

Opinion



Canadian Rangers patrol boats, centre and right, sail towards HMCS Harry DeWolf on the Eclipse Sound, Nunavut, during Operation Nanook-Nunukput, Aug. 19, 2021. Photograph courtesy of Corporal Simon Arcand, Canadian Armed Forces

Canadian Rangers should have their maritime mission

In the Arctic, the challenges of lack of infrastructure and the cost of doing business requires a whole-of-government approach where departments share information and resources. In those communities that have an Auxiliary Canadian Coast Guard boat, the Canadian Rangers could use the same vessel to conduct their patrols, a cost-effective use of a federal asset.

Pierre Leblanc

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OTTAWA—The recent auditor general of Canada's report on the matter of Arctic waters surveillance was both disappoint-

ing and alarming. It was disappointing because it highlights that "the government has not taken the required action to address long-standing gaps affecting its surveillance of Canada's Arctic waters" and alarming, because soon, we could be partially blind to what is going on in this beautiful but fragile part of our country because there could very well be gaps in the replacement of critical assets such as icebreakers and space-based surveillance satellites.

The report makes clear that even with the assets we have presently, we lack the ability to permanently monitor a specific site from satellites, one of our most precious security assets. Although the RADARSAT Constellation allows us to scan the whole surface of the Arctic with great accuracy, the satellites are constantly in motion and cannot maintain surveillance of a specific point of interest. One must wait for the next orbit of one of the three satellites to have another look at a potential target. The Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard ships we deploy in the Arctic over the shipping season need to cover an area greater than continental Europe. They will be days away from an incident unless they happen to be inadvertently close by. One may recall that the New Zealand vessel that illegally transited the Northwest Passage because of COVID restrictions was spotted by the Inuit Maritime Monitoring Program, a Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. initiative, as opposed to a federal program.

In 2010, *Enhancing The Role Of The Rangers In The Arctic: A Discussion Paper*, a study commissioned by several Senators,

including Senator Dennis Patterson of Nunavut and then-Senator Roméo Dallaire, recommended increasing the role of the Canadian Rangers with a maritime mission. The Canadian Rangers have this great reputation of being the eyes and ears of the Canadian Forces on the land in the Arctic. It is a proven cost-effective program. In addition to some limited training on the land, the Canadian Rangers also report on any suspicious activity while performing their day-to-day activities. They support deployments of the Army, support search and rescue on land, and support their community during a disaster such as the avalanche in Kangiqsualujjuaq or during the COVID lockdown.

The concept proposed in the discussion paper was brilliant. It was to use the Canadian Rangers as first responders in their maritime role. In the conduct of their seasonal maritime patrols, the Rangers, who are mostly Inuit in the High Arctic, would report any unusual or suspicious activities such as illegal fishing, ships in maritime protected areas, an environmental spill, or unusual presence in one of the national parks. Their report would be provided to the relevant authorities to take appropriate action. Depending on the circumstances, the Rangers could take immediate action to minimize impacts. They could be the first responder to an environmental issue while the Canadian Coast Guard would ramp up its response. They would naturally be ready to execute a search and rescue operation. One of the important contributions they would provide is to maintain communication and continuous

information on a given situation on site while the appropriate federal agency would be deploying the required resources. Information on the nature of an environmental spill or the detailed information on the number and type of casualties would provide valuable information to tailor the federal response appropriately. In the words of Senator Patterson, "... Inuit are specifically suited to a maritime capability because of their intimate knowledge of and mastery of the Arctic marine environment—land fast ice included."

The security situation in the Arctic is changing rapidly mainly because of the impact of global warming, which is making access to the Canadian Arctic archipelago much easier and for increasingly long periods of time. We have already seen a significant increase in maritime activity including tourist vessels, cruise ships and vessels transporting criminal elements. The situation with Ukraine only magnifies the need to have complete domain awareness in our Arctic. China, which claims to be a "near-arctic state," has long-term Arctic ambitions and has been increasing its presence in the Arctic. Its growing aggressiveness and the threat of its fishing fleet to our Western Arctic exclusive economic zone only adds to the need to know what takes place in our Arctic at all times.

The Canadian Forces did not increase the maritime role of the Canadian Ranger Program in the Arctic following the recommendation of the December 2009 report of the Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, the 2010 discussion paper on enhancing

the role of the Rangers, nor the sovereignty and security in Canada's Arctic interim report of the Senate Committee on National Security and Defence. The Canadian Coast Guard, to its merit, has been partially filling the void by deploying Auxiliary Canadian Coast Guard detachments in several Arctic communities to improve maritime search and rescue.

As is the case in the Arctic, some of the detachments are staffed in part by people who are also members of the local Ranger Patrol. We find the same people in the leadership of their community, participating in their hunters and trappers organization and volunteering in the community's search and rescue organization. In the Arctic, the challenges of lack of infrastructure and the cost of doing business require a whole-of-government approach where federal departments share information and resources. In those communities that have an Auxiliary Canadian Coast Guard boat, the Canadian Rangers could use the same vessel to conduct their patrols, a cost-effective use of a federal asset.

"We can easily bring people from Southern Canada to increase our security in the Arctic, but why not employ the people of the Arctic: they are there, they know the land and waters, and they have vested interests," said Sen. Dallaire in February 2010.

Hopefully, because of the auditor general's report, the Canadian Forces will reconsider the recommendation of that 2010 discussion paper to give the Canadian Rangers a maritime mission. This would provide an additional layer of information to improve and maintain domain awareness especially if one of the surveillance systems in place becomes unserviceable or is not replaced in time.

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