

WITH Dr. Douglas Bland, Queen's University School of Policy Studies and Author of *Uprising*



**Dr. Douglas Bland** is a Professor and holds the Chair in Defence Management Studies at the Queen's University School of Policy Studies. His research is concentrated in the fields of defence policy making at national and international levels, the organization and functioning of defence ministries, and civil-military relations. Dr. Bland served thirty years in command and senior staff positions the Canadian Forces and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1991. He holds a doctorate in political studies from Queen's University. Among other works he wrote, in 1995, *Chiefs of Defence: Government And The Unified Command of The Canadian Armed Forces* and in 2003, *Campaigns For International Security: Canada's Defence Policy at the Turn of the Century*. His most recent book, *Uprising*, a political novel published by Blue Butterfly Books, is based on four years of research into the root causes of national insurgencies and aboriginal affairs in Canada. He was interviewed after his Lunch on the Frontier speech, March 5, 2010 in Winnipeg.

**Frontier Centre: Please tell us about your model of national insurgencies and how it can be applied to the current situation of Aboriginal-government relations.**

**Douglas Bland:** The model for insurgencies is based on three fundamental conditions. First, that there is a significant grievance within a large minority population in a state. The second thing is that there usually needs to be a set of economic and political conditions that makes an insurgency feasible, that is, there's something to attack. Third, there needs to be a unifying leader within that community that takes control of the grievances and exploits them. In Canada, those three conditions are building in our Aboriginal community.

**FC: How do you account for the rise of more belligerent rhetoric from within the First Nations community? In other words, what is creating the Terry Nelson's out there?**

**DB:** I think that effect has two sources. One, is as Chief Phil Fontaine said, "Frustrations and anger are growing across the community." Secondly, the lack of genuine engagement by Canadian politicians and senior leaders of the Aboriginal community together is simply emboldening the more radical elements of the community.

**FC: Why are Canadian leaders ignoring these warnings of a looming crisis with its Aboriginal peoples?**

**DB:** I think first off there's not much constituency in the Aboriginal community that supports central government. They're not engaged in the political arena. Secondly, and more importantly, I think typical Canadian politicians at the federal level, provincial level have no idea what to do with this matter. All they can see it as is a great deal of difficulty for themselves.

**FC: You recently published a novel called *Uprising* that dealt with many of the issues you are discussing but in a fictionalized scenario. What lead you to publish this book and how is it being received?**

**DB:** Just my growing interest in the condition of the Aboriginal people. First, an interview I listened to on the CBC Radio when elders from the Grassy Narrows area of Canada were explaining how desperate they were and how these elders were losing control of the community to radical movements. Then we look at that in conjunction with these

theories of what causes insurgencies and I could see a match so I started studying that. What affect has the book had? We don't know yet. But anecdotally, when I speak about it to crowds or to individuals or on radio and so people can see the dreadful logic of it all and most times they are truly alarmed.

**FC: Many believe that the problem is First Nations' groups, such as the Mohawk community in Quebec and Ontario, who do not believe the government has any authority over them and that they are sovereign. How is this a problem and how should Ottawa deal with those claims?**

**DB:** That's the essential root cause of disturbances. There are leaders in those communities who are not as interested in sovereignty as a way to produce good governance but rather as a way to advance their own individual or small group objectives. The other conundrum here is that when Aboriginal community leaders say they want to be sovereign at the same time they don't want to go without the benefits that flow from the Canadian sovereignty. Mostly we're talking about money and land.

**FC: Many say that allowing lawlessness in government-First Nations relations, as in the case of Caledonia where the OPP seem afraid to apply the law to native protesters, is encouraging other Native communities to consider contentious activities such as blockades. How do you feel about those sentiments?**

**DB:** I think there is a reason to believe that. Caledonia isn't the first incident. We had people sitting on railway tracks in Ontario, border cross difficulties, problems at Oka, QC where a policeman was murdered in front of the barricades which was never investigated or solved as far as I know. So the Aboriginal communities are emboldened by the politicians' reluctance to face up to the problem. As an aside, and it's a big aside, what's in the back of most politicians' minds is that if they do go after a particular individual or incident they will face a nationwide uprising.

