

March 20, 2026

The Speed of the North: Look to Operation NANOOK-NUNALIVUT

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“Speed is now the true measure of sovereignty in Canada’s North,” [John Wright wrote in a 17 March 2026 *Globe and Mail* commentary](#). “Ottawa can publish strategies and announce billions in investments, but if we can’t move people, ships and aircraft into our own Arctic quickly, and keep them there, our claims are only as strong as our press releases.” The op-ed is filled with the conventional frames, usually misguided, suggesting that Canada’s Arctic sovereignty is precarious and imperilled. “True sovereignty” is extolled but never defined in any coherent way. Instead, Wright offers broad rhetoric about the need for “speed” in the face of “urgency” – which, based on the evidence that he provides, comes off as more political urgency than any substantive kinetic military threats to the Canadian Arctic. And, of course, Wright runs down the Canadian Armed Forces while celebrating our allies for their Arctic military prowess – the typical self-denigrating fare served up in the Canadian media these days.

I concur that we need to create more agile, flexible, and efficient procurement and contracting processes to build strategic infrastructure at the speed of relevance – but adopting a “crisis” mentality to do so, rooted in dubious risk assessments borne more of rhetoric than reality, is dangerous. In the past, “crash programs” built brazenly in response to perceived crises have had dramatic human and environmental impacts. It is telling that Wright makes no reference whatsoever to Northern Canadians, including Inuit, First Nations, and Metis rightsholders, who have indicated their strong support for defence and multi-purpose investments. Instead, he simply sees infrastructure as a federal responsibility, and the essential defence partnerships as international. He misses the internal Canadian partnerships that are equally, and I would argue even more, important to our total defence and comprehensive security.

Want to see an example of Canada moving at speed in the Arctic? Look to the Canadian Rangers who are currently in the midst of an epic, 5,000-kilometre-long patrol across our Arctic coastline. A core team left Inuvik by snowmobile in the western Arctic in mid-February, headed north to the Arctic coast where we endured whiteouts and high winds in the coldest winter in recent memory. The Rangers and 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group headquarters staff then pushed east through Tuktoyaktuk, Paulatuk, Kugluktuk, Cambridge Bay, and Gjoa

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Haven. Supported by the noble Twin Otter crews of the Royal Canadian Air Force's 440 (Transport) Squadron and other military elements, they will soon turn south along the Kivalliq coast to Churchill, Manitoba. They are moving at speed with modern equipment bolstered by age-old local and traditional knowledge and experience.

This long-range patrol is part of Operation NANOOK, the Canadian Armed Forces' signature Arctic operation that has been recast to encapsulate the many military activities that are conducted year-round to secure our northern regions. Wright seems oblivious to these efforts, which have often included allied participation as well as serving as a reminder to adversaries and competitors that we are present and active in our Arctic. The Royal Canadian Navy has a fleet of Arctic and Offshore Patrol Vessels, which the Americans are using as the design basis for their new Arctic Security Cutter program. In terms of North American and Canadian defence modernization, my visits to the High Arctic over the last year suggest that more experimental testing is already happening than the media reports, alongside efforts to locate sites for advanced sensing technologies in some of the remotest stretches of Canadian coastline.

While Wright encourages more "semi-permanent military gaming on Canadian terrain," he seems oblivious to the real CAF operations that actually represent the "durable presence" that he suggests does not exist. It is also time to celebrate the strength and capacity that resides in the Canadian North – including the Canadian Rangers' unique form of dedicated service, and that of the other military personnel who are active in our North. "The problem is the Arctic doesn't live on paper, but in days and hours," Wright contends. Having just spent days on snowmobile alongside the Rangers, as part of a fifty-day patrol showcasing tremendous expertise, agility, and adaptability in extreme conditions, I can confirm that the Canadian Armed Forces are not just doing paper exercises. The Rangers' snowmobile tracks may be temporary, but the sovereignty that they exercise is enduring. In an uncertain world, they demonstrate practical expertise and resourcefulness that operates at the speed of the North.