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## Arctic Security and Emergency Preparedness: Opportunities to Improve Coordination and Bolster Resilience

P. Whitney Lackenbauer

Network Lead, NAADSN

Opening Statement to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs studying the Arctic sovereignty, security and emergency preparedness of Indigenous Peoples, Ottawa, 10 June 2022.

I am honoured to appear before the committee today from my home in Oxford County, on traditional Anishnabek and Neutral territory that is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties. By taking the time to acknowledge the land I stand on, I remind myself of the long history of silencing in this country and the need to speak the truth on a journey towards reconciliation.

Your current study on Arctic sovereignty, security, and emergency preparedness of Indigenous Peoples covers a lot of terrain near and dear to my heart – and I will touch on just a few topics in my opening statement.

First, in terms of Arctic security writ large, the framework that I typically employ to conceptualize Arctic threats is one that differentiates between threats that pass through the Arctic, threats to the Arctic itself, and then threats originating in our Arctic.

I will focus my opening comments on threats in the Canadian North – most of which I see as related to our ability to respond to humanitarian and environmental emergencies caused or exacerbated by climate change – from tundra and wildfires, to melting permafrost and coastal erosion, to flooding and landslides – as well as risks amplified by heightened human activity in the North, such as pollution and spills, or maritime and air disasters. My team adopts an all-hazards approach to identifying measures to anticipate, mitigate, and respond to risks in remote communities and austere environments. Our focus is on how we can improve Whole of Government and intergovernmental

responses and work towards more holistic Whole of Society approaches to build resilience and enhance emergency management.

The Canadian Rangers are an example of a community-based capability within the Canadian Armed Forces that provides [important grassroots local response across the spectrum of risk](#). First, full disclosure that I am the Honorary Lieutenant Colonel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Ranger Patrol Group which spans our three northern territories, and I am a huge promoter of the Rangers. I see the Rangers as a distinctly Canadian military solution that embraces Northerners and indigenous Peoples as the heart of what is needed to encourage and leverage subject matter expertise, capabilities, and local relationships in ways that are attuned to both community and national needs.

The Rangers serve as the eyes, ears, and voice of the CAF in remote regions, guide southern-based soldiers who deploy to our North, and, due to their presence and capabilities, Rangers regularly support other government agencies in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a broad spectrum of local emergency and disaster scenarios. Over the last couple of years, Rangers were a key component of Operation LASER – the military’s response to COVID-19 – in isolated communities, while continuing their established roles in responding to heavy flooding in places like Lake Vermillion, Hay River, and Kashechewan; evacuating communities threatened by forest fires; responding to plane crashes; and supporting ground search and rescue. We should note that residents of Canada’s remote regions, and particularly Indigenous Peoples in our North, already serve in the Canadian Armed Forces in very high numbers per capita as Rangers.

One straightforward way of bolstering emergency management in remote communities is to [improve the coordination between the Rangers and other first responder organizations](#), such as the [Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary](#), volunteer Search and Rescue organizations, Indigenous Guardians programs, and volunteer fire fighters.

Relationships are key. Better horizontal and vertical coordination of the diverse array of actors involved in security and disaster and emergency management means embracing a multi-sectoral approach and changing how we talk and work together across jurisdictional boundaries, before, during, and after emergencies. I echo previous witnesses before the committee when I call for greater clarity about who is responsible for what aspects of emergency management, what capabilities exist at local and regional levels, how these capabilities might be better integrated and coordinated, and where there are gaps in our processes that must be addressed.

We have positive examples of successful communities of practice, like the Arctic Security Working Group co-chaired by Joint Task Force North and the Territories, which works well at a pan-territorial regional level. Nevertheless, we still face major challenges in information sharing between departments and agencies, between governments, and with local actors. This inter-agency and inter-asset information sharing and coordination was a major theme and recommendation of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador’s [Public Inquiry Respecting Ground Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons](#), led by Commissioner James Igloliorte of Labrador. In my view, improved information sharing is a key opportunity space that can be acted upon immediately – but this does

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require a cultural change in how federal actors think about their role in not just ingesting relevant information for its purposes but also providing it to first responders at the speed of relevance.

One possible initiative that could help to synchronize different lines of effort would be implementing an [Inuit Nunangat Community Public Safety Officer Program, which Calvin Pedersen, Dr. Peter Kikkert, and I have proposed](#). I will be pleased to discuss this in more detail in the question and answer period.

Finally, I see important opportunities related to [strategic infrastructure investments that align defence and security needs with the well-established priorities of territorial, provincial, and Indigenous governments](#). Priority areas include communications (both broadband and satellite), improvements to airfields, ports and harbour facilities, and sensor systems that enhance our domain awareness in both environmental and human dimensions. Addressing infrastructure deficits in the North that create vulnerabilities in the security sphere should be synchronized, wherever possible, to also address persistent social, health, and economic inequities in the region.

So, to wrap up – relationships are key, Indigenous peoples and Northerners are key to local solutions to meet evolving human and environmental security threats in the North, and we need to better share information – in anticipation of emergencies, during emergencies, and in discerning lessons afterwards. All of this is contingent on more fully adopting Whole of Government and Whole of Society approaches to emergency management – which will bolster resilience, security, and sovereignty. And when we come up with a sober appraisal of the security situation in the Canadian Arctic, I hope that we align smart investments in Arctic defence and security with civilian priorities and ensure that they provide dual-use or military and civilian benefits wherever possible.