

*"Indigenous Communities are at the Heart of Canada's North":  
Media Misperceptions of the Canadian Rangers, Indigenous  
Service, and Arctic Security*

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*Having spent two decades in uniform and a third reporting on military affairs, I can say I've never seen a component of the Canadian Armed Forces so frequently and impulsively photographed, praised and promoted as the Canadian Rangers.... So who exactly are these Canadian Rangers, these alleged "soldiers of the North" riding across the tundra with Canadian flags flying from their snowmobiles? .... The Canadian Rangers are not soldiers in any professional sense of the word because they are not trained to actually go to war and fight. They are political props, the blunt end of Canada's Arctic defence delusion.*

– Robert Smol (2013)

Canada's extensive coastlines and vast northern expanses have presented security and sovereignty problems since the Second World War. As *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (Canada's defence policy) highlights, "spanning three Territories and stretching

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as far as the North Pole, Canada's North is a sprawling region, encompassing 75 percent of the country's national coastlines and 40 percent of its total land mass." This tremendous expanse, "coupled with its ice-filled seas, harsh climate, and more than 36,000 islands," poses particular monitoring and surveillance challenges for the CAF and for the Government of Canada more broadly. Furthermore, Canada's three northern territories have the lowest population density in North America – a significant constraint on conventional operations that also amplifies the benefits of drawing on access to local resources. *Strong, Secure, Engaged* notes that "the region is dotted with vibrant communities, many inhabited by Canada's Indigenous populations. These communities form an integral part of Canada's identity, and our history is intimately connected with the imagery and the character of the North" (DND, 2017, p. 79).

In the twenty-first century, the Canadian Rangers – an unorthodox military organization comprised predominantly of Indigenous people – have emerged from the shadows to become a hallmark of Canadian sovereignty and security in the North. With approximately 5000 members, Rangers live in more than 200 Canadian communities and speak "26 different languages and dialects, many Indigenous" (Canadian Army 2017). As part-time, non-commissioned members of a subcomponent of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Reserves, the Rangers' official mission is "to provide a military presence in sparsely settled northern, coastal and isolated areas of Canada that cannot conveniently or economically be provided for by other components of the Canadian Forces" (DAOD, 2020-2). Creating an organization that successfully mobilizes Indigenous people and other Canadians living in remote regions and situates them appropriately within the defence team has entailed moving beyond conventional military structures and practices, and instead embodies various "postmodern" characteristics including permeability between civil and military spheres, heightened diversity and cultural exchange, less hierarchy, and a greater focus on non-traditional missions (Lackenbauer, 2006).

In *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, the Government of Canada commits to "enhance and expand the training and effectiveness of the Canadian Rangers to improve their functional capabilities within the Canadian Armed Forces" (DND, 2017, p.113). What does the phrase "improved functional capabilities" actually imply and entail? In previous books and articles, I have furnished detailed overviews of the history of the

Canadian Rangers, their unique or unorthodox characteristics as a military component, relationships between the Rangers and other CAF elements, and the high rates of Indigenous participation in the organization. This article does not seek to replicate those efforts or to revisit this same ground. Instead, I have chosen to critically interrogate the assumptions and critiques levelled at the Canadian Rangers. In particular, I carefully deconstruct and analyze the work of the Rangers' two most ardent media critics: former Army intelligence analyst and Toronto-based freelance journalist Robert Smol, and *Maclean's* reporter Scott Gilmore. In contrast with their assessments, I argue that the Rangers are an appropriate and operationally valued component of a Canadian military posture designed to address Northern risks across the defence-security-safety mission spectrum. They serve as enablers or "force multipliers" for conventional operations, while at the same time supporting "soft security" responses that CAF operational concepts identify as the most probable threats to the Canadian North. Rather than seeing the Rangers as a sideline to the "serious" military show that Smol and Gilmore would like to see play out in the North, this unique component is better understood as offering core capabilities that meaningfully and practically leverage the rich diversity, knowledge, and skills of Northern Canadians – and, most relevantly for the theme of this volume, of Indigenous peoples.

## Context and Background<sup>2</sup>

The Rangers are neither a military nor an Aboriginal "program" (as they are sometimes misidentified), but rather a subcomponent of the Reserves that leverages the skill-sets of Canadians from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds to support home defence, security, and public safety missions. While official figures suggest that Indigenous Canadians represented 2.2% of the total Canadian Armed Forces in 2013, they make up more than two-thirds of the Canadian Rangers in Northern Canada.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> Parts of this section are derived from a forthcoming chapter on "The North's Canadian Rangers" in *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces through Diversity and Inclusion*, eds. Alistair Edgar, Rupinder Mangat, and Bessma Momani (forthcoming, University of Toronto Press, June 2019).

<sup>3</sup> This official figure of Indigenous people's participation in the CAF does not include the Canadian Rangers because they are neither Regular Force nor Primary Reserves. Self-identification surveys related to the Rangers are highly unreliable. Only 25.6% of Rangers in 1 CRPG had completed a cultural self-identification survey by July 2016, with nearly all returns appearing to come from Yukon. Accordingly, the statistics are not representative. By contrast, 81.7% of Rangers in 2 CRPG completed the survey, with

defence policy includes the need to “better forecast occupational requirements and engage in more targeted recruiting, including capitalizing on the unique talents and skill-sets of Canada’s diverse population” (DND, 2017, p. 6). The successful inclusion of northern Indigenous peoples in the defence team through the Rangers represents an important example of how an appreciation of Indigenous knowledge and local skills not only accommodates but promotes diversity and benefits from it in tangible ways.

There are five Canadian Ranger Patrol Groups (CRPGs) across Canada, each encompassing a distinct geographical area. This article focuses specifically on 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (1 CRPG), the largest military unit in Canada with an effective strength of about 1400 Rangers in 60 patrols across Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and northern British Columbia. The majority of Canadian Rangers in 1 CRPG are Inuit, First Nations, or Métis, and their command structure – wherein community-based patrols vote in their own leadership – reflects the grassroots nature of the Ranger organization. As the “eyes, ears, and voice” of the CAF in the North, southern military units rely on and learn from the experience and knowledge of the Rangers to survive and operate effectively in Arctic and Subarctic environments. The Canadian Rangers not only benefit their communities in a direct social and economic sense, they also empower Northern Canadians who mentor and educate other members of the CAF on how to manage, respect, and ultimately care for their homeland (Lackenbauer, 2013; 2015).