**FC: What are the impacts of these confrontations on the economy?**

**DB:** So far they're not a major problem but the country is vulnerable. Canada's economy is vulnerable to national disturbance simply because a great deal of our economy depends on the export of oil, gas, natural gas, hydro and

other commodities to the United States. The Aboriginal communities are sitting on those supply lines. They have already talked about and demonstrated how at any moment they can turn that system off. That would be a considerable danger to not only our economy but also for Canada national sovereignty.

**FC: From a military and national defense standpoint, what should be done to deal with increasingly aggressive native tactics?**

**DB:** What we need to do is have a very careful review of our assumptions of how to deal with internal security matters. Through most of our history, internal security has been handled by police. When police, on the rare occasion, can't handle an incident then the Armed Forces will come in according to law and system. But what we're dealing with now is a continuous trans-national criminal insurgency across North America, across the Western hemisphere if you'd like. What we need to do is to have a real look at the law, the structures and the organizations for maintaining internal security in the country.

**FC: Many Aboriginal disputes, including the on-going Caledonia situation, arise from unresolved specific land claims. A few years ago the federal government passed new legislation that it is expected to expedite the specific land claims process, including the creating of an independent tribunal. How do you feel this could ease tensions from within the Aboriginal community towards the government?**

**DB:** I'm not sure. If it's not managed well it might actually excite tensions with the Aboriginal community. But we have to be careful using the term "Aboriginal community" because there are actually, depending on how you add them up, more than 600 Aboriginal communities all of which have different histories, different traditions, different objectives, different land claims – some of which are partly settled and some not settled and some land claims are in places that have no economic value whatsoever. It is a difficult problem but it is at the heart of a lot of grievances that are out there in the countryside.

**FC: What concrete steps should the federal government take to ease tensions with the Aboriginal community?**

**DB:** I'm not quite sure what would ease tensions without actually exciting them. In my darkest moments, I despair and think that we may have to actually go through a conflict to come out the other side and then have a negotiation about issues that we should be doing now. What we would hope to have is a calm discussion with members of our community who say do we want to go through that uprising or do we want to sit down and solve it before it happens to the great distress of everybody?

**FC: To what extent is poverty on reserves and problems with ineffective on-reserve band governance creating this tense environment?**

**DB:** I'm not sure that poverty is the cause. I think poverty is an outcome. The Canadian government provides every year something approaching \$8 billion for the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. That's about half the size of Canada's defense budget. I think the problem is in the distribution of resources not in the provision of resources. Mending the distribution of resources requires new ways to look at Canada-Aboriginal affairs but it is also highly dependent on building a trustworthy, accountable governance system within the Aboriginal community.

**FC: Drawing upon your experience in national insurgencies, what would be the signs that things are reaching a critical moment when more serious levels of violence could be possible?**

**DB:** Oh I think we see the signs now. When a leader says "The only way to deal with a White Man is to pick up the gun" that's an indication from my background and training I always think that if someone were to put a gun to me I'd take them seriously. I think that continuing the confusion is the kind of questions we were just talking about that are not resolved, that haven't even been discussed is an indication that as former Prime Minister Paul Martin said in an interview "We don't have a policy. We just hope something won't go wrong." And that's not going to work.

**FC: What should Aboriginal leaders do to help ease tensions from within their own communities?**

**DB:** At the best of times if there is an Aboriginal community that is coherent, and it's not right now, the leaders of the Aboriginal community, including the Metis and the Inuit, would sit down and say how far are we going to carry this thing? How much danger and destruction do we want to bring to our communities? How much despair do we want to create? As they used to say, how many tears in the lodges can we stand? That doesn't mean they have to surrender but they need to confront that issue soberly and decide what are reasonable grounds for negotiation with the federal government.

**FC: Can you comment on to what extent allowing First Nations to enter the modern economy and improve their socio-economic well-being would help ease many of these problems?**

**DB:** Oh I think there are examples of that already functioning. In Alberta, for instance, where large Aboriginal communities have access to and control over or have negotiated returns for oil, gas and other resource extractions. It has improved their communities immensely. If they're going to be in the modern economy then they need to develop, as the rest of society has, a system of bringing in resources, in this case money, and taxing that money and then using the taxes to pay for community services. That would get them some place. And again, it's governance, fairness and accountability that's necessary to make that work.