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New Research on Northern Development

Research Perspective

The Canadian Rangers: A Force Multiplier for the Canadian Armed Forces in the Territorial North

Zoë K.B. Pontikes

Abstract: The Canadian Rangers are a part-time, non-commissioned, community-based subcomponent of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). The Rangers operate in Canada's three territories and the northern regions of many Canadian provinces. This article focuses on the nearly 2,000 Canadian Rangers (specifically those in the First Canadian Rangers Patrol Group, ICRPG) living in 65 communities throughout the Canadian Territorial North. Most Rangers in ICRPG are Indigenous. This article examines the tangible and intangible value the Rangers provide to the CAF and the Canadian government, particularly in supporting Canada's security and sovereignty. It argues that the Rangers have existed for eighty years as a force multiplier for the CAF through their direct connections to the communities where they live, their intimate knowledge of the nearby land and waters, and their skills in surviving the harsh northern climate. The re-election of Donald Trump to the United States presidency and his isolationist and trade threats have caused Canadians to be more supportive of increased military spending. The security role of the Rangers within this higher level of military spending should be supportive of the CAF and focused on their skills and knowledge of northern conditions. This article concludes that the Canadian government can reinforce its sovereignty in the Territorial North and encourage sustainable northern economic development by supporting the Rangers in mobilizing northern people to continue building communities that are even more self-reliant and resilient.

Nouvelles recherches sur le développement du Nord

Research Perspective

Les Rangers canadiens : multiplicateur de force pour les Forces armées canadiennes dans le Nord territorial

Zoë K.B. Pontikes

Résumé: Les Rangers canadiens constituent une sous-composante des Forces armées canadiennes, à temps partiel, non officier et basée sur la communauté. Les Rangers sont présents dans les trois territoires du Canada ainsi que dans les régions nordiques de plusieurs provinces canadiennes. Cet article se concentre sur les 2 000 Rangers canadiens — en particulier ceux du 1er Groupe de patrouilles des Rangers canadiens (I GPRC) — vivant dans 65 communautés à travers le Nord territorial canadien. La majorité des Rangers du I GPRC sont autochtones. Cet article examine la valeur tangible et intangible que les Rangers apportent aux FAC et au gouvernement canadien, en particulier dans le soutien à la sécurité et à la souveraineté du pays. L'article soutient que, depuis plus de quatre-vingts ans, les Rangers agissent comme un multiplicateur de force pour les FAC grâce à leurs liens directs avec les communautés où ils résident, leur connaissance approfondie des terres et des eaux environnantes, ainsi que leur capacité à survivre dans le rude climat nordique. La réélection de Donald Trump à la présidence américaine et ses menaces isolationnistes et protectionnistes ont amené les Canadiens à soutenir davantage l'augmentation des dépenses militaires. Le rôle des Rangers en matière de sécurité, dans ce contexte de hausse des dépenses militaires, devrait soutenir les FAC en mettant l'accent sur leurs compétences et leur connaissance des réalités nordiques. L'article conclut que le gouvernement canadien peut renforcer sa souveraineté dans le Nord territorial et encourager un développement économique nordique durable en appuyant les Rangers dans la mobilisation des populations nordiques afin de bâtir des communautés plus autonomes et résilientes.

The Canadian Territorial North, located roughly above the sixtieth parallel, includes all lands and waters within the territories of Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon.¹ Three roles the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have performed in the Territorial North are contributing to national and continental defence and security, enhancing Canada's sovereignty over the region, and supporting broader Canadian government-wide responsibilities in northern communities. Currently, the land force (army) of the unified CAF has approximately 300 military and civilian personnel at its Joint Task Force North headquarters in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, as well as almost 2,000 Canadian Rangers living in sixty-five communities throughout the Territorial North.

The Canadian Rangers ("Rangers") and their relationship with the rest of the CAF are as a part-time, non-commissioned, community-based subcomponent of the CAF Reserve. Because they are recruited from and stay in their home communities, most Rangers in the Territorial North are Indigenous. However, the Rangers are not an Indigenous employment-equity or affirmative-action program of the CAF. Rather, they are valued as a separate entity within the CAF for the specialized knowledge and skills they bring to support the CAF's three roles in the Territorial North.

The research question for this article focuses on whether the Canadian Rangers, as a separate autonomous and decentralized subcomponent organization, are a force multiplier for the CAF in performing its three roles through its regular and other reservist forces in the Territorial North. The research question asks what tangible and intangible value do the Rangers provide to the CAF and the Canadian government, particularly in supporting Canada's security and sovereignty claims to the international community? This article examines an ongoing debate within military circles and in northern communities about the Rangers' value to the CAF as a separate reservist ground force with its own "operational culture" based on Indigenous traditions.

The article will argue that the Rangers have existed for eighty years as a force multiplier for the CAF through their direct connections to the communities where they live, their intimate knowledge of the nearby land and waters, and their skills in surviving the harsh northern climate. Since there has not been an armed conflict in the Canadian North and since sovereignty disputes have so far been resolved by diplomacy and agreement, the effectiveness of the Rangers as a force multiplier for the CAF has not been directly tested.

Introduction to the Canadian Rangers

Tasks of the Canadian Rangers

In performing their roles within the CAF, the Rangers' mandate is described by three assigned tasks.² First, the Rangers support the CAF's sovereignty operations, including reporting "suspicious and unusual activities" and collecting local information of possible "military significance." Second, the Rangers share local knowledge and survival skills with southern-based soldiers during training sessions, serve as local guides into unfamiliar areas, and take leadership roles as "first responders" in local search and rescue operations. Reflecting on these two tasks, General Wayne Eyre, former Chief of Defence Staff, has described the Canadian Rangers as "our eyes and ears and our guides in the North."³ For the third task, they maintain a military presence within their communities, as well as being instructors, mentors, and supervisors for the Junior Canadian Rangers (a complementary component of the Canadian Rangers consisting of members between the ages of 12 and 18 years).

This article will show how, at least until recently, the relationship between the Canadian Rangers and the CAF has been a logical approach to Canadian defence policy in the Territorial North. Four factors underlie this conclusion. First, logistical, technical, and financial challenges have not motivated foreign private and state actors to challenge Canada's geographic sovereignty and legal jurisdiction in the Territorial North. However, the seasonal Arctic sea ice cover, retreating due to climate change, is opening new routes in the Territorial North for sea traffic, resource exploration, and tourism, as well as for illegal activities (such as drug-trafficking, people-smuggling, and other forms of organized crime), environmental degradation, and other potential disasters. Second, successive Canadian governments have not reprioritized and significantly enhanced their budgetary allocations to defence. Despite pressure from "friendly" nations, Canadian politicians have reflected their voters' satisfaction with the current domestic priority placed on defence spending and have not seen an urgency to refurbish the nation's ageing and obsolete military hardware. However, recent threats to Canada's sovereignty by the United States administration have refocused political attention on these deficiencies. Third, Canada is a "middle power" in the world order of nations. Yet, it is a member of the G7 and has participated in international missions of the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It has also benefited from "proportionate" sharing of continental defence with the United States through NORAD (North American Aerospace Defence Command). Fourth, Canada has the world's second-largest land mass, and its geography presents a significant challenge for providing conventional defence throughout the country.