My writing over the years has highlighted the Rangers’ practical contributions to the defence team in the Canadian North. By bridging diverse cultures and the civilian and military realms, I have argued that the Rangers represent a successful integration of national security and sovereignty agendas with community-based activities and local stewardship. The identity of the Indigenous peoples is tied to the land, and the CAF’s decision to gain their assistance in defending that land and that identity has yielded a practical partnership, rooted in traditional knowledge and skills, that promotes cooperation, communal and individual empowerment, and cross-cultural understanding. Although commentators often associate military practices, and those of

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56.9% self-identifying as Aboriginal peoples, 2.5% as visible minorities, and 1.1% as persons with disabilities. Statistics provided by the office of the Chief of Staff Army Reserve.

the state more generally, with physical dislocation, environmental degradation, political disruption, and culture shock for Northern Indigenous peoples (eg. McMahon, 1988; Abele, 1989, p. 189; Simon, 1992, p. 60; Lackenbauer and Farish, 2007; Bonesteel and Anderson, 2008), the interconnectedness between the military, remote communities, and Canadian society is respected as a constructive force in the case of the Canadian Rangers. Accordingly, I argue that it serves as a striking example of what can be achieved when policies and practices are rooted in a spirit of accommodation, trust, and mutual respect. Recent studies by Peter Kikkert (2017), Sébastien Girard Lindsay (2017), and Magali Vullièrme (2018) confirm these assessments.

### (Misplaced) Criticism

Not all media commentators share my enthusiasm for the Canadian Rangers or the capabilities that their Indigenous members represent. Robert Smol, a freelance pundit, represents himself as “a retired Army intelligence officer who served over 20 years in the Canadian Armed Forces” and has spent the last decade as an educator and writer in the Greater Toronto Area (Smol, 2008; 2014). His opinion pieces often target the Canadian Rangers as the epitome of what he considers to be Canada’s lamentably weak Arctic defence posture. He regularly dismisses the Rangers as “political props” (2009) and a “token military force” (2016) because they are neither designed nor trained for combat. “The flow of public affairs ink at National Defence … seems determined to portray our Canadian Rangers, in particular, as a bulwark in Canada’s determination to assert its sovereignty in the Far North,” Smol wrote in May 2009. “Primarily of members of local Inuit and other First Nations people,” he acknowledged that the Rangers are “extremely useful in search and rescue missions in the North, and in training others in winter survival skills,” but they were “nowhere near being a serious military presence in the region.”

The only true measure of military seriousness, in Smol’s eyes, is a conventional Regular Force capability prepared to defeat a hostile enemy surging over the North Pole and threatening Canada’s territorial integrity. Anything less, he argues, is “dangerous optimism.” Ironically, the former officer notes that “like every other nation, we have a unique set of geographic, political and demographic challenges that need to be dealt with if we are truly to take control of our own defence and assert our sovereignty at the

same time.” He fails to grasp the value of the Rangers as a capability that is well-suited to Canada’s “unique set of geographic, political and demographic challenges.” Rather than reflecting Canada’s “dangerously naïve sense of optimism that no country will ever seriously follow through and violate our borders,” the Rangers represent a key element in a defence posture that is not as inconsequential as Smol asserts, given the lack of an imminent conventional military threat facing the Canadian Arctic. Furthermore, it does indicate a successful, made-in-the-Canadian-North solution to Northern defences that does not require permanent garrisons of full-time, professional soldiers sprinkled across Canada’s Arctic expanses. Instead, it offers Northerners – and mainly Indigenous Northerners – a chance to serve as “force multipliers” within the CAF in a way that reinforces and shares Northern knowledge and does not require them to leave their homelands.

“So who exactly are these Canadian Rangers, these alleged ‘soldiers of the North’ riding across the tundra with Canadian flags flying from their snowmobiles?” Smol asked in a follow-up article in 2013:

For Ottawa, they are made to stand as proof that the Harper government is doing something substantial to protect Canadian interests in the North. To the public, they represent some perceived ‘effort’ and “sacrifice” Canada is making already to defend its territory — making it seem like nothing more needs to be done.

The reality is quite different. The Canadian Rangers are not soldiers in any professional sense of the word because they are not trained to actually go to war and fight. They are political props, the blunt end of Canada’s Arctic defence delusion — the naïve belief that we possess the capability to actually defend ourselves in a way comparable to other Arctic nations. They’re casual help, in other words.

While again acknowledging the Rangers’ potential value in search and rescue or in an emergency, he considers their role “peripheral” to a substantive military presence in the region. “Our Canadian Rangers do not receive any combat training in winter warfare — no training in how to conduct offensive, defensive and transitory operations in the extreme environmental conditions of the Arctic,” he asserts. “Rangers lack the complex logistical, mobility and communication assets that are so vital to sustaining a military

force in the far North" (Smol, 2013). The weight that he assigns to conventional land force combat operations is unmistakable.

In a recent volley, published in August 2017, Smol suggests that "Canada's 'Arctic soldiers' shouldn't be our only line of defence in the North." With reference to the annual Operation Nanook being held in Nunavut and Labrador, he sneered that: "As with each and every sovereignty exercise, the vaunted Canadian Rangers, our so-called 'Arctic soldiers' will be touted by the Armed Forces and government as the permanent military symbol of Canada's determination to assert its sovereignty in the region" (Smol, 2017b). He never specifies who exactly refers to the Rangers as "Arctic soldiers" – a phrase not commonly used in 1 CRPG or in wider CAF circles. As the "only permanent military presence in the North," Smol points to the Rangers' limited ability to fight off a hostile foreign land force invading our Arctic shores:

Just how secure should we feel knowing that our Rangers are on duty? Dispense with the standard cheesy accolades and one can see that, operationally, the Rangers are not much more than a public affairs ruse aimed at placating Canadians into believing that Canada is actually taking Arctic defence seriously.

Granted, the Canadian Rangers do occasionally assist in search and rescue and may provide other needed public assistance in their communities. But place our Rangers under an operational military lens and all one sees is a network of minimally trained, non-combat, part-time auxiliaries. The Canadian Ranger recruit receives all of 10 days military training. Most are not employed in a continuous manner. They do not have a uniform (other than sweatshirts and ball caps) and are usually required to supply their own snowmobiles when "on patrol."

Thus it should not come as a surprise that Canadian Rangers are in no way expected to go into military combat. As each Rangers unit is allotted about 12 days of paid employment for the year, we can hardly expect them to provide any systematic sovereignty patrol in the Arctic.

