

Bolstering Community-Based Marine Capabilities in the Canadian Arctic

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Credit: Whitney Lackenbauer

Although Canadian Rangers are often visualized as being on foot and on snowmobiles, they also employ a variety of small watercraft in the summer months. Here, Rangers patrol waters near Clyde River in August 2018.

The June 2019 Special Senate Committee report on the Arctic, *Northern Lights: A Wake-Up Call for the Future of Canada*, recommends that “the Government of Canada enhance maritime and aerial situational awareness of the Canadian Arctic, including improving the icebreaking capacity of the Canadian Coast Guard, and equipping the Canadian Rangers with marine capabilities.”¹ This recommendation flows from the committee’s emphasis on the effective enforcement of Canadian regulations in the Arctic. The insistence on equipping the Rangers with new marine capabilities, however, is rather peculiar given that the organization garners only one other mention in the 138-page report.

Over the past decade, various commentators and federal committees have recommended tasking the Rangers with a wide range of marine roles, ranging from search and rescue, to oil spill response, to marine law enforcement.² In April 2009, for example, the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans recommended that the military should make the Rangers “an integral part of the Canadian reserves” and provide them with a “marine capability.”³ Colonel (Retired) Pierre Leblanc, Commander of Canadian Forces Northern Area (now Joint Task Force

North) from 1995-2000, has been the most adamant in insisting on the need to “provide the Canadian Rangers with a maritime role.” In February 2018 he advised the committee (which was investigating maritime search and rescue (SAR)) that the Rangers could “increase our SAR capabilities but also act as first responders to report illegal fishing, initiate action on marine spills and provide a sovereignty presence throughout the Arctic.” He advised that giving the Rangers a marine role should be one of the top priorities of the Canadian government to increase SAR capabilities in the region.⁴ On several occasions he has suggested that “we could quickly, and at little cost, train and equip Ranger patrols along the Northwest Passage with a respectable sea-capable vessel like the Rosborough boats that are being used by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.”⁵ Senator Dennis Patterson, who chairs the Special Senate Committee on the Arctic, has echoed Leblanc’s appeals for an expanded maritime role for the Canadian Rangers, suggesting that they could perform the roles mentioned above, as well as serve in national parks, marine protected areas, assist with the collection of scientific samples, and act as “first responders” in support of whatever else federal departments might require in the marine domain.⁶

The argument that the government should give the Rangers a maritime role in the Arctic overlooks an obvious and important fact: the Rangers already operate in the maritime domain, by boat in summer and by snowmachine in winter. Furthermore, recommendations to expand the Ranger maritime role tend to miss and even undermine the attempts by the Canadian Coast Guard, the Nunavut Inuit Monitoring Program and the Guardians initiative to bolster community-based marine capabilities and local maritime domain awareness.

The Ranger Maritime Role

Currently, the Canadian Rangers perform several roles in the maritime domain as part of their broader mission as the “eyes, ears, and voice” of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in northern coastal communities.⁷ The official Ranger tasking list includes coastal and inland water surveillance, and during training exercises Ranger patrols often use boats to travel between destinations. While on the water, the Rangers report unidentified vessels, any unusual activities or sightings, and collect local data for the CAF. If the conception of the maritime domain is expanded to include the months that the Arctic waters are covered in ice, Ranger activity in a marine operating environment becomes even more impressive.

Kugluktuk Ranger Sergeant Roger Hitkolok would be shocked to hear that the Rangers do not have a maritime role, given his patrol’s regular activities on the waters of the Canadian Arctic. Last summer, he led his Rangers on

a boat patrol from Kugluktuk to Victoria Island to track vessels moving through the Northwest Passage. In August and September, 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group deployed over 50 other Rangers from patrols across Nunavut and the Northwest Territories (NWT) to monitor the passage.⁸ Hitkolok and the Kugluktuk Rangers also use their personal watercraft to perform annual checks on the North Warning System (NWS) station situated on southwestern Victoria Island near Lady Franklin Point. As part of the Canadian Ranger Ocean Watch Program (established in 2011), the Kugluktuk patrol has acted as guides and collected samples for Fisheries and Oceans Canada researchers carrying out oceanographic research in the region – an example of the kind of scientific monitoring that Ranger patrols often undertake on the waters and ice of Canada’s Arctic.⁹ Several Rangers from the Kugluktuk patrol have also participated in oil spill and environmental response training over the last decade which they have received during *Operation Nanook* or through the annual training patrols conducted in the communities.