Origins of the Canadian Rangers

The Canadian Rangers trace their organizational roots to the Second World War. The Canadian government reluctantly created the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers (PCMR) in 1942 as a concession to a panicking public in British Columbia, who felt the federal government was ignoring their fears of a possible enemy invasion. The PCMR provided surveillance along the country's west coast, and if necessary could use guerrilla tactics to delay enemy forces from advancing into Canada until combat-trained soldiers arrived.

In 1945, the threat of an enemy coastal attack subsided and the PCMR was disbanded. However, after much debate within the CAF, they were re-established as the Canadian Rangers in 1947 to operate across the Arctic and Subarctic areas of the Canadian North.

By the early 2000s, the Rangers were no longer expected to use guerrilla tactics to engage with an enemy or to assist police in the discovery or apprehension of enemy agents or saboteurs.⁴ This change recognized the Rangers' limited training and civilian-military identity, and was made to preserve the positive relationship between the CAF and Indigenous communities. Because Canada does not have a "national guard," the Canadian government has utilized the CAF to intervene in domestic crises, including those involving disputes between Indigenous advocacy groups and private and public interests. (An example is the CAF's intervention in 1990 during the Kanesatake Resistance, also known as the Oka Crisis.) A subsequent policy amendment removed the Rangers from any CAF interventions involving Indigenous groups anywhere in Canada. Nevertheless, the Rangers maintained their military status, even though they no longer had a "combat" role.

For the CAF and the Canadian government, the Rangers carry out their assigned military duties as part of their daily civilian activities in and near their communities. Unless specifically organized by the CAF, they perform surveillance while hunting and fishing to feed their families and communities. However, the Rangers are not on continuous watch and are only trained to identify and report suspicious or unusual activities, such as the surfacing of a submarine, they encounter by chance while on hunting and fishing expeditions.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer observes that the Rangers see their role as "custodians of their homeland" and not as "community-based citizens-soldiers," despite being part of the CAF.⁵ The predominant motivation for many northerners to join the Rangers has been a personal commitment to protect their homes and communities.⁶ Local patrols (rather than being called platoons) are named after their communities. As Lackenbauer explains, "numeric designation made sense for combat-oriented units but not for ones demonstrating sovereignty"; alternatively, the Ranger patrols' names linked to communities demonstrate the military's presence in the Arctic.⁷

Recruitment Requirements

The requirements to become a Ranger include being at least 18 years of age, being a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant, being physically and mentally fit to perform the duties, and not having been convicted of a serious offence. Northern residents are recruited into the Rangers for their intimate and life-long familiarity with the people, land, and climate where they live, as well as their civilian experiences, hunting expertise, and survival skills while living in the North. Rangers serve for as long as they can articulate their communities' need and can provide knowledge and advice to Regular Forces and Reservists during CAF training sessions; their older members are honoured as Elders within patrol groups.

Soldiers recruited from the Territorial North by regular forces are among the best-educated youth in the northern communities. However, retention rates are low as many recruited soldiers prefer staying in their communities and becoming Rangers. Indigenous families in remote communities do not want their children to travel south to join the CAF; most have experienced how young northerners are unable to cope with the culture shock of the military environment and the broader southern urban environment, and how this shock can lead to substance use disorder, suicide, and other social problems.⁸

For these reasons, the Rangers have much appeal to northern residents who, while focused on their communities and families, also can relate to a broader northern and national identity.

Operations

Each member of the Canadian Rangers is issued a rifle and an annual provision of ammunition. The Rangers are the only members of the Canadian military who receive rifles on a full-time basis because they can be used for personal hunting to feed their families and communities and for personal safety, such as killing predatory animals. The Rangers are encouraged to use their rifles for hunting to become more skilled in using them.

To enhance their status and pride of membership, Rangers are issued "parade uniforms," consisting of a red T-shirt and hoodie, combat pants, and ball cap with the Rangers crest, which have become an "iconic symbol for the military in Northern Canada."⁹ However, when "on operations," the Rangers wear their own clothing, which is environmentally appropriate for their local conditions and personal comfort and safety.

The Rangers also supply their own equipment, such as snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, and watercraft. The equipment is used for both military and personal use, with each Ranger purchasing what serves both needs best, without having to compromise their personal requirements in favour of contractually determined military procurement policies. Also, they can use their equipment

at their discretion, thereby avoiding bureaucratic authorization and expensing procedures as would occur with military-owned equipment. The Rangers receive some compensation for the use of personal equipment for military activities.

Governance

The governance practices for the Rangers are highly decentralized. They are organized into Canadian Ranger Patrol Groups (CRPGs) covering five geographic areas in the Canadian territories and the area north of the treeline in the Canadian provinces. The First Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (1CRPG), headquartered in Yellowknife, is responsible for the Territorial North, as well as a small portion of northern British Columbia. The commander of 1CRPG has considerable autonomy, despite a "shoestring budget," to respond to regional differences in its own natural environments, cultural demographics, operational requirements, and political circumstances. Overall, the Rangers appear more like a regional federation than a national organization.

Lackenbauer has observed that there is no other military organization like the Rangers anywhere in the world.¹⁰ He describes the Rangers' governance at the patrol level as a "horizontal approach, exploiting individual strengths rather than formal networks arrayed by rank."¹¹ The local leaders of each Ranger Patrol (sergeants, master corporals, and corporals) are elected annually by each patrol's membership and are accountable to their subordinates. Each patrol is self-administered and decisions are made by consultations and consensus. Elders within a patrol are often asked for advice before a decision is made.¹²

Furthermore, Lackenbauer argues that patrol groups in remote and isolated communities are more effectively operated through an organization modelled as a series of "small posts" with decision-making decentralized at the community level.¹³ He describes a decision-making process within the patrols as lengthy and complex. By adopting this approach in its relationship with the Rangers, Canada's military has revealed its willingness to be flexible, inclusive, and accepting of the culture of northern Indigenous Peoples.