Deriding the Rangers' .303 Lee Enfield rifles (which are currently being replaced, one should note, not because they are obsolete but because they are no longer available in sufficient quantities) as "museum-worthy," Smol suggests that "by placing minimally trained, non-combat, part-time reserve auxiliaries as the symbol of Canadian resolve to

assert our sovereignty, we are, in essence, saying that Arctic sovereignty is not a responsibility we as a nation are willing to take seriously" (Smol, 2017b).

By comparison, Smol has intense admiration for the other Arctic states and their efforts to militarize their Northern territories by investing in more conventional forces (eg. Smol 2009; 2016; 2017a). Norway, for example, has "a permanent, professional boots-in-the-snow presence in the Arctic, letting the world know that they are present, poised and prepared to stand and defend its own territory first and foremost before any outside help arrives" (Smol, 2014). If Canada had any self-respect, he reiterated in August 2017, "we would be doing what the Danes, Norwegians, Finns, Swedes, Russians and Americans have been doing for decades. That is to maintain full-time, well equipped, professional and specialized 'boots in the snow' ready to assert and defend their Arctic sovereignty" (Smol, 2017b).

What is the threat environment that Smol – a former intelligence officer – anticipates in the Arctic to justify his need for robust, combat-ready land forces to defend the Canadian Arctic? Without any substantiating evidence or argumentation, he seems to rely upon the unstated, "common sense" logic that because the Russians are building weapons systems and have shown aggression in Georgia, the Ukraine, and Syria, they are similarly disposed to attack Canada's Arctic. His advocacy efforts insist on the need for a robust Canadian Army presence, presumably in anticipation of a conventional land-based ground assault across the North. Smol is either unaware or dismissive of the threat assessments produced by the DND/CAF over the past decade, which emphasize that there is no immediate conventional military threat to Canada's Arctic (see Lackenbauer and Lajeunesse, 2016). Although his desired defence posture is modelled on the Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes, he fails to consider how geographical realities make their Arctic very different than Canada's (both physically and demographically) and, as close land neighbours to Russia (and, in the case of the Norway, with a unique relationship related to Svalbard), why they might face a different threat environment. By ignoring these core considerations, he simply smooths the entire Circumpolar North into an undifferentiated space, and champions the Swedish "Arctic garrison" model – a model that, for good reason, Canadian strategists have dismissed since the 1940s (see Eyre, 1981; 1987; Horn, 2002; Lackenbauer, Eyre, and Kikkert, 2017).

A systematic analysis of how the Canadian Rangers and the CAF's Arctic plans compare to other countries' Arctic defence postures is sorely needed. Any such analysis will require an awareness of the different operating environments, demographic realities, and political relationships across the Circumpolar Arctic. Moreover, it will have to acknowledge (as Smol entirely fails to do) that most Canadians living in the Arctic – particularly outside of the territorial capitals – are Indigenous people who are rightsholders with a clear sense of how their own sovereignty is nested within and interacts with that of the Canadian state (eg. Loukacheva, 2007; ICC, 2009). The logic that "sovereignty begins at home" (eg. Simon, 2008; 2009; Nicol, 2010), with Inuit and other Northerners themselves, seems entirely lost on Smol. Furthermore, he is oblivious to overtures by the Alaskans and Danes/Greenlanders to explore the Canadian Rangers model as an option to better engage members of their Indigenous communities in a form of military service. Given this international interest, it is hard to justify dismissing either the Canadian Rangers or their place within the CAF's Arctic operational concept more broadly.

Scott Gilmore – a *Maclean's* correspondent, "Conservative appointee to the board of the International Development Research Centre", and husband to Liberal Cabinet minister Catherine McKenna (Gilmore, 2015) – provides more explicit analysis of the Arctic threat environment while arriving at a similar denigration of the Rangers as a token symbolic force with little practical value for national defence. "Canada has an Arctic problem: our northern marches are increasingly important to us and others, but no Canadian government has ever made even the minimum investments necessary to safeguard it," he wrote in November 2015 (Gilmore, 2015). Contrasting Russian investments in their North with Canada's, he observes that Russia "remains the sole superpower" in the Arctic. In light of this hegemonic status, Gilmore notes that Russia's "undisputed position does not require a bellicose strategy" – a contrast to its strategies in Ukraine and Syria. Although "a rules-based international system works in Moscow's favour" in the Circumpolar North, "which makes it "unlikely to see Russian icebreakers steaming defiantly past our ragtag force of part-time Canadian Rangers in the short term," he uses the Russian threat as a pretext to advocate for billions in federal investments – or "Canada's Arctic problem is only going to get worse." The dismissal of the Rangers as a "rag-tag force," which harkens back to depictions by earlier *Maclean's* reporters (see Lackenbauer, 2013d), is telling. The following year, Gilmore similarly

used Canada's declining footprint at the port of Churchill to lament its unwillingness to invest in the Arctic, holding up the Rangers' use of "Second World War era Lee-Enfield rifles" as another example (Gilmore, 2016a).

Gilmore's September 2016 article on "The Great Canadian Lie" situates the Rangers in a more substantive critique of Canada's failure to invest sufficiently in a Northern Strategy. "Canada is not a proud northern nation," Gilmore chastises (2016b). "Its Arctic is undefended, undeveloped and socially fraught." In contrast to other Arctic regions, he laments the lack of economic activity in the Canadian North, the absence of a vigorous fishing industry, and dismal social and health indicators. "Canada has also left its north largely undefended," he suggests, with only a small 120-personnel headquarters in Yellowknife and no "ice-strengthened warships" (in contrast to Denmark's seven). Lest anyone hold up the Canadian Rangers as evidence of a military presence, Gilmore (2016b) pre-emptively offers the following dismissal:

Usually, whenever anyone points out the total absence of Canadian Forces in the Arctic, someone mentions the Canadian Rangers. This volunteer militia is made up mostly of Indigenous Canadians living in the North. They are the backbone of our military presence, providing surveillance and conducting "sovereignty patrols." To complete this mission they are issued a sweatshirt, a baseball cap, and a Second World War-era rifle. (This week they were promised, again, that these would all be replaced by 2019.) Rangers must supply their own snowmobiles and radios. They may be hardy, but they're no replacement for an actual military presence.

Canada's North is empty. We stopped trying to develop it generations ago.