Rangers employ their own vessels for open-water patrolling during the summer and fall for which they receive cash reimbursement according to an established equipment usage rate. In employing their own watercraft, they are fulfilling the Canadian Rangers’ primary mandate, which is to “provide lightly equipped, self-sufficient, mobile forces in support of the CF’s [Canadian Forces] sovereignty and domestic operation tasks in Canada.”¹⁰ Furthermore, by encouraging individuals to invest in their own equipment (rather than government-owned assets), this allows Rangers to procure appropriate vessels and vehicles to operate in their home environments while representing a material contribution to local capacity-building. Providing Rangers with Canadian Armed Forces-owned boats would not only add a tremendous (and unnecessary) logistical burden on the military, it would also undermine the guiding philosophy that Rangers are best suited to make their own decisions about what they need to operate comfortably and effectively across diverse northern environments.

In short, although the Rangers are primarily a land-based organization, they have long played an active role in the maritime domain. With unique terms of service that allow them to strike a balance between military and community contributions, they are relevant members of the defence team. They have extensive experience operating in austere conditions and are willing to share their local and traditional knowledge about lands and waters, whilst providing practical support for activities in what many southerners consider to be ‘extreme environments.’ As members of their local communities, the Rangers also



Credit: Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Canadian Rangers Corporal Tom Epakohak and Sergeant Jimmy Evalik guide Fisheries and Oceans researchers on a research trip near Cambridge Bay on 18 February 2017. The Rangers also assist the scientists in gathering oceanographic data.

represent an important source of shared awareness and liaison with community partners and, by virtue of their capabilities and location, regularly support other government agencies in responding to the broad spectrum of security and safety issues facing isolated communities.¹¹ Despite calls for the Rangers to take on more law enforcement and regulatory-type duties, the Canadian Armed Forces have been clear that they have “no intention to assign any tasks to the Canadian Rangers that have a tactical military connotation or that require tactical military training, such as naval boarding.”¹² Other CAF elements are better trained to perform support to law enforcement functions (where they fall within the *National Defence Act*), which Rangers have indicated that they did not sign up to undertake,¹³ and may be better performed by other organizations.

The Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary and Marine Search and Rescue Societies

General proposals insisting on the need to expand the Ranger maritime role typically fail to recognize the Canadian Coast Guard’s efforts to build up community-based Auxiliary (CCGA) units and bolster marine SAR societies in the Canadian Arctic. Marine SAR units have existed in the North for decades, comprised of emergency management personnel, the RCMP and other community volunteers.¹⁴ The first CCGA units – which are made up of local volunteers who use their own vessels or a community vessel to respond to emergencies – were established in Yellowknife and Hay River in the late 1980s. Under the leadership of Jack Kruger, a former RCMP officer who had served in NWT and Nunavut, the Auxiliary expanded to Inuvik, Aklavik and Tuktoyaktuk in the 2000s, and has started making inroads in the eastern Arctic.¹⁵

In late 2001, the government of Nunavut’s Department of Community Government and Transportation secured \$645,000 in funding to establish 30 CCGA units across Nunavut over three years, each with two or three local vessels and five or six trained members per vessel.¹⁶ While this goal proved overly ambitious, the program successfully established units in Cambridge Bay, Rankin Inlet, Pangnirtung and Kugluktuk. Members of the Auxiliary receive insurance coverage and reimbursement of certain operational costs, but must fundraise to purchase the required equipment (e.g., personal flotation devices, GPS and radios), although the CCG has transferred surplus assets to several Arctic units (e.g., in 2014 it transferred a 17-foot Boston Whaler and 90 horsepower outboard motor to the Cambridge Bay Auxiliary).¹⁷ While some units have struggled with membership, finding suitable vessels and funding safety equipment, they have provided invaluable SAR services to their communities.

Pursuant to the Oceans Protection Plan’s emphasis on improving marine safety, the CCG has been actively expanding the auxiliary in the Arctic and bolstering the capabilities of marine SAR societies since 2016. Currently, there are 15 community-based CCGA units active in the North, with over 200 auxiliary members and 25 vessels, with plans to create new units in additional communities in 2019.¹⁸ Based on the understanding that communities often struggle to identify and equip a vessel suitable for SAR missions, the Oceans Protection Plan has also established a four-year Indigenous Community Boat Volunteer Pilot Program to provide vessels and equipment to Auxiliary units. To date, boats have been constructed for Cambridge Bay (\$270,311), Gjoa Haven (\$222,187), Rankin Inlet (\$221,572) and Ulukhaktok (\$274,217) which will be delivered in summer 2019, and others have been ordered for Kugluktuk and Tuktoyaktuk. Additional funding has also been provided to other communities for equipment and vessel improvement.¹⁹

