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The Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Rangers' Maritime Role: An Unclear Proposal

Peter Kikkert, PhD
NAADSN Network Coordinator

P. Whitney Lackenbauer, PhD
NAADSN Network Lead

As the HMCS *Harry DeWolf* completed its transit of the Northwest Passage in late September, the vessel's commanding officer, Cmdr. Corey Gleason, [told](#) CBC North that "he has an ambitious plan for the Canadian Rangers — part of the Canadian Armed Forces Reserves who work in remote coastal areas of the North — to expand from operating on land to water." The proposal raises three important questions: Why does it ignore the long-standing maritime roles executed by the Rangers? Does it take into consideration current programming and initiatives aimed at improving marine capabilities in Inuit Nunangat? Why was this "ambitious" plan dropped so casually during an interview with the CBC?

The argument that the Canadian Armed Forces should give the Canadian 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 – a point we have made in several [previous publications](#).

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 in the North. Although the Rangers are force generated by the Canadian Army, their official Ranger tasking list includes coastal and inland water surveillance. Members of Ranger patrols often employ their personal boats to support their monitoring of vessel traffic in the Northwest Passage during Operation NANOOK-NUNAKPUT each summer, and during training exercises Rangers often use boats to travel between destinations. While on the water, the Rangers report unidentified vessels, unusual activities or sightings, and collect local data for the CAF. In carrying out these tasks, Rangers employ their own marine vessels, for which they receive reimbursement according to an established equipment usage rate. In employing their own watercraft, they are fulfilling the unit's primary mandate, which is to "provide

lightly equipped, self-sufficient, mobile forces in support of the CF's sovereignty and domestic operation tasks in Canada." Furthermore, by encouraging individuals to invest in their own, privately-owned equipment (rather than government-owned assets), this approach allows Rangers to procure appropriate vessels and vehicles to operate in their home environments while representing a material contribution to local capacity-building.

In short, Cmdr. Gleason's recommendation ignores the valuable role that Rangers have been playing in the maritime domain for decades. Because the Navy representative does not acknowledge any of the Rangers' contributions or practices in the maritime domain, it is unclear (but perhaps safe to assume) that the RCN intends to change these practices. If this shows a lack of understanding of what the Rangers have done, and continue to do, then it begs the question: how can you make an "ambitious plan" for the Rangers if you do not understand the Rangers?

We also question whether this plan for an expanded Ranger maritime role reflects an adequate understanding of the broader context of maritime safety and security relationships, competencies, and capacities in Inuit Nunangat. Has Cmdr. Gleason's plan been co-developed with, or at least socialized and circulated to, other government departments, Inuit organizations and associations, and the communities? How does this plan fit with ongoing collaborative efforts to bolster marine capabilities in Inuit Nunangat, such as the expansion of the [Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary](#), the [Nunavut Inuit Monitoring Program](#), the [Inuit Guardians Pilot Program](#), and the [Ocean Protection Plan's Northern marine training program](#)? Has the Royal Canadian Navy ensured that its ambitious plan for the Rangers would work with these programs and not actively undermine them or compete for human resources at the community level? Would an expanded Ranger maritime role, for instance, strip Coast Guard Auxiliary units of some of their best volunteers during the busy summer months?

We also question whether casually dropping this "ambitious plan" in the middle of an interview with the CBC was the best course of action. It certainly stands in sharp contrast to how the Canadian Coast Guard embarked upon its expansion of the Coast Guard Auxiliary in the Arctic. In the face of increasing maritime activity and the need to improve marine safety, the Coast Guard launched the multi-year [Arctic Search and Rescue Project](#) in 2015. Before acting, the Coast Guard built the relationships it needed with the Indigenous governments and organizations, territorial/provincial governments, and communities, and actively co-developed its programming with these key partners. While the project envisioned establishing new Auxiliary units in Northern communities, the Coast Guard intentionally started with a two-year study of marine risks and SAR requirements in coastal Arctic communities (Risk-based Analysis of Maritime SAR Delivery—RAMSARD). The Arctic RAMSARD team made 14 engagement trips to the North over a two-year period, visiting 45 communities. Through the study, the Coast Guard worked with communities to identify, estimate, and evaluate marine risks, and then assessed existing and potential risk control measures. As importantly, the Canadian Coast Guard's efforts to better understand the requirements of each community, have produced more [trusting and cooperative relationships](#). These community relationships then facilitated the work of the Coast Guard's Arctic Community Engagement and Exercise Teams (ACEET), which began visiting communities in June 2017 to *connect* with existing Auxiliary

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units, *introduce* the program to communities without one, and *provide the support and training* required for the establishment of new units.

The [instructions](#) given to the Coast Guard's Arctic Community Engagement and Exercise teams emphasized the service's overall approach: "is the key for success – we must present our topics, our areas of expertise 180 degrees from what is normal. Instead of us telling a community what we are doing, we need to think from the community perspective and present the benefits for the community of the service or concept for which we are responsible and ask if they agree with what we see as benefits and if they can suggest better or the best ways we can work together." The general approach taken by the Coast Guard explains the Arctic SAR Project's success and provides broader lessons and best practices for resilience-building measures in the North. We hope the Royal Canadian Navy is listening.