Gilmore's commentary is problematic in many respects. First, the whole notion of an "empty" Arctic is reflective of a classic "Settler Frontier" mindset that dismisses the fundamental reality of the region as an Indigenous homeland with a long history of human use and occupancy. Second, the idea that the Canadian Rangers are "no replacement for an actual military presence" is also condescending in denying the Rangers their status as an official sub-component of the Canadian Army. Presumably, they are not "real" members of the military because, like Smol, Gilmore's concept of the CAF is predicated entirely on a conventional model of Regular Forces and Primary

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Reservists singularly trained to ward off foreign military invaders. Like Smol and other critics, Gilmore also alludes to the Rangers' .303 Lee Enfield rifle as a relic of a bygone era – perhaps an analogy to his view of the Rangers themselves.

Picking up on his theme of the “undefended” Canadian North, Gilmore insisted in 2017 that “there is no place on earth as poorly defended as the Canadian Arctic,” thus rendering the region “essentially the largest military-free zone in the world.” Typically dismissive or ignorant of the CAF’s expanding footprint over the previous decade, he was consistent in his dismissal of the Rangers – “local volunteers who are given Second World War rifles, a hoodie, a ball cap and an annual photo op with whichever politician is shameless enough to fly north for 24 hours to emote about the Canadian North from the depths of his or her \$1,200 Canada Goose parka.” While the journalist recognizes that “the Canadian Arctic is more remote and difficult to access than Russia’s,” he likens it to the Amazonian rainforest – and finds our defences comparatively lacking (Gilmore, 2017).

These stories furnish an incomplete or distorted picture of the logic behind having Canadian Rangers purchase, maintain, and use their own environmentally-appropriate equipment. Although southern Canadian media commentators like Gilmore often criticize the lack of pay, equipment, and clothing provided to Rangers compared to their Regular and Reserve Force counterparts, my extensive conversations with Rangers from across the North over the last two decades suggests that these critiques are generally ill-informed or misplaced.<sup>4</sup> The diverse landscapes in which Rangers live and operate prescribe different equipment and clothing needs. The philosophy of treating the Rangers as self-sufficient, lightly-equipped members of the defence team recognizes this reality as well as the military’s limited capabilities for providing logistical support to community-based patrols distributed across the

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<sup>4</sup> Although Rangers are not paid for their year-round service as “eyes and ears” on the land, Rangers are paid for force generation activities such as annual training patrols, local meetings, and leadership workshops, with an average of twelve paid days per year. Furthermore, they are paid when they participate in force employment activities such as Operations Nanook, Nunalivut, and Nunakput, as well as when they provide support to southern units on northern training exercises (NOREXs) or are officially tasked to conduct search and rescue. Although the influx of several thousand dollars into a community at the end of a Ranger patrol or military exercise might appear paltry, this Ranger pay can constitute a substantive part of an Indigenous economy that balances short-term paid labour with traditional harvesting activities, thus supporting a social economy that does not conform to Western models.

territorial north. The Rangers are well known across the North for their “red hoodie,” and are also provided with t-shirts, a ball cap, CADPAT pants, military boots, and red jackets intended for parade. On operations, however, Rangers are expected to use their own environmentally-appropriate clothing, which they deem best suited to local conditions, rather than being assigned standard military gear. While media commentators often dismiss the Rangers as “rag-tag forces” as a result, they fail to observe that this lack of uniformity embodies a respect for diversity, allowing Rangers to make their own decisions about what they should wear to operate comfortably and effectively in their home environments.

This same logic extends to transportation and camping equipment. Gilmore’s critique that “Rangers must supply their own snowmobiles and radios” neglects to mention how, during training and official taskings, Rangers are compensated for the use of their own equipment and vehicles - including snowmachines, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), and boats – according to an established Equipment Usage Rate (EUR). This arrangement provides Rangers with tax-free reimbursements that they can invest in their own equipment and tools, which they can then use in their everyday lives without having to ask the government for permission to do so. By allowing individuals to purchase their own, privately-owned equipment, this approach represents a material contribution to local capacity-building. Furthermore, it means that the military does not have to assume an unnecessarily high sustainment burden when it comes to maintaining equipment dispersed across more than sixty communities in the territorial north.

In general, the ongoing criticisms of the Canadian Rangers levelled by Smol and Gilmore highlight their persistent frustration with Canada’s modest Arctic defence posture compared to other Arctic countries and their dismissal of a largely Indigenous, Northern-based military organization that does not fit their traditional concept of national defence. On the one hand, the Rangers are held up as a “strawman” for these journalists to knock down in their overall critique of Canada’s alleged failure to invest in “serious” or “real” military capabilities. Second, their unwillingness to embrace any concept of military service that does not involve conventional soldiers preparing for warfighting is limiting in a defence-of-Northern-Canada context. When the Rangers are situated in a more robust strategic and operational context, I contend that the

journalists' criticisms fall short. Conventional military threats to Canada's Arctic are less acute than sensational media coverage or implicit assumptions suggest, and Canada's defence capabilities in the region, while admittedly modest compared to other parts of the world, are proportionate and sufficient to meet them (Lackenbauer and Lajeunesse, 2016). By turning to self-sufficient, locally-based Canadian Rangers as an enabler or "force multiplier" for conventional southern-based military units and as an organized body of first responders in and for their communities, Canada has developed a successful model for defence of regions remote from the southern population belt that face no conventional military threat.

### **Situating the Canadian Rangers in the Canadian Armed Forces' Arctic Operational Picture**

The traditional view of Arctic sovereignty and security, perpetuated by Smol and Gilmore, focuses entirely on military defence, especially the protection of national borders and the assertion of state sovereignty over Arctic lands and waters. During the Cold War, Arctic security was inseparable from national security, nuclear deterrence, and the bipolar rivalry between the American and Soviet superpowers (Coates et al, 2008; Kikkert and Lackenbauer, forthcoming). Alternative understandings of security that emphasize economic, social, cultural and environmental concerns have emerged in the post-Cold War period, however, and many scholars and politicians now promote a broader and deeper conception of security that reflects new and distinct types of threats – and encompasses human and environmental security (Greaves and Lackenbauer, 2016). This understanding frames Canada's Whole-of-Government (WoG) approach to Arctic security which involves many departments and agencies (at various levels of government) and Northern community stakeholders (Lackenbauer, 2016b; Lackenbauer and Lajeunesse, 2017). While overshadowed by popular depictions of circumpolar competition and a so-called Arctic arms race in popular media coverage (eg. Griffiths et al, 2011; Wilson Rowe, 2013; Pincus and Ali, 2016), the Government of Canada's integrated, comprehensive approach to defence and security reflects an increasingly concerted effort to reduce risks across the mission spectrum and strengthen the resilience of Arctic communities (Lackenbauer and Lajeunesse, 2016). DND policy has

reflected this framework for more than a decade which, I have argued, offers a strong and appropriate basis upon which to build (Lackenbauer, 2017c).

