

# Evaluation of Arctic Operations



## Program Overview

The Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) activity in the Arctic has been guided by Canada's 2017 defence policy: *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, which commits the CAF to enhancing its Arctic capability through several initiatives to operate in the Arctic and adapt to a changing security environment. These initiatives include direction to increase the CAF's mobility, reach and presence in the Arctic over the long term and to work cooperatively with Arctic partners.



## Evaluation Scope

The Evaluation of Arctic Operations focused on evaluating the future Arctic operating environment, whether there are clear roles for CAF operations in the Arctic and the effectiveness of CAF operations over the timeframe of 2018–2022. Several events took place outside the evaluation period, including the 2023 Northwest Territories wildfires and the 2023 surveillance balloon incident, which have been included due to their relevance.

The evaluation was structured around three evaluation questions, with a focus on the five operational functions (Command, Sense, Act, Shield and Sustain), when assessing the effectiveness of CAF operations. It further considered CAF presence in the Arctic and how well-positioned CAF operations are to address future Arctic threats. For the purposes of this evaluation, the Canadian Arctic is defined as the Joint Task Force North's Area of Responsibility. The CAF Arctic Operations evaluation was undertaken in alignment with the 2016 Treasury Board Policy on Results. This is the first time Arctic operations have been evaluated.



## Key Findings



- There is minimal consensus on the future Arctic security threats facing the CAF.
- The lack of clear objectives leads to a fragmented approach to defence in the Arctic.
- Joint Task Force North faces unique command challenges that other Joint Task Forces do not.
- Collaboration with partners and allies helps to mitigate the CAF's limited all-domain awareness sense capability in the Arctic.
- Planned operations do not accurately reflect the CAF's unplanned operational manoeuvrability requirements in the Arctic.
- CAF infrastructure in the Arctic region is limited and deteriorating; however, the exact status is unknown.



## Overall Assessment

The Department of National Defence/CAF's activities in the Arctic have been guided by Canada's 2017 defence policy: *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, which commits the CAF to enhancing its Arctic capability through several initiatives to operate in the Arctic and adapting to a changing security environment. These initiatives include direction to increase the CAF's mobility, reach and presence in the Arctic over the long term and to work cooperatively with Arctic partners. Despite unclear objectives for Arctic operations, to date, the CAF has been successful in its role through planned operations such as Operation NANOOK, which comprises a series of comprehensive activities designed to exercise the defence of Canada and to secure the northern regions.

The CAF lacks appropriate sensing/surveillance technology and equipment, which can hinder access to timely and accurate information on matters of Arctic security and defence. To mitigate its limited all-domain awareness sense capability in the Arctic, the CAF has effectively cooperated with partners. Through these long-standing partnerships, as well as those with the Canadian Rangers and northern Indigenous communities, the CAF can defend against threats in the region.

There are also several other challenges that may hinder the CAF's ability to maintain its presence over the long term. Climate change is anticipated to increase CAF security and other government department support challenges in the region. There may also be more requests for assistance in response to natural disasters, more search and rescue operations in response to increased marine traffic and an increased presence of adversarial states. Coupled with infrastructure deficits, the CAF's ability to operate in the region may be limited.



## Recommendations

- 1 Address the gap in CAF strategic direction to develop clear Arctic operational objectives.
- 2 Incorporate lessons learned from planned and unplanned operations into future operations.
- 3 To have a fulsome understanding of the status of CAF Arctic infrastructure, a comprehensive inventory and analysis is needed to inform future requirements.