The CCGA’s primary role is maritime search and rescue. The vast majority of SAR incidents in the North occur while people are either hunting or fishing, or travelling between communities, which is reflected in the missions with which auxiliary units have been tasked to date.²⁰ Units are also preparing to respond to growing marine activity throughout the Canadian Arctic – from pleasure craft, to fishing boats, to cruise ships.²¹ Furthermore, Auxiliaries upload all of their vessel, equipment and membership information through the CCGA’s SAR Management System, an automated database that collects unit data and tracks all official activities. Consequently, when Joint Rescue Coordination Centres require the services of an auxiliary, they can quickly identify with whom they are dealing and the capabilities a unit possesses, thus streamlining and improving the organizational and coordination requirements to conduct a successful SAR mission.²²

Beyond search and rescue, CCGA members also assume various roles that bolster marine safety and enhance community resilience more generally. For example, they have supported governmental efforts to expand the number of aids to navigation and establish VHF repeater systems in the region, often deploying the physical infrastructure.²³ Auxiliary units have participated in military or whole-of-government operations such as *Nunakput* and *Nanook Tatigiit*.²⁴ On their familiarization and training patrols, some Auxiliary units also inspect the water around transiting ships to check for signs of leaks or waste, and strive to improve maritime domain awareness more generally.²⁵ In 2004, for example, Auxiliary members from the NWT and members of the RCMP travelled from Inuvik to Herschel Island and across the Beaufort Sea into Alaska, on



Canadian Rangers operate on the ocean near Clyde River in August 2018 amidst icy waters. The photos were taken and provided by P. Whitney Lackenbauer, one of this article's authors.

what they labelled the “first operational patrol in this part of the world since the *St. Roch*” (an RCMP schooner that transited the Northwest Passage during the Second World War).²⁶ Finally, CCGA members seek to educate their communities about safe practices, potential marine hazards and, because of the Coast Guard’s ‘train-the-trainer’ program, some are able to mentor and train new Auxiliary members. These activities enhance the capacity of northerners to respond to maritime incidents in their waters.²⁷

Nunavut Inuit Marine Monitoring Program and the Guardians

Calls for an expanded Ranger maritime role should also be cognizant of efforts by Indigenous organizations to bolster local marine capabilities in the Arctic, including the Inuit Marine Monitoring Program (IMMP) and the Guardians program. Through these programs, Inuit are taking the lead on monitoring and protecting their waters, while adding additional layers of capability to respond to potential emergencies and SAR incidents.

Under the direction of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and with support from the government of Canada, the Nunavut IMMP is an Inuit-led initiative that aims to collect information on shipping activities in the region that is relevant and useful to communities. The project is

working to establish a terrestrial Automatic Identification System (AIS) network in Canada’s Arctic, similar to that utilized by the Alaskan Marine Exchange, which represents a new way to track and monitor vessels. The IMMP also employs Inuit Marine Monitors during the shipping season to observe vessel activity and report on environmental conditions and wildlife. The information that the IMMP collects will be “shared with Nunavummiut to inform residents about shipping activities and develop policies that include more Inuit involvement in shipping management.”²⁸

The Indigenous Guardians program in Nunavut, which is based on an Australian model, “supports Indigenous land management and oversight in their territories based on a cultural responsibility for the land.”²⁹ In 2016, Inuit community members on the Franklin Interim Advisory Committee suggested the creation of an Inuit Guardians program for the Wrecks of HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror* National Historic Site. From the end of July to freeze-up, Guardians camp near the sites to monitor and protect the ships and the environment, and notify vessels that get too close to the protected waters. While on-site, the Guardians also facilitate research, conservation and tourism activities, and offer an emergency response capability to any accidents or SAR activities that occur in the surrounding area.³⁰



In the eastern Arctic, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA), with the support of Parks Canada and the government of Nunavut, has established a Guardians program to monitor and manage the Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area (Lancaster Sound) – the Arctic Bay Nauttiqsuqtiit.³¹ Called ‘the eyes and ears of Tallurutiup Imanga,’ the six Nauttiqsuqtiit now monitor sea ice and ship traffic near Arctic Bay, report on environmental conditions, act as cultural liaisons and interpreters, gather Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (traditional knowledge), harvest food for their community and provide SAR assistance. After a successful first season, the QIA is now trying to establish chapters in Grise Fiord, Resolute Bay, Pond Inlet and Clyde River – the other communities bordering the 109,000 square kilometre conservation area.³²

Strengthening Community-Based Capabilities

Commentators and committees urging the federal government to expand the maritime role of the Canadian Rangers must be aware of the roles that Rangers already perform in the marine domain and of the mandates and missions of complementary community-based organizations operating in the North. There is scope within the Rangers’ existing orders and directives to extend the frequency or scale of sovereignty and surveillance patrols that they conduct. Rangers should also continue to train for various roles that they might play in a mass rescue operation or mass casualty event in the Arctic maritime domain. These areas of emphasis do not require a ‘new’ maritime role, and should not be used as the basis to change the established practice of having the Rangers use their own boats and snowmachines to operate in the maritime domain – a practice that enables Rangers to invest in their own equipment and tools, appropriate to their local environment, which they can then use in their everyday lives without having to ask the government for permission. Government initiatives must also be cognizant of the multiple hats individuals often wear in northern communities (many serve as Rangers, in the CCGA, with ground search and rescue, etc), and avoid actions that unnecessarily add to their burden by duplicating or expanding roles, responsibilities and training requirements.