*Strong, Secure, Engaged*, released in June 2017, shows that the Arctic remains an area of particular interest and focus. Climate change, resource issues, undefined continental shelf boundaries, potential maritime transportation routes, and security concerns have factored significantly into the domestic and foreign policy agendas of Arctic states, non-Arctic states, and organizations. “To succeed in an unpredictable and complex security environment,” the new defence policy committed to “increase [its] presence in the Arctic over the long-term and work cooperatively with Arctic partners” (DND, 2017, p. 14), reiterating longstanding images of the Arctic as a region undergoing massive change. At the same time, it explains that “Arctic states have long cooperated on economic, environmental, and safety issues, particularly through the Arctic Council, the premier body for cooperation in the region,” and that “all Arctic states have an enduring interest in continuing this productive collaboration” (DND, 2017, p. 50).

Strategic documents produced by DND/CAF consistently emphasize that Canada does not face any conventional military threats to the Arctic in the foreseeable future. Although recent Russian activities (Ukraine, Syria, strategic bomber flights to the limits of North American airspace) indicate a return to great power competition globally, which warrants careful monitoring and analysis in concert with our “premier partner” (the United States) and other NATO partners. Changes to the global threat environment, however, have not changed the perception of the conventional military threat to the *Canadian* Arctic. Although meeting near-peer competitor threats globally requires new or renewed capabilities that will be deployed in the Canadian Arctic (such as interceptor aircraft to replace the CF-18 and post-North Warning System detection systems), these requirements are not borne of threats emanating from Arctic-specific sovereignty issues/disputes. Furthermore, Russian military activities in its Arctic do not relate, in any obvious way, to environmental change or to maritime corridors in the Canadian Arctic (Sergunin, 2015; Lackenbauer, 2016a). A false correlation between Russian investments in Arctic capabilities and a commensurate increase in the threat to the Canadian Arctic perpetuates misconceptions by conflating *Arctic issues* (those emerging in and from the Arctic region) with *grand strategic issues* that may have an Arctic nexus but are appropriately dealt with at a global (rather than narrowly regional)

level. If Canada fails to reflect this nuance in its official policy, it risks generating the very misconceptions that build mistrust and create conflict.

A sober Arctic defence and security policy requires leveraging relationships with allies, as Canada has always done. While Smol might consider this a “colonial mentality” that indicates subordination to the United States (2017a), it is a sensible and realistic approach that is consistent with both past practice and current international norms and relationships (including NORAD and NATO). As Global Affairs Canada has consistently reiterated, the longstanding Canada-US disagreement on the status of Canada’s Arctic waters remains manageable and does not detract from deep, longstanding cooperation on defence of North America. Furthermore, the Trudeau government’s emphasis on nation-to-nation relationships with Indigenous peoples reinforces the central importance of respect for and reconciliation with these Canadians to his political agenda. “No relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples,” Trudeau highlighted in his publicly-released mandate letter to each of his Cabinet ministers in November 2015. “It is time for a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership” (Trudeau, 2015). Accordingly, Canada will continue to place the highest priority on ensuring that its activities in the Arctic (both domestic and international) acknowledge, protect and promote Indigenous peoples’ rights – including military activities.

President Obama and Prime Minister Trudeau emphasized in their 10 March 2016 joint statement that a shared Arctic leadership model should “embrace the opportunities and … confront the challenges in the changing Arctic, with Indigenous and Northern partnerships, and responsible, science-based leadership.” It need not be built around inflated military threats to Arctic sovereignty and security, as Smol and Gilmour believe are paramount. Instead, the four main objectives focus on conserving biodiversity; building a sustainable Arctic economy; collaborating with “Indigenous and Arctic governments, leaders, and communities to more broadly and respectfully” incorporate Indigenous science and traditional knowledge into decision-making; and supporting strong Arctic communities by “defining new approaches and exchanging best practices to strengthen the resilience of Arctic communities and continuing to support the well-being of Arctic residents, in particular respecting the rights and

territory of Indigenous peoples.” This objective stresses that “all Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic are vital to strengthening and supporting U.S. and Canadian sovereignty claims,” and both countries “commit to working in partnership to implement land claims agreements to realize the social, cultural and economic potential of all Indigenous and Northern communities.” Taking “greater action to address the serious challenges of mental wellness, education, Indigenous language, and skill development, particularly among Indigenous youth,” is identified as one of the key priorities (Obama and Trudeau, 2016). Although this may not reflect the vision of the Trump administration in Washington, it is reinforced by Mary Simon’s proposed “Shared Arctic Leadership Model” (2017), and the Government of Canada’s “Arctic Framework Policy: Discussion Guide” (INAC, 2017).

DND/CAF Arctic plans also anticipate that the CAF is likely to play an increasingly active domestic role in support of civilian authorities in the future. I have argued elsewhere that investments already announced to enhance Arctic capabilities, such as the HMCS *Harry DeWolf*-class of Arctic and Offshore Patrol Vessels and the Canadian Forces Arctic Training Centre, as well as recent organizational and doctrinal developments, are sound and appropriate. Although Smol and Gilmore are dismissive or oblivious to the land force concept designed around Primary Force Immediate Response Units, Primary Reserve-generated Arctic Response Company Groups, and the Canadian Rangers, there is no indication that this concept – once fully implemented – is ill-suited to meet the most probable defence threats that land forces will be required to meet *in Canada’s Arctic* today and in the foreseeable future (Lackenbauer and Lajeunesse, 2017).

While noting enduring responsibilities to defend Canada and North America and deter would-be aggressors, as well as the importance of monitoring military activities across the Arctic region (particularly by Russia) primarily through surveillance missions, strategic documents emphasize that the security risks and “threats” facing Canada’s Arctic are unconventional, with the lead management responsibilities falling primarily to other government departments and agencies (CFD, 2010, p. 5-6; CDS/DM, 2011, p. 9; CJOC, 2014). Strategic and operational-level documents guiding the military’s northern planning focus on WoG responses to law enforcement challenges (such as upholding Canadian fishing regulations vis-à-vis foreign fishing fleets),

environmental threats (such as earthquakes and floods), terrorism, organized crime, foreign (state or non-state) intelligence gathering and counterintelligence operations, attacks on critical infrastructure, and pandemics (CFD, 2010, p. 23-24; CDS/DM, 2011, app.A, 1-2). Accordingly, rather than focusing solely on training for Arctic combat, the military has embraced what the *Land Force Operating Concept* (2011) describes as a “comprehensive approach” to WoG integration, with the CAF providing assets and personnel to support other government departments and agencies dealing with issues such as disaster relief, pollution response, poaching, fisheries protection, and law enforcement. From a military perspective, this means *supporting* the many stakeholders responsible for implementing federal, territorial/provincial, local, and Indigenous government policies in the North.