Training

The training of the Rangers is a reciprocal learning process that brings together army and Indigenous Knowledge and skills. Many Rangers know their areas through physical markers, such as piles of rocks, positioning of stars and planets in the night sky, snowdrifts, and ice formations. Army instructors have taught the Rangers how to read and draw maps, to use compasses, and to operate global positioning systems (GPS) technology that allow them to communicate their observations and provide surveillance over a larger area. This training enhances the Rangers' usefulness to the CAF and hence makes the former into a better force multiplier.

The Canadian Rangers and Security in the Territorial North

First identified in 1973 by Nils Ørvik of Queen's University, defence against help theory is a geostrategic prescription for protecting the security and sovereignty of smaller-power countries that are located near larger-power countries.¹⁴ Peter Pigott observed that "... as early as September 1945, speculation appeared in the press that the United States intended to protect itself with airbases and radar stations in Canada with Ottawa's permission – or without."¹⁵ Therefore, it was in Canada's best interest from both security and sovereignty perspectives to negotiate a proportionate share of North American defence responsibilities through bilateral or multilateral cooperation such as participation in NORAD and NATO. Canada's objective was to have a "seat at the table" when the Americans made decisions serving their own self-interests and also affecting Canada's security and sovereignty.

By the late 1950s, North American military strategists on both sides of the Canada–US border agreed an enemy attack on the continent would be airborne, rather than by land or sea. The Sputnik satellite demonstrated how the Soviets had the technology to launch missiles over the polar ice cap and strike major North American cities. Peaceful co-existence in a nuclear world was established and maintained through the threat of massive retaliation, deterrence, and mutually-assured destruction. Continental defence became more reliant on technology such as the 5,000-kilometre radar system known as the Distant Early Warning System (DEW) Line, which was subsequently expanded to include the Mid-Canada Line and the Pinetree Line and was replaced in the 1980s by the North Warning System (NWS).¹⁶

With this technology, the Rangers' ad hoc surveillance role became less relevant for continental defence for most of the 1960s. Lackenbauer observed that "citizen soldiers with armbands and rifles could not fend off Soviet bombers carrying nuclear weapons."¹⁷ Instead of focusing on international threats, the Rangers were more frequently responding as unpaid volunteers to search and rescue operations—each time enhancing their reputation within their local communities. Occasionally, they would assist the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to capture criminals. They continued to provide the CAF with intelligence on unexpected sightings of ships and aircraft. The Rangers avoided being disbanded, likely because they drew so little from the defence budget and also, as will be explained later, they played a significant role in serving Canadian sovereignty requirements in the Territorial North simply by being there.

Even though the military's attention was on nuclear missiles delivered over the North Pole by bombers, the possibility remained that the enemy could also attack by sabotaging strategically important ground-based installations, such

as weather stations, the early warning radar system, and the Alaska Highway. Questions arose within the CAF and with its US partners as to how quickly Canada could respond to these threats, particularly if its regular troops and reservists were not stationed in the North. The Rangers with their local knowledge and expertise, such as their ability to move quickly on snowshoes, might provide an appropriate level of first response. However, members of the Rangers required additional military training "in patrolling and reporting, aircraft recognition, navigating, and field sketching, as well as group training in how to share information, survey vital points in their area, and participate [and establish direct relationships with regular troops through] military exercises."¹⁸ These considerations opened a debate on whether the Rangers should become a combat-trained force within the CAF or an armed militia, such as a home guard.

However, the debate about "professionalising" the Rangers did not have much traction. Canadian political and military leaders were convinced the Soviets would strike first in the US heartland. Because they relied on radar to detect bombers in Canadian airspace, the priority for military spending was, therefore, the Royal Canadian Air Force. The Rangers were directed to continue their surveillance role, looking for enemy parachutists who might install navigational beacons and undertake "nuisance" attacks in remote and isolated areas.

The Rangers have reported several submarine sightings in the waters of the Territorial North.¹⁹ Since Canada has not had naval vessels continually patrolling these areas and does not have subsurface sensors to monitor foreign naval traffic in the Arctic, the Rangers have provided surveillance information through their random process. Until the 1990s, when they were issued high-frequency radios, the Rangers had no immediate means to report such sightings and therefore, days and even weeks could pass before they could communicate this information for further investigation and diplomatic attention.²⁰

Rather than stationing fully-trained soldiers in the North, the CAF followed a "staggered-response" approach and deployed them incrementally and as needed. Arctic Response Company Groups (ARCGs) provided most of the Canadian Army's response to emergencies and significant safety and security incidents, but they were not physically located in their state of readiness in the Territorial North. Consequently, the Canadian Rangers became first responders and the CAF's "watchful presence" for their communities and surrounding areas. Army Initial Reaction Units (IRUs) were also created to respond within eight hours to significant incidents with a four-person reconnaissance team, a twelve-person vanguard company within twelve hours, and a thirty-two-person main support body within twenty-four hours.²¹

To accommodate their first responder role, more Rangers were provided with enhanced training and more advanced equipment. Lajeunesse observed that

“when deployed, with regular forces or southern-based reservists, [the Rangers served] as force multipliers, increasing the effectiveness of any deployment by teaching, guiding, and generally keeping others alive and active.”²² With increased training in northern survival skills, Lajeunesse wrote that a larger number of trained soldiers in southern Canada were available for “small-scale [northern] deployments and tactical movements while self-sustaining for nearly three weeks”:

It may not be a robust military presence in the conventional sense, and has been criticised in the media for falling short of the government’s aggressive promises for a strong presence; however, it is a focused and cost-effective system. It is designed with Canada’s limited resources in mind and for the sort [of] sovereignty and security threats that the country is likely to face in the coming years.²³

While the value of an ad hoc approach to ground surveillance occurring when individual Rangers are on personal hunting and fishing expeditions can be questioned, their contribution to military survival training cannot. Considering the challenges of the northern landscape and environment, the CAF benefits from the knowledge and skills gained from its interaction with northern Indigenous Peoples. No one else has the practical experience to provide a similar quality of information.²⁴ Furthermore, replacing the Rangers’ operational services, such as surveillance, is difficult without on-the-ground information on the local environment and would be much more expensive. While their value as the CAF’s “eyes and ears” in the North is being superseded by military technology, the Rangers’ role as northern on-the-ground “guides” remains significant.