In its brief to the Special Senate Committee on the Arctic in March 2019, the Inuit Circumpolar Council asserted that “Inuit are always the first to respond to an emergency, and in doing so with limited training and resources they risk their own safety and security.” Accordingly, the council urged the federal government “to enhance search and rescue and emergency protection infrastructure and training in Inuit communities.”³³ Rather than focusing on expanding the Rangers’ mission so that they can act as



Corporal Qaraq Oookookoo, a Ranger from Pond Inlet, travels to base camp located on Little Cornwallis Island, Nunavut during **Operation Nunaliut** on 7 April 2016.

a cure-all to the perceived gaps in Canada's maritime capabilities in the Arctic, government officials should focus their efforts on ensuring that the myriad groups already active in the maritime domain improve their interoperability so that they can work together during emergencies. 🍌

Notes

1. Report of the Special Senate Committee on the Arctic, *Northern Lights: A Wake-Up Call for the Future of Canada*, June 2019, p. 108.
2. Ed Zebedee, Director, Protection Services, Government of Nunavut, at the Foreign Affairs and International Development Committee, 26 February 2013, available at <https://openparliament.ca/committees/foreign-affairs/41-1/67/ed-zebedee-1/only/>.
3. Bob Weber, "Clamp Down on Arctic Shipping, Beef Up Coast Guard Armament: Senate," *Waterloo Chronicle*, 14 December 2009.
4. The Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, Evidence, 15 February 2018, available at <https://sencanada.ca/en/Content/SEN/Committee/421/pof/53827-e>.
5. See, for example, Pierre Leblanc, "Thinking Outside the Igloo?" *FrontLine Defence*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2011); Pierre Leblanc, "Is the Arctic Focus Being Lost," *The Hill Times*, 18 March 2013. Note: As the head of Arctic Security Consultants, Leblanc has provided services to Rosborough Boats, via Arctic Security Consultants, 'Services.'
6. See presentation, "Ranger Maritime Role Iqaluit July 2016," posted to Senator Dennis Patterson's personal website, available at <https://www.dennispatterson.ca/den>.
7. See P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Vigilans: The 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group* (Yellowknife: ICRPG, 2015); and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers: A Living History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).
8. Derek Neary, "Operation Nanook Swings into High Gear; Rangers will Play Key Role," *Nunavut News*, 6 August 2018.
9. Steven Fouchard, "Canadian Rangers Ocean Watch Program Assisting Arctic Research," *Canadian Army News*, 16 February 2018.
10. Government of Canada Response to the Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans "Rising to the Arctic Challenge: Report on the Canadian Coast Guard," October 2009, available at <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/reports-rapports/200910a-eng.htm>.
11. For an elaboration on these themes, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Indigenous Communities are at the Heart of Canada's North: Media Misperceptions of the Canadian Rangers, Indigenous Service, and Arctic Security," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (December 2018), pp. 158-192.
12. Government of Canada Response to the Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans "Rising to the Arctic Challenge: Report on the Canadian Coast Guard," October 2009. The combat role originally assigned to Rangers in 1947 has been removed from their official task list because they are neither trained nor equipped for this role, leading some commentators to declare that they are not a 'real military force' and using this as a prime example that the CAF is unprepared to defend Canada's Arctic from foreign adversaries. On these critiques, see Lackenbauer, "Indigenous Communities are at the Heart of Canada's North."
13. This conclusion is based on the workshops and interviews conducted with over 100 Rangers, conducted as part of the Measuring the Success of the Canadian Rangers: Using Statistical Methods, Gender Based Analysis Plus, and Stakeholder Dialogue to Discern Culturally Relevant and Appropriate Metrics project being carried out by the authors pursuant to a 2018-19 Defence Engagement Program research grant.
14. Dave Martin, "Volunteers Ready to Respond at a Moment's Notice," *Northern News Services*, 22 June 1998.
15. See, for example, Jack Kruger, "District 9," *Coast Guard Auxiliary Newsletter*, Vol. 1 (January 1998); Jack Kruger, "District 9," *Shipmate*, Vol. 3 (February 2000).
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17. Randy Strandt, National Chair, Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary, Proceedings of the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, Issue No. 5, Evidence, 31 May 2016.
18. Jeffery Hutchinson, Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, at the Foreign Affairs and International Development Committee, 19 September 2018.
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