In order to fulfill the military’s roles in leading or assisting in the response to security incidents, defence officials recognize the need to build strong, collaborative relationships with Northern partners. DND/CAF strategic documents clearly highlight threats to Indigenous communities posed by climate change, economic development, and increased shipping activity. Furthermore, these documents consistently emphasize that Northern domestic partners must be involved in the planning and enactment of policies and activities in the region, with information shared across government departments and with Arctic stakeholders. Because of the military’s training, material assets, discretionary spending powers, and the specialized skill set held by its personnel, defence documents affirm that the CAF had an essential role to play in government operations in the North – albeit an explicitly supporting role (CFD, 2010, p. ix, 10, 23, 49). Otherwise stated, while other departments and agencies are mandated to lead the responses to Northern security threats and emergencies, the military will “lead from behind” in the most probable security and safety scenarios. (The exception is search and rescue, where DND has the lead for coordinating air and maritime SAR and providing aeronautical SAR.)

Recent analysis of strategic documents produced by DND during the Harper era reveals how military planners did not subscribe to a “sovereignty on thinning ice” thesis, nor did military implementation plans build on rhetoric about a foremost need to “defend sovereignty” against foreign military threats emanating from resource or boundary disputes. While political leaders often cited the need for enhanced military

capabilities under the sovereignty pillar of Canada's *Northern Strategy*, the military did not interpret this as an urgent need to develop conventional war-fighting capabilities to ward off foreign state aggressors. Instead, the military articulated, promoted, and sought to implement a WoG approach that clearly emphasized unconventional security and safety challenges. Rather than dismissing human and environmental security considerations, DND/CAF conceptualized these "soft" missions as the most probable situations where it would be called upon to provide security to Canadians. In these scenarios, enhanced military capabilities would help to address these challenges in a *supporting* way rather than as the main line of government effort to "enhance" sovereignty (see Lackenbauer, 2016b; Lackenbauer and Dean, 2016; Lackenbauer, forthcoming). Cast in this light, the Canadian Rangers are far from irrelevant to military capabilities designed and equipped to meet threats to the Canadian Arctic across the defence-security-safety mission spectrum. They are deliberately designed to be a practical mechanism that avoids the perception of undue "militarization" of Canada's North – from both national and international perspectives.<sup>5</sup>

### "Sovereignty Begins at Home": Indigenous Service in the Canadian Rangers

Brigadier Kelly Woiden, the Chief of Staff, Army Reserve, explained to the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence on 18 February 2015 that:

More than anything else, [Rangers] have a very clear and strong understanding of local community and their environment. Many of them are individuals who have prominence. They can be an elder within the native community with their local Inuit or other ... First Nations peoples across the country. However, they could also just be rank-and-file folk because of their background and knowledge, for instance, the local snowmobile mechanic who has done well and he's the best guy.

Rather than seeing the Rangers as a sideline to the "serious" military show that Smol and Gilmore would like to see play out in the North, this unique component is better understood as offering core capabilities that meaningfully and practically leverage the

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<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Lieutenant-Colonel Tim Halfkenny, the Commanding Officer, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Ranger Patrol Group, for reinforcing this point after reading a preliminary draft of this article.

rich diversity, knowledge, and skills of Northern Canadians – and, most relevantly for the theme of this volume, of Indigenous peoples. Canada’s three northern territories are a diverse human geography, with Indigenous peoples comprising a substantial portion of the population. Combined, Canada’s three territories were home to just over 113,600 people in 2016, representing 0.3% of the total Canadian population. Outside of the territorial capitals, most residents live in small, dispersed communities, many without road access, with concomitant challenges of economies of scale and the delivery of government services. Whereas Indigenous people – First Nations, Inuit, and Métis – made up 4.3% of the total Canadian population in the 2011 census, they comprised 23.1% of the population in Yukon, 51.9% in Northwest Territories, and 86.3% in Nunavut. These demographics are reflected in the Canadian Rangers.

The lack of Ranger self-identification data in 1 CRPG does not allow for firm statistics, but conversations with Ranger instructors and headquarters personnel, as well as my own field work over the past fifteen years, affirm that more than two-thirds of all Canadian Rangers across the Territorial North are of Indigenous descent. The rates of Indigenous participation are highest in Nunavut and NWT, with Yukon having higher numbers of non-Indigenous members, as the demography of that territory would predict. At the local level, individual patrols are representative of their communities’ ethno-cultural and linguistic diversity. These are important considerations, given the Government of Canada’s strong focus on the centrality of Northern Indigenous leadership (Lackenbauer, 2017b) and the defence policy statement that “Indigenous communities are at the heart of Canada’s North” and the military will “work to expand and deepen our extensive relationships with these communities, particularly through the Canadian Rangers and Junior Canadian Rangers” (DND, 2017, p. 80).

Elsewhere, I have explained the historical emergence of the Rangers as a diverse and inclusive organization, and explored how the Rangers’ role, mission, and tasks accommodate Indigenous and local knowledge and expertise. To facilitate the participation of a wide range of Northern Canadians, the Rangers have unique enlistment criteria<sup>6</sup> which respects the experiential and traditional knowledge that

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<sup>6</sup>The only formal entry criteria for men and women who wish to join the Rangers stipulates that they be over eighteen years of age; Canadian citizens or landed immigrants who reside in a remote, coastal or

recruits bring to the organization. Upon enrolment, Canadian Rangers are considered to be “trained, self-sufficient, equipped, and clothed to operate as self-sufficient mobile forces in support of CAF sovereignty and domestic operations in Canada in their local area of responsibility” (generally described as a 150-km radius around their home communities) (Commander Canadian Army, 2015). New Rangers are typically provided with a ten-day orientation course, provided by Regular or Primary Reserve Force Ranger Instructors, which focuses primarily on marksmanship and learning basic facts about the history and structure of the CAF. There is no “basic training” akin to the Regular Force or Primary Reserves, and Rangers are not required to undertake annual training. Accordingly, Rangers do not conform to the principle of universality of service because knowledge of the military and conventional “soldiering skills” are not prerequisites to their participation. Furthermore, there is no compulsory retirement age for Rangers in recognition of the essential role of elders in Indigenous communities.<sup>7</sup>

The decision not to impose an age cap or strict medical conditions on Ranger service can lead to confusion. Overzealous media stories in recent years that suggest a crisis in the organization because of the apparently high number of Rangers who have died while still serving (40 members in 1CRPG from 2012-2015) seem to overlook or fail

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isolated area; in sufficiently good health to carry out their duties; knowledgeable of the local terrain and competent to operate on the land; and free of any legal prohibitions. (DAOD 5002-1). There are no fitness or aptitude tests that Rangers must take prior to joining nor do they face any hard medical criteria. Given social indicators that reveal significant health and education gaps between northern and southern Canadians, these are important accommodations that allow the Ranger organization to include a more representative sample of Northern society than might otherwise be the case.