Canadian Rangers and Sovereignty in the Territorial North

The CAF’s second identified role in the Territorial North is protecting Canada’s sovereignty. Canada’s territorial claims are based on nineteenth-century colonial practices which have largely been secured by treaty, by aggressive settlement, and, particularly in the North, by lack of interest by other states. While jurisdictional disputes over Canadian northern waters have almost all been resolved, melting ice caused by climate change is opening the long-sought Northwest Passage to foreign traffic and to sovereignty challenges. The Canadian government has suggested that the effects of climate change in the Territorial North present economic opportunities not only for Canada but also for other nations:

By 2050, the Arctic Ocean could become the most efficient shipping route between Europe and East Asia. Canada’s Northwest Passage and the broader Arctic region are already more accessible, and competitors are not waiting to take advantage – seeking access, transportation routes, natural resources, critical minerals, and energy sources through more frequent and regular presence and activity.²⁵

Meanwhile, successive Canadian governments have equated sovereignty with military presence, despite international legal conventions suggesting that more is needed. Canadian governments have identified the Rangers as a convenient and inexpensive way to demonstrate Canadian sovereignty: they live in the North and most can trace their Indigenous presence through many generations. However, these considerations may be insufficient to justify sovereignty.

Shelagh D. Grant defines sovereignty in a Westphalian world as a circumstance where a nation-state has “supreme and independent political authority” over certain lands and people.²⁶ Through much of its history (before and after it was able to chart its own independent foreign policy), other states did not challenge Canada’s jurisdiction over its northern lands or waters because they lacked the financial resources, technology, transportation accessibility, or willingness to take the risks to pursue the economic, commercial, or strategic potential of the Territorial North. With rising temperatures reducing the seasonal ice, many parts of the Canadian Arctic are opening to ships with reinforced hulls and advanced guidance technology. These ships can conduct geological research in previously inaccessible areas and are collecting data confirming and challenging international jurisdictional claims.

However, Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon has observed that while northern coastal states are interested in confirming their jurisdiction over offshore resources, the urgency to do so is low because there “are still many resources to develop ... where the risks and logistical problems are less daunting”²⁷ Currently, active jurisdictional challenges to Canada’s sovereignty claims in the Territorial North have focused on its efforts to control potential pollution risks, overexploitation of Arctic wildlife resources, drug and human trafficking, oil and gas drilling, and seabed mining.

Canadian sovereignty was originally based on a concept known as “terra nullius,” which means the land, when discovered, belonged to no one. This concept not only justified declaring sovereignty based on European discovery, but also ignored the presence of the Indigenous Peoples who lived on it at that time, thereby nullifying their sovereign rights as the original inhabitants of the land.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Lassa Francis Lawrence Oppenheim provided the legal application of “terra nullius,” arguing that when jurisdiction was declared by discovery (such as planting a flag, placing a plaque, and returning to the sponsoring monarch with treasures taken from the discovered land), sovereign title could be claimed if the land was “inchoate” (that is, undeveloped or temporarily vacant). However, this title would lapse if not followed, in a reasonable time, with “effective occupation,” such as establishing permanent settlements, providing basic public services, establishing governance structures, and enforcing laws and regulations.²⁸

After asserting ownership of the Territorial North, Canada needed to demonstrate its commitment to this ownership. However, permanent settlement of this cold and isolated region was difficult for relocated non-northerners and impractical when many Indigenous residents moved seasonally between camps for hunting and gathering activities. Canada initially asserted its authority through its national police force—the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP), and later the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Oppenheim would have described these posts as “fictitious occupation only” since their operations were mostly symbolic.²⁹

Two active disputes to Canada’s jurisdiction over northern waters remain to be resolved—the maritime boundary between the Yukon and Alaska in the Beaufort Sea,³⁰ and international access to the Northwest Passage. Most relevant for this article is the outstanding jurisdictional issues associated with the Northwest Passage as a “shortcut” between the Atlantic Ocean/Europe and the Pacific Ocean/East Asia and an alternative to the Panama Canal and the trade route from Cape Horn in South America. The melting northern sea ice has opened more navigable sea channels, many of which still require the assistance of icebreakers or are too shallow for commercial ships transporting heavy cargo. The “opening” of northern sea channels more often refers to the lengthening of the shipping season (through more days per year when ice conditions allow shipping to occur), rather than year-round navigation. Thus, northern routes and ports continue to be disadvantaged by the length of their season and the reliability of access relative to their southern counterparts.³¹

Today, two maritime routes³² through Canada’s Arctic islands are considered seasonally navigable; together, they are described as the Northwest Passage. Canada has argued that the routes through the Canadian Arctic are internal waterways between its Arctic islands and has asserted its jurisdiction by drawing “baselines,” which enclose all waters within the Passage (as well as the airspace above) as Canadian.³³ The United States, on the other hand, considers these routes as international straits connecting the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans and therefore has disregarded all domestic laws Canada has put in place to regulate traffic (particularly oil tankers) through these waters. According to Michael Byers, the

Americans’ position is less about fearing Canada would block US vessels from the Northwest Passage, and more about avoiding Canada’s jurisdictional claim that would create a precedent for regulating their navigation through other continental waterways.³⁴

The US challenges in the Northwest Passage have been the only serious threat, so far, to Canada’s sovereignty in the Territorial North. An example is the large American oil tanker, the SS *Manhattan*, which entered the Northwest Passage in 1969 without prior Canadian approval. However, this Canada–US dispute hardly justifies a Canadian response involving large-scale expenditures in military personnel, equipment, and infrastructure within this region. Instead, from a diplomatic perspective, Canada has tried negotiating bilateral and multilateral agreements that protect, even with reasonable compromise, Canada’s sovereignty interests. From a military perspective, proposals to enhance Canada’s northern surveillance and regulatory enforcement, such as acquiring new icebreakers and nuclear-powered submarines, have been abandoned on budgetary grounds. While the CAF was being downsized, the Rangers were expanded, but not for military purposes. Instead, the Rangers were called upon to serve the federal government’s objective of building and reinforcing Indigenous–military partnerships—a curious role when the CAF was specifically insisting the Rangers were not an Indigenous program.

The Conservative Government of Stephen Harper came to power in 2006 with an agenda of strengthening Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, as well as rebuilding the CAF. The government equated a greater military presence throughout the Territorial North and along the Northwest Passage with protecting the country’s sovereignty in the Arctic Archipelago. Consistent with the government’s political agenda, the Canadian Parliament’s Standing Committee on National Security and Defence observed in 2006 that “the Rangers are the sole military presence over large parts of the Canadian north”³⁵ and recommended expanding the Rangers from 4,100 to 7,500 members. As Lackenbauer points out, this recommendation came without “a clear rationale for this number nor an explanation of how an expanded force would provide Canada with greater security and sovereignty.”³⁶ The government decided, however, to increase the complement to 5,000.

In 2007, two Russian mini-submarines descended more than two miles under the polar ice cap. A Russian flag, reproduced in titanium, was then placed on the seafloor at the North Pole known as the Lomonosov Ridge.³⁷ Russia’s brazen action caught the attention of the Harper government, creating further rhetoric for greater military security in the Canadian Arctic. The Rangers received additional funding and a commitment to the “modernization” of its operations. While the expectation was that this funding would have the greatest impact on 1CRPG and the Territorial North, it later became evident that “two-thirds of the

expanded Ranger organization” would occur in the other four CRPGs, south of the Territorial North and in the provinces.³⁸ Lackenbauer suggests that political optics were behind the expansion—that is, “by championing the Ranger expansion . . ., the new government could claim an existing success story as its own.”³⁹

In 2009, the Canadian Parliament’s Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans recommended making the Rangers “an integral part of the Canadian reserves” and providing them with “marine capacity.”⁴⁰ These recommendations challenged the core principles of the Rangers—that is, being a subcomponent of the CAF, with membership drawn from local residents in northern communities who knew their areas intimately and could spot suspicious activities and protect their family and neighbours. Under these southern-generated proposals, the CAF’s links to northern communities would be broken if the Rangers became part of the combat-trained Reserves. Also, these proposals could have significant consequences for recruiting northerners and for community-building. With pushback coming from its members and strong advocacy by the military’s leadership, the Rangers’ core principles and operations remained unchanged.

In summary, successive Canadian governments have tried to justify their claims over “sovereignty” and “presence” in the Territorial North through the Canadian Rangers. The Rangers have been highly visible and widely-dispersed representatives of the Canadian government through their affiliation with and funding from the Department of National Defence. Their Indigenous heritage was exploited as evidence of a long-term “Canadian” presence in the Territorial North—an ironic statement when historical facts show that the Indigenous presence in North America during European exploration was completely ignored and suppressed.

The Canadian Rangers and Community-Building in the Territorial North

As discussed earlier in this article, successive Canadian governments have used the presence of military defence (CAF) and police security (RCMP) to assert sovereignty in the Territorial North. According to Lackenbauer and Katharina Koch, this approach has created “false expectations”:

[Canada] often [has conflated] ‘sovereignty’ and ‘security’ as concepts Alongside traditional hard-security functions (such as defending territory from potential aggressors, power projection deterrence and containment), Canadian statements [have assigned] its armed forces the opaque mission of ‘defending,’ ‘asserting’ or ‘demonstrating’ Arctic sovereignty.⁴¹

In 2008, for example, the Conservative government’s *Canada First Defence Strategy* anticipated that “the military will play an increasingly vital role in demonstrating a visible Canadian presence in this potentially resource-rich region, [including] helping other government agencies such as the Coast Guard respond to any threats that may arise.”⁴²

Despite its efforts to demonstrate its sovereignty by “showing the flag” throughout the Territorial North, the Canadian government later realized that a more legally defensible approach required populating the region through strategically located communities. Indigenous northerners were encouraged to settle into communities to receive certain government-provided social benefits. In 1985, William Marsden, a *Montreal Gazette* reporter, described the northern communities he visited as “essentially artificial communities kept alive by federal government welfare.” Their source of income through the fur trade had been decimated by animal-rights protests, and substance use issues, suicide, and other social issues were prevalent.⁴³ Government officials could demonstrate Canada’s presence through maps, which showed Canadians living in remote areas of the Territorial North. However, the maps did not show the effects of social seclusion, helplessness, and despair that existed among the population.⁴⁴

By the latter part of the 1990s, the Canadian government had concluded that there were no looming Arctic security threats in the Territorial North requiring an increased army presence in the area. Through its membership on the Arctic Council, Canada has promoted circumpolar cooperation on a wide range of issues, such as “sustainable development, including economic and social development, and cultural well-being . . ., [as well as,] the protection of the Arctic environment, including the health of arctic ecosystems, maintenance of biodiversity in the Arctic region and conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.”⁴⁵ This approach conforms with the Canadian government’s soft security strategy for the Territorial North which has shifted its emphasis from “defence of sovereignty” to “exercising and demonstrating sovereignty.”⁴⁶ Through this strategy, the Canadian government has reaffirmed its belief that in addition to a significant military presence through the Rangers, Canada’s Arctic sovereignty can best be demonstrated in the Territorial North through a local population living in established communities, through regional civilian governance and administration, and through upgraded infrastructure and services, such as enhanced surveillance and monitoring equipment and expanded search and rescue capabilities.

Unlike the United States, for example, Canada does not have a separate home or national guard to provide domestic support during disasters and emergencies. CAF personnel and equipment often supplement overloaded civilian resources during domestic crises throughout Canada and “help stack sandbags to hold back floods, fight forest fires, evacuate people in danger, deliver supplies, help local

law enforcement, check houses door-to-door, assess damage, and more.”⁴⁷ As previously noted, climate change has opened the Territorial North to more diverse maritime traffic, including criminal and terrorist activity (of primary concern to the RCMP and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service), environmental accidents (of primary concern to Environment Canada and Transport Canada), and search and rescue (of primary concern to the Canadian Coast Guard). The CAF supports the primary agencies in the performance of their duties. However, these agencies often are not physically present in remote northern communities and the lead responsibility therefore falls upon the Rangers.

Today, the 1CRPG has been directed by the CAF to be the “force of first response” in coordinating area-wide interagency planning and responses to search and rescue incidents, emergencies, and disasters. It works with local authorities (such as police, fire, and medical services) or other federal government agencies (such as the RCMP). However, in addition to often being the only organization immediately available in remote communities, the Rangers have the knowledge and training to lead search, rescue, and other urgent response missions. The CAF has supported the Rangers to assume leadership roles in their communities by providing training and equipment to organize and conduct locally-based responses to major disasters and crises, such as airplane crashes and local evacuations. Lackenbauer has noted that while the Rangers were recruited because of their skills and their knowledge of the local area, their CAF training as Rangers “taught patrols how to work as a group” and “to benefit their communities.”⁴⁸

In the 1970s, following the introduction of radar surveillance, the value of the Rangers to military security and sovereignty was in question. Major Ron McConnell of the CAF proposed giving the Rangers an expanded mandate focused on supporting local communities through land-based northern search and rescue responsibilities. At that time, primary responsibility for northern search and rescue was assigned to the RCMP and many calls for assistance were not answered because of insufficient police resources and coverage. To engage the Rangers, the RCMP had to initiate a formal request through bureaucratic channels which lost valuable time. However, on the ground, community leaders who were Rangers would not wait for approval to participate in a search and rescue mission when another community member’s life was at stake. Rangers, therefore, often unofficially participated in such missions as volunteers, knowing that they would not get compensated as Rangers if they did not obtain formal approval. Lackenbauer observes, “this distinction [between being an unpaid civilian volunteer and being a compensated Ranger volunteer] confused ... many Rangers, but in emergencies they acted first and foremost as community members, regardless of discrepancies between their practical contribution and official policies.”⁴⁹ The initial reaction to McConnell’s proposal within the CAF was cool.