<sup>7</sup> A Ranger is only considered non-effective when s/he can no longer patrol their AOR in the process of their individual normal routine; s/he does not reflect good credit upon their community, their patrol and the CAF; s/he is not accepted as an equal and participating member within their respective patrol; or s/he no longer provides tangible advice and guidance to the patrol which is grounded in experientially-based, traditional knowledge. If the patrol membership decides by consensus that the individual is non-effective, then the commanding officer of the patrol group can release the member (CAO 11-19). This process reinforces the community-based philosophy of the Ranger organization. As long as individuals contribute to their patrol, in the eyes of the other patrol members, they can remain in the organization and make positive contributions. For example, people unable to travel on the land can serve as communication contacts back in the community. Elders also serve as important cultural mentors and subject matter experts, lending traditional and local knowledge to the planning of operations, management of relationships within a patrol, the training of other Rangers, and the mentoring of youth. Accordingly, the absence of any compulsory retirement age not only brings greater generational diversity within the Rangers than in the Regular and Primary Reserve Forces, it also facilitates the trans-generational transfer of knowledge within Northern Indigenous communities.

to understand these policies (eg. Everson, 2015). While the tragic death of Ranger Donald Angoyoak of Gjoa Haven during Exercise Polar Passage in 2013 was operationally-related and prompted Prime Minister Stephen Harper to remind Canadians that this demonstrated how the Rangers and other CAF members face “real dangers as they safeguard Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic” (Weber, 2013), the other 39 Rangers had died due to non-duty related causes. Most passed away due to natural causes, including old age. Unacceptably high suicide rates in the North also have an impact on the Rangers, both directly and indirectly, but there is no evidence that stresses related to Ranger service have any correlation with suicides. Indeed, some observers suggest that Ranger activities, which provide Northerners with a sense of purpose and self-worth, might actually play a positive role in reducing suicide rates – a key human security concern in Canadian Indigenous communities (eg. ITK, 2016).<sup>8</sup>

In terms of harnessing diversity, the Rangers organization has also become a more inclusive place for women since the gender barrier was first broken in 1991. As of December 2016, there were 408 female Rangers in 1 CRPG, representing 22.7% of the unit strength – a much higher percentage than in the Regular Force or Primary Reserves across the CAF. Eight of the sixty Ranger sergeants (patrol commanders) in 1 CRPG are women (13.3%), as are 52 of the 237 master corporals (21.9%) and 46 of the 181 corporals (25.4%).<sup>9</sup> These statistics affirm that women feel that they can and should play a leadership role in the organization, and have acceptance from their peers (who elect them into these positions). It also reflects the prominent role of women in overseeing the Junior Canadian Ranger patrols in their communities, which is typically done by a Master Corporal.

While Smol and Gilmore would likely dismiss these diversity statistics as evidence of mere “symbolism,” they speak to the Ranger organization’s success in achieving broader DND/CAF objectives to “better forecast occupational requirements and engage in more targeted recruiting, including capitalizing on the unique talents and skill-sets of Canada’s diverse population” (DND, 2017, p. 12). Particularly in isolated Northern communities, where Indigenous peoples make up such a high proportion of

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<sup>8</sup> More research is required to prove that there is a positive correlation between improved physical and mental health indicators and Ranger service (DND/CAF Ombudsman, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Statistics provided by 1CRPG, November 2017.

the population and southern units have less familiarity with operational constraints related to environmental conditions and mobility, being able to leverage this expertise is highly valuable. Unfortunately, convincing some critics of the value of a diverse military that does not fit their preconceived notions of “serious” capabilities can be difficult. General Jonathan Vance, the Chief of the Defence Staff, noted at the 2018 Halifax Security Forum that “military leaders have failed to grasp the importance of recruiting more women and minorities, partly because they have for too long relied on an antiquated template for recruits.” In his view, deepening the diversity of the CAF is essential. “We know that the future of warfare is going to demand different ways of thinking in different domains so that we can prevail,” he asserted (Canadian Press, 2018). While he is likely referring to domains such as cyber and piloting of unmanned aerial vehicles, the Canadian Arctic domain is another area where conventional models do not fit – but not because the nature of warfighting has changed.

Smol and Gilmore are correct in highlighting that the Rangers are not intended as combat forces. This role, which was originally assigned to Rangers in 1947, was removed from their official task list because they are neither trained nor equipped for it (DAOD, 2020-2). This does not justify the declaration that they are not a “real military” capability, or that their lack of combat training renders the CAF less prepared to defend Canada’s Arctic from foreign adversaries. Understanding the Rangers and how they fit within the defence team is key. They are intended to serve as enablers or “force multipliers” for other CAF elements in preparing for Arctic warfare and, presumably, an actual warfighting scenario (however highly improbable that is in the Canadian North).

Rangers *could* be trained for more kinetic military tasks – but there is no indication that they *should* be, given the threat environment and the important roles that they already play through their unique terms of service. As Table 1 shows, the Rangers’ national task list encompasses three broad aspects: conducting and supporting surveillance and presence patrols; conducting and assisting with domestic military operations; and maintaining a Canadian Armed Forces presence in local communities. This includes reporting unusual activities or sightings; collecting local data for the CAF; land-based and maritime patrolling (in winter by snow machine and in summer by boats); training and guiding Regular and Primary Reserve Force units operating in

remote regions; assisting in search and rescue efforts and in local emergencies; and assisting with natural disasters such as forest fires and floods (DAOD, 2020-2). The Army considers the Rangers “a mature capability” and “the foundation of the CF’s [sic]

**Table 1: Canadian Ranger Tasks (DAOD 2020-2)**

The tasks in the following table may be undertaken by a CR member on duty when authorized by their CRPG HQ:

<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Conduct and provide support to sovereignty operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct and provide support to surveillance and sovereignty patrols, including training in Canada.</li><li>• Conduct North Warning System site patrols.</li><li>• Report suspicious and unusual activities.</li><li>• Collect local information of military significance.</li></ul>
Conduct and provide assistance to CAF domestic operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct surveillance of Canadian territory.</li><li>• Provide local knowledge and CR expertise (i.e. advice and guides).</li><li>• Participate in search and rescue operations.</li><li>• Provide support in response to natural or man-made disasters and support in humanitarian operations.</li><li>• Provide assistance to federal, provincial, territorial or municipal government authorities.</li></ul>
Maintain a CAF presence in the local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Instruct, mentor and supervise Junior Canadian Rangers.</li><li>• Participate in and support events in the local community (e.g. Yukon Quest, Canada Day, Remembrance Day, etc.).</li></ul>

The following tasks may not be assigned to a CR member, except when placed on active service under section 31 of the *National Defence Act*:

1. undertaking tactical military training;
2. performing immediate local defence tasks, such as containing or observing small enemy detachments pending the arrival of other forces;
3. providing vital point security (e.g. dams, mines, oil pipelines, etc.);
4. assisting federal, provincial, territorial or local police in the discovery, reporting and apprehension of enemy agents, saboteurs, criminals or terrorists; and
5. serving in aid of the civil power.

operational capability across the North for a range of domestic missions" (Leslie, 2009). In emphasizing their myriad contributions, the Army notes that the "Rangers will remain a critical and enduring presence on the ground, valuable in many roles, including amongst others, the CAF's eyes and ears for routine surveillance purposes, its guides, local cultural advisors, interpreters, and the core of our liaison capacity in many locations, while remaining immediately available to support local government or other agencies" (DND, 2013, p. 23).

As noted earlier, the key Arctic defence documents produced by the Canadian military over the last decade all emphasize integrated defence team and whole of government approaches to meet challenges across the mission spectrum (Lackenbauer and Lajeunesse, 2017). Within these concepts, the Rangers are situated as facilitators or enablers for other military components providing combined response capabilities. Lessons learned or post-exercise reports regularly highlight the benefits of this partnership and the need to leverage the Rangers' Indigenous and local knowledge and capabilities to facilitate successful operations and to further develop Regular and Primary Reserve Force units' operating skills in remote areas (see Lackenbauer, 2015; Lackenbauer and Lajeunesse, 2016). Rather than dismissing the Rangers for not simply replicating existing Canadian Army capabilities that reside in southern-based units, these exercises affirm the value of having access to subject-matter experts with extensive experience operating in austere conditions who are willing to share their local and traditional knowledge about lands and waters and provide practical support for activities in what southerners consider to be "extreme environments."

I have argued elsewhere that the Rangers have proven their value in recent decades by striking an appropriate balance between their military and community contributions (eg. Lackenbauer, 2013a; 2013d). As members of their local communities, the Rangers also represent an important source of shared awareness and liaison with community partners (Chief of Land Staff, 2011) and, by virtue of their capabilities and location, regularly support other government agencies in responding to the broad spectrum of security and safety issues facing isolated communities. For example, their leadership and training makes them the *de facto* lead during states of emergency in their communities – from avalanches, flooding, extreme snowstorms, and power plant shutdowns to forest fires and water crises. Accordingly, they are the CAF's first

responders in most safety and security situations in and around northern communities (CFD, 2010, p. 23). Rangers are also called up to assist with search and rescue in their communities both as volunteers who know how to work effectively as a group and, when called upon, as an official military tasking. Their familiarity with local cultures, fluency in Indigenous languages, and vested interest in the welfare of their fellow community members make them valuable, trusted assets.

## Conclusions

*"I know where I'd be placing my bets should the Rangers actually have to go to war in defence of Canada."*

- Robert Smol (2009)

*"Most importantly, the Canadian Armed Forces must reflect the diversity of the country we defend. We need a military that looks like Canada."*

- DND, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (2017, p. 20)

Critiques of the Canadian Rangers by Smol and Gilmore are indicative of misrepresentations and misunderstandings of both the limited conventional military threat facing the Canadian North and where the Rangers fit within the Canadian Armed Forces' Arctic strategy and operational concepts. By offering a persistent military presence in communities across the Canadian North, serving as critical enablers for southern-based units operating in the region, and providing "first responder" capacity in the case of local emergencies, the Rangers help the CAF deliver on its mission to defend Canada's security, protect its citizens, and promote its strategic interests at home. Just because the Ranger model does not fit conventional force structures or combat capabilities does not, as Smol suggests, render the Rangers irrelevant or a "token military force." Their proven ability to operate in austere and difficult environmental conditions – often reflecting applied Indigenous knowledge of their homelands – and to maintain interoperability with mission partners to address practical security challenges remains highly valuable. By serving as the "Eyes, Ears, and Voice" of the CAF in their communities (Lackenbauer, 2013a, 2015), the Rangers also

embody federal approaches to collaboration and partnership predicated on ideas that Northerners are best placed to make decisions in areas that impact them.

The Rangers exemplify how a sub-component of the Reserve Force can harness the benefits of diversity, ensuring that Northerners are integrally involved in the defence team when it operates in Indigenous homelands, and developing local capabilities that both reflect and support the interests of local communities. Although Canada's defence policy lists Indigenous peoples as an "under-represented population within the Canadian Armed Forces" (DND, 2017, p. 23), this is not reflective of the situation in Canada's Territorial North. Through the Canadian Rangers, Indigenous people in Canada's North serve in the CAF at a far higher rate per capita than Canadians do on average. Rather than adopting a deficit approach, a more appropriate framework might be to analyze why the Canadian Rangers have made the CAF an "employer of choice" for Indigenous men and women living in Northern communities (D Strat HR, 2003).

The Rangers provide an important outlet for Northern Indigenous peoples who wish to serve in the defence of their country without having to leave their communities. Ranger activities allow members of Indigenous communities to practice and share traditional skills, such as living off the land, not only with people from outside their cultures but also across generations within. These skills are central to Indigenous identities, and there is a persistent worry that these will be lost unless individuals have opportunities to exercise them and share them with younger generations. By celebrating traditional and local knowledge, and encouraging and enabling community members to go out on the land and share their knowledge and expertise, the Rangers can play an important role in supporting the retention or expansion of core cultural competencies. In turn, the Ranger concept is inherently rooted in the idea that the unique knowledge of Northern peoples can make an important contribution to effective military operations. It is this partnership, rooted in mutual learning and sharing, that has made the Rangers a long-term success on the local and national scale.

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