Expanding the Ranger’s mandate could not be financially accommodated within the CAF’s budget allocations. Today, search and rescue are among the Rangers’ highest profile responsibilities.

A CAF review of the Canadian Rangers in 2000 described their contribution to northern communities:

By their nature, the Canadian Rangers are having a tremendous impact on the lives of people and communities in which they are located.... Rangers, in those communities where there is no other federal presence, are often perceived to be the elite of the community and are held up as role models for others. Frequently the Rangers represent the only identifiable and formed group that is readily available to the community in times of need.⁵⁰

There has also been considerable political pressure to expand the number of Junior Rangers patrols in the four patrol groups located below the sixtieth parallel. However, Junior Ranger patrols require mentorship-affiliation in their communities with Ranger patrols. 1CRPG officials expressed caution that

the organization as a whole could collapse under its own weight. Creating Ranger patrols simply to support Junior Rangers would drive up the costs through the roof and tax overburdened instructors and headquarters staff 1CRPG urged restraint before ambitious regional commanders [in the other four patrol groups, because of the organization’s decentralized governance system] carried the Rangers in new – and dangerous – directions.⁵¹

This cautionary message reflected an understanding that the Rangers’ low cost remained their political advantage, allowing the organization to survive the federal government’s fiscal austerity measures. To maintain their military relevance, the Rangers had to keep focused on the sovereignty, security, and surveillance tasks that supported the CAF.

Finally, by proclaiming itself as a protector of the environment and resources in a self-defined portion of the Arctic, the government effectively expressed sovereignty less as a right and more as a responsibility, which involves regulatory action. There are costs to receiving international recognition of the jurisdiction to impose such regulations. These costs also involve committing resources to personnel, equipment, and infrastructure to facilitate enforcement.

When civil society is introduced into the analysis, the identification of force multipliers becomes more complex. Now, there are two beneficiaries of the Rangers’ activities—the CAF and the Indigenous communities. The benefits flow

simultaneously. For northern residents, the Rangers have interests in the renewal of Indigenous culture, the practice of Traditional Knowledge and survival skills, and a sense of responsibility towards their communities and homeland. According to Lackenbauer, northern residents see the Rangers and their connection to the Junior Rangers as “a strong signal that the military accepted the importance of [Indigenous] cultures and that [Indigenous] communities trusted the military to teach their youth.”⁵² They have confidence in the Rangers to assist in addressing problems of suicide, substance use disorders, criminal activity, and other self-destructive behaviours being practised by their young people. However, Indigenous Elders are also concerned about “skills fade”:

The [traditional] skills are for the most part ... learned from elders. Retention of these skills is disappearing. Most Rangers over 40 years of age have them, but few under 30 have the same capability. Despite a resurgence of traditional values through the North, the common complaint in communities is that the young are becoming town bound and exhibit little interest in seriously pursuing traditional skills.⁵³

The Rangers have, therefore, had to play a larger role in providing a broader range of training to participants in the Junior Rangers’ program. Traditional land skills are threatened with extinction if they are not taught through the Rangers and Junior Rangers. The Rangers’ role is more than the intergenerational passing down of cultural knowledge and experiences within Indigenous communities; it also is essential to the northern survival of CAF personnel and northern residents generally. The Rangers’ training and mentorship programs are, therefore, a force multiplier for the CAF and also for the local communities where they are based.

The CAF is supporting community-building activities by providing the Rangers with relevant project-management training and encouraging them to facilitate civil-society collaboration. These activities will support Canada’s northern jurisdictional claims. As communities rebuild capacity towards greater self-determination and resilience, Canada’s presence and sovereignty is enhanced.

Northern residents also expand their skills and confidence to self-advocate. Through the Rangers, the CAF is seen as representing the Canadian government within the communities and therefore can be lobbied for greater financial and infrastructure support. It may become difficult for individual Rangers who are associated with such lobbying to distinguish between whether they are advocating as Rangers or as residents of their community. As voices in the North exert pressure to spend more on northern needs, the Canadian government may be less interested in having the Rangers encouraging such advocacy.

On the other hand, the positive consequences of the blurred line between civilian and Ranger roles are most obvious when their military training is applied to their community activities. This training has transformed the Rangers into community leaders, with an elevated sense of the values for volunteer service and social responsibility—the same civil society values that build stronger, self-sufficient, and resilient communities.

Communities in the Canadian North are pressing the federal government to address local social issues and are advocating for the same amenities that Canadian urban residents in comparable-sized communities receive. Northern leaders, who are also Rangers, will likely be forced to choose between the two leadership roles. Historically, Rangers have directed their loyalties first to their communities, and second to the Rangers and the CAF. In time, the Rangers will possibly be recruited from a smaller pool of applicants.

In the meantime, the blurred relationship supports those who envision the Rangers as a means for delivering social support to Indigenous Peoples in the Territorial North. The broadening of the Rangers’ mandate raises the question of the legitimacy and appropriateness of engaging the CAF in non-military programs, rather than focusing the Rangers’ role on contributing to the CAF’s military mandate.

Another Perspective of the Rangers as Force Multiplier

By 1995, an internal review by the Canadian Army concluded that the Rangers’ involvement in protecting security was of marginal value. However, their role within northern communities was being refocused in relation to community development and presence:

[The Rangers’] presence is very worthwhile both from the perspectives of the communities themselves and for the Canadian Forces and the Canadian government. Frequently, the Rangers represent the only identifiable and formed group that is readily available to the community in time of need In pure business terms, which seems necessary these days to justify any military endeavour, the Ranger program is analogous to a ‘goodwill’ class of asset. Its value is above and beyond the meagre budget that sustains it, yet that difference in value could only be realized once another means had to be funded to replace those services that the Rangers provide.⁵⁴

The final report of the internal review observed that the Rangers’ value included their “significance in enriching the social fabric in remote areas.”⁵⁵ This is a remarkable conclusion coming from a military organization and likely reflects

an acknowledgement of the Canadian government's financial priorities and a bureaucratic defensive reaction against further budget cuts. Vice-Admiral Larry Murray suggested that among the patrol groups within the Rangers, the CAF's priority was 1CRPG because "there is still a requirement to maintain a deployed observation capability and a military presence to demonstrate sovereignty."⁵⁶

With respect to security and defence, the Rangers' surveillance role has been replaced by radar and satellite technology. Meanwhile, NORAD's surveillance systems and infrastructure have not kept up with advancing military technologies, and therefore major expenditures for upgrading or replacing equipment are required. Disbanding the Rangers would remove the CAF's on-the-ground surveillance capacity, which is part of NORAD's continental defence and which could still be useful until new technology is installed. The loss of the Rangers' surveillance could also affect the CAF's capacity to monitor, on behalf of non-military government agencies, increasing criminal and terrorist traffic, uncontrolled tourist activity, and environmental violations as climate change opens new northern waterways. The staggered-response approach to incidents in the Territorial North continues to place the Rangers in the position of being first responders. They also support southern-based soldiers from the Regular Forces and Reservists by providing survival training in extreme northern conditions and supplying the intelligence necessary to manoeuvre through the northern landscape. Disbanding the Rangers would require developing alternative methods of transmitting this important training to southern-based soldiers.

With respect to sovereignty, disbanding the Rangers would remove the military connections and visibility they provide in remote northern communities. The former Rangers would continue to be residents, but their distinctive ball caps, hoodies, and other clothing would have no further significance as symbols of the Canadian government's presence, the status of military recognition and training, or the CAF's commitment to their communities and their residents. To satisfy international conventions on asserting sovereignty, other symbols of presence would be required to replace the Rangers, particularly along the Northwest Passage, in isolated and remote parts of the North, and in areas where climate change has made resource extraction financially viable. It is unlikely that any replacement could be provided as inexpensively as the Rangers.

Finally, the Rangers have become important leaders in building community capacity in the Territorial North to respond to local emergencies and disasters, as well as supporting community-response to major health and safety incidents and other emergency situations. The CAF provides special training programs for Rangers on emergency preparedness. Disbanding the Rangers may not immediately place northern communities in a more vulnerable position for threats to their well-being and security. Other federal departments, such as the RCMP

and the Coast Guard, might be able to provide the mobilization and coordination currently provided by the Rangers—but not necessarily in as timely a fashion or as effectively, from a civil society perspective, as the Rangers. Also, because local leaders often do not distinguish between their role as Rangers and their ongoing commitment as private citizens to the well-being of their communities, CAF-trained former Rangers could continue to lead facilitation and coordination roles during emergencies. However, this capacity would erode in the future if the next generation of leaders is unable to learn comparable or better leadership skills currently provided through the CAF.

Canada's Department of National Defence has committed to having a "footprint" in communities across the nation through CAF bases, armouries, other installations, and Ranger patrols.⁵⁷ Disbanding the Rangers would remove a significant number of locations in the CAF's northern "footprint." The military and perhaps even Canadian government presence would disappear, therefore having implications for sovereignty claims in the Territorial North.

International Interest in Canada's Territorial North

According to Lackenbauer, Canada and the United States have considered the Territorial North, from a defensive point of view, as "an exposed flank," rather than a land needing protection for its "intrinsic value."⁵⁸ The Americans fear an over-the-Pole attack by foreign adversaries to harm US citizens in large cities and key industrial, government, and military installations. Canada, on the other hand, has not been as concerned about being attacked by foreign interests, but rather fears the intrusion on Canadian soil by the United States to secure US interests, if they perceive Canada as unable to do so. Therefore, the "exposed flank" for Canada is its sovereignty in the Territorial North from a unilateral "invasion" by the United States.

Canada has taken an "if you can't beat them, join them" approach to the threat of US intrusion. It has delegated its airborne defence of the Territorial North to the United States through the bilateral NORAD agreement. Canada is the junior partner in this continental defence arrangement—for example, senior leadership in NORAD is always filled by Americans. Canada's involvement only pertains to surveillance; it has opted out of directly engaging in defensive counterattacks, with the Americans responding if a hostile state threatens an assault over North American airspace.

Recently, the assumption by Canadian military and political leaders that Russia no longer posed a threat to the world order has been shattered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the supportive intervention by NATO. When Russian President Vladimir Putin came to power, his mission was to rebuild his country's

military capabilities in Russia's northern regions. An Arctic Command, established in 2014, became responsible for managing fourteen new military airfields and sixteen built or restored deep-water ports.⁵⁹ Rob Huebert also points out that "most of [Russia's] submarine-based nuclear missiles were located with the northern fleet ..."⁶⁰ The Russians have also extensively mapped the undersea infrastructure causing NATO to consider methods to protect underwater pipelines and cables.⁶¹

Meanwhile, since the late 1990s, China's interest in the Arctic has grown. Its first icebreaker (the *Xue Long*) arrived in Tuktoyaktuk in 1999. Furthermore, its maritime fleet and commercial ships have been upgraded to travel in the northern waters. China has aggressively expanded its jurisdiction, through the creation of artificial islands in the South China Sea and through its Belt and Road Initiative (Polar Silk Road), including an attempt to acquire, through investment, control over Canada's critical minerals and other natural resources.⁶² In 2017, a Chinese icebreaker travelled through the Northwest Passage. Chinese monitoring buoys have been discovered in the Territorial North; China is also believed to be developing listening devices that could soon be monitoring underwater activity in Canadian waters. It has also developed new precision armaments, including "long-range, stealth cruise missiles and bombers, low-yield nuclear weapons and advanced conventional weapons."⁶³ China is soon expected to equip its nuclear-powered submarines with deep-diving submersibles.⁶⁴ Additionally, North Korea is rapidly expanding its capability to attack North America through its nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles development program. The United States has determined that Alaska offers an effective strategic location to intercept long-range ballistic missiles launched from North Korea.⁶⁵

Defence against help theory strongly suggests that the recent activity by the United States in the Northwest Passage, the Russian military presence in the Arctic, China's apparent Arctic interests, and North Korea's advancing nuclear technology will reignite the Americans' concerns about Canada's military defence in the Territorial North. While Canada may view itself as a peace-loving nation, US pressure is increasing for Canada to spend more on defence of the North, particularly in addressing deficiencies in surveillance technology. The Rangers may be enhanced as a symbolic response, but this reaction will not be sufficient to satisfy US jitters. The longer Canada delays enhancing its military strength in defence of North America, the greater the likelihood it will lose its defence against help preferred position within NORAD.⁶⁶

Conclusion

Samantha Stevens describes the Canadian Rangers as "a success story of Indigenous/Canadian military collaboration."⁶⁷ She points to the CAF's non-hierarchical structure, its attention to Indigenous cultural and language proficiency, its appreciation of a community-first sovereignty, and its search for Indigenous partnerships. Lackenbauer and Kikkert describe the relationship between the Rangers and other units or elements of the CAF as "based on mutual respect that manifests in a productive exchange of skills that supports and strengthens the CAF's ability to conduct Domestic Operations."⁶⁸

The Rangers coincidentally established a military and sovereignty presence in the remote parts of the Territorial North. As shown in this article, the CAF has been budgetarily squeezed into not investing in infrastructure or designating a permanent ground force in the Territorial North, relying instead on a staggered-response with troops based in the southern part of the country. Within available funding, Canadian military priorities do not support army and navy installations in a part of the country that is inhospitable to settlement.

This article shows how the Rangers with their distinctive ball caps, arm patches, and rifles have served since the late 1940s to protect Canadian sovereignty. Military practices and traditions have been modified to respect the way of life of northern Indigenous residents and to avoid rekindling the colonizing practices associated with the European settlement of Canada. These modifications have been necessary for the CAF to recruit and retain local residents into the Ranger force—therefore, establishing a visible Canadian government and military presence and "effective occupation" in the North.

The research question for this article is: are the Canadian Rangers, as a separate autonomous and decentralized subcomponent organization, a force multiplier for the CAF in performing its three roles through its regular and other reservist forces in the Territorial North? The article has also considered the question in reverse: how would Canada's sovereignty, security, and community building in the Territorial North be affected if the Canadian Rangers and the Canadian Junior Rangers were disbanded? From both perspectives, 1CRPG is a force multiplier for the CAF. Because of the arbitrary and ad hoc nature of their activities, the Rangers provide the weakest force multiplier to the CAF on surveillance, but have more significant impact on training southern-based regular and reservist soldiers on essential survival skills if they are deployed to the North—either for military defence or for emergencies—that in other countries would be addressed by a national or home guard. With respect to sovereignty by demonstrating a Canadian presence in the Territorial North, the Rangers provide a much stronger force multiplier—first, symbolically by living in remote northern communities; second,

by coordinating year-round essential services (notably search and rescue) within their communities; third, by supporting community development and enhancing civil society; and fourth, by tracing their presence back many generations through their Indigenous heritage. Working through the Junior Rangers program, the Canadian Rangers provide positive mentorship to northern youth, as well as skills and training for future leaders. However, it is possible that future participation in the Rangers by northern Indigenous residents will decline as they choose to engage as full-time community leaders who are advocating to secure greater financial support and self-government.

At a time when the Canadian government faces many political demands on its budgetary resources, any external pressure on the Canadian government by the US, NATO, or NORAD to substantially increase its military spending has not been well received by Canadian taxpayers. However, the re-election of Donald Trump to the US presidency and his isolationist threats, including the use of tariffs as a tool for implementing his “make America great again (MAGA)” ideology, have caused Canadians to be more supportive of increased military spending, but without a clear consensus on how this will be achieved and within what time frame. There is, however, growing public support for concentrating increased military spending in the Territorial North. Financing increased spending for the CAF will be challenging and involve difficult choices for the current federal government. How it proceeds will be clearer as it issues its fiscal and budgetary plans and how the machinery of government follows through with implementation.

Meanwhile, the Rangers continue to be the ad hoc “eyes and ears” and guides of the CAF in the North, as well as an important resource for teaching survival skills to southern troops when deployed to northern locations. The Rangers will continue to be a force multiplier to CAF and NORAD until deficiencies in early-warning surveillance technologies are addressed. Through their Elders, the Rangers can also share Traditional Knowledge of the survival skills and local expertise that can support southern-based troops.

With respect to sovereignty, Canada remains a country where most of its population prefers living in urban environments along the country’s southern border. Populating the North requires economic development that creates attractive and well-paying jobs and living amenities for raising families. Remote areas are less likely to be populated by non-northern people. For this reason, the Rangers will continue to be important contributors to Canada’s government presence in the Territorial North. Furthermore, climate change is introducing new non-military jurisdictional challenges to the region. Even if the Canadian government does not see a military urgency to enhance its presence in the North, it cannot ignore the implications of the opening of the Northwest Passage on non-

military issues relating to potential pollution, resource development, criminal and terrorist activity, and even increased tourism through cruise ships. The Rangers, as first responders and subcomponents of the CAF, may not be appropriately positioned within the Canadian government’s bureaucracy to support these functions.

The Canadian government has conveniently used the Rangers as a “smoke screen” to cover up its inadequate “whole-of-government” response to northern security and sovereignty challenges. The Rangers were never designed to be more than a community-based response to the CAF’s northern roles. Expanding their mandate or incorporating them into the regular or primary reservist forces would effectively represent disbanding them.

The Rangers, regardless of whether they are part of the CAF, perform an important civil society function and enhance the safety and well-being of their communities. In the interest of Canadian sovereignty and sustainable northern economic development, they should continue to be supported by the Canadian government and be encouraged to focus on mobilizing northern people to continue building communities that are even more self-reliant and resilient. Meanwhile, the Canadian government needs to have a serious review of its military role in the Canadian North and within a broader strategy of how its security and sovereignty interests in this region can be adequately addressed. Spurred by political rhetoric and destabilizing economic threats from US political leaders, Canadian political discourse is beginning to acknowledge the need and the urgency of responding to these challenges to Canada’s northern security and sovereignty. The time has come for Canadian politicians to respond with bold budgetary and policy actions that serve the best interests of Canada’s independence, sovereignty, and place in the world.

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Notes

1. The analysis in this paper will be confined to the military’s and the Rangers’ roles in the Territorial North. However, it should be noted that the Rangers operate in the northern regions of several Canadian provinces—specifically Newfoundland and Labrador, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec.

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62. In 2020, for example, a Chinese state-owned enterprise purchased a Canadian company that owned a gold mining property in Nunavut. Following a security review under the Investment Canada Act, the federal government blocked this transaction on national security grounds.
63. Michael Dawson, “NORAD: Remaining Relevant.” SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY, November 20, 2019. <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3505473>, 1.
64. Huebert, “China is on a relentless mission to control Canada’s Arctic waters”
65. Huebert in Leuprecht et al., *North American Strategic Defense in the 21st Century*, 181.
66. On June 10, 2025, Prime Minister Mark Carney announced the Canadian government’s intentions to expand defence spending to achieve NATO’s target of two percent of Canada’s Gross Domestic Product by March 31, 2026. This is a significant reversal of previous government plans to do so by 2032 (Chase and Jeff Gray, “Carney lays out defence boost, says era of US dominance over,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 10, 2025, pp. A1 and A15).
67. Stevens, “Canadian Rangers: Community, Autonomy, and Sovereignty,” *Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand Studies Network* 1, no. 2, (2021): 34.
68. Lackenbauer and Kikkert, *Measuring the Success of the Canadian Rangers* (North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, 2020), iii.

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