

Canadian NATO
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
canadienne de l'OTAN

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)
Washington, DC, United States
December 15-16, 2008**

Report

Mr. Leon Benoit, M.P., led a Canadian delegation to Washington, D.C. to attend the Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum from 15-16 December 2008. The Canadian delegation included Mr. Claude Bachand, M.P., Mrs. Cheryl Gallant, M.P., Senator George Furey and Senator Pierre Claude Nolin.

This eighth annual Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum was hosted by the United States (US) National Defence University (NDU), in cooperation with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and the Atlantic Council of the United States (ACUS). Over 100 NATO and NATO partner parliamentarians attended the meeting, the highest participation ever. Proceedings allowed European and Canadian legislators to get a strong sense of US debates on security and foreign policy through direct discussions with leading representatives of Washington's governmental and policy communities.

This year's event featured addresses by over a dozen policy specialists on topics such as the need for a new NATO strategic concept, the global economic and financial crisis, stabilizing Afghanistan, developments in Russia, and the outlook for the new US Administration. The Speaker of the US House of Representatives, The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, hosted all attendees, in honour of US Congressman John Tanner, the new President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, at the National Statuary Hall of the Capitol Building. In her address, she stressed the key role played by the Forum in discussions of security issues and in consensus building.

The first four sessions were held on Monday, 15 December 2008. In his opening remarks, the President and CEO of the Atlantic Council of the United States suggested that the inauguration of Barack Obama as US President might present an opportunity to revive a closer relationship between the US and Europe, but that Europe would also have to be willing to take the opportunity. He also noted that many were looking forward to the promulgation of a new NATO strategic concept in the near future, hoping it would serve to break the "logjam" in relations between NATO and the European Union (EU).

The transatlantic security relationship was addressed in the first session. The first speaker noted that both the US and Europe seemed to agree on the top three threats facing them – weapons of mass destruction (WMD), terrorism and instability caused by failed states. However, despite their apparently similar threat perceptions, the US and Europe did not necessarily agree on how they should be addressed. Another presenter was less convinced of converging perceptions of threat and noted that the core of the US/European relationship might now lie beyond Europe, as 'out-of-area' threats to western security emerge. However, a resurgent Russia might once again bring the security focus back to the Europe, but it should not be allowed to create an artificial divide between the US and Europe, nor distract them from continuing to address challenges abroad. In these circumstances, it is all the more important that the new NATO strategic concept be crafted and promulgated in such a way that it enjoys the support of the people in each NATO nation.

Session two explored options for the new US Administration in the Middle East. A former Afghan government minister identified the insurgency, the Afghan government,

the international community, NATO and the US government as “driving forces” in Afghanistan. He saw the insurgency as being largely based on criminality, including development money siphoned off into illegal activity. Moreover, the speaker rated the Afghan government as inept and not operating in accordance with the rule of law. The international community, on the other hand, he thought, has been quite ineffective and “hog-tied” by its bureaucratic processes. More problematic was the fact that NATO provincial reconstruction teams continue to work, to a large extent, according to national agendas rather than a coordinated NATO plan. In many cases, NATO is doing work that should be done by civilians, but in the face of ineffectiveness on the part of the international community, military forces have to do it. Interestingly, although he did not describe Pakistan as one of the “driving forces” in Afghanistan, the speaker did feel that events and forces in Pakistan were central to the Afghan insurgency.

In a somewhat prescient presentation, the next presenter remarked that the Arab-Israeli conflict would be a priority issue for the new US President, noting that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the oldest regional conflict remaining in the Middle East, an issue that continues to gravely “annoy” all Arabs. He discussed two traditional strategic solutions – the ‘two-state’ solution and the one-state (bi-national) solution. There were two possible approaches for the US. First, but not probable, the US could simply disengage from the issue and leave the main actors to their own devices. Second, and in the view of the presenter, regrettably all too probably, the US might continue to “muddle through”.

Global economic challenges were addressed in the third session. The session moderator initiated discussion by noting the onset of the first “G7 synchronized recession” since the Cold War and that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was “back in business”, in competition with regional economic assistance programmes that contest support from the “US-centric” IMF. One panellist noted that protectionist influences were gaining strength in the US and that trade might not enjoy its traditional high priority in the future. Nonetheless, he did think that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was “probably safe”. A second panellist offered his view of five problems facing the new head of the US National Economic Council. First, he felt a larger aggressive economic stimulus package was needed. Second, a financial policy making credit more available was required, and third a more aggressive monetary policy must be put in place. Looming fiscal difficulties in the Eurozone were collectively the fourth concern and he felt that a number of countries were on the verge of defaulting on their loans. Finally, emerging markets need help to get through the economic downturn. In qualifying a previous point about the IMF, the IMF is indeed active again, but, according to this speaker, only for some. The IMF apparently does not have enough “lendable” money and few, if any sources are willing to lend money to Russia because of its large private sector debt.

The fourth session dealt with US-Russia relations. A panellist specializing in Russian affairs made the point that Russia is losing its lustre as an “energy superpower”. It is scaling back its production and its giant national gas corporation, Gazprom, is seen as being unreliable. The Russian stock market has taken a drastic tumble, making the pursuit of planned major energy infrastructure projects unlikely and there is extensive capital flight from the country. Endemic corruption makes new foreign investment

unlikely. Domestic difficulties will adversely affect Russia's ability to act abroad. A retired US ambassador who is now a member of a working group on the future of US-Russian relations commented that in the circumstances noted above, the Russian perception of NATO enlargement and the installation of ballistic missile defence apparatus in Poland and the Czech Republic has caused them great concern.

Session five began on Tuesday, 16 December 2008. United States Marine Corps General James Mattis, Supreme Allied Commander Transformation and Commander US Joint Forces Command spoke on emerging strategic challenges and NATO transformation. It was a time of both promise and peril he said. NATO is analyzing five "alternative futures" to ensure alliance military capability remains relevant and effective. Specifically, military capabilities must be globally deployable, with a capacity to sustain deployed forces. There was some discussion about the fact that while military personnel should only offer military advice to their political masters, it is a political responsibility to more clearly articulate, in public, the need for robust armed forces and the missions they undertake. In the context of Afghanistan, there remains a continuing need for legislators to continue their efforts to explain "why we are the good guys", to their various publics.

Session six dealt with terrorism challenges facing the transatlantic community. One expert explained that no one tool was adequate in a counter-terrorism campaign and that direct military action was necessary, but insufficient on its own. An examination of root causes is required and a broad-based programme initiated to address all of them.

A media view of the future of US politics was presented in session seven. Two senior political correspondents agreed that Barack Obama's extraordinary popularity at home and abroad offered an opportunity to improve both domestic and international relations. Both cautioned however, that Obama's popularity is based on, so far, nothing but hope, because he has not 'done' anything yet, although early indications in the form of nominated appointments are encouraging. This presents the new President with the imposing challenge of "getting things right, fast" upon taking office. Nonetheless, it was interesting to note that the general tone and reaction of those attending was one of positive anticipation of improved transatlantic relations expected to come with a new Obama Administration.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant, M.P.
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)	
ACTIVITY	Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum	
DESTINATION	Washington DC, United States	
DATES	December 15-16, 2008	
DELEGATION		
SENATE	Senator Pierre Claude Nolin Senator George Furey	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Leon Benoit, M.P. Mrs. Cheryl Gallant, M.P. Mr. Claude Bachand, M.P.	
STAFF	Ms. Jodi Turner Mr. Jim Cox	
TRANSPORTATION		\$5,657.79
ACCOMMODATION		\$3,928.73
HOSPITALITY		\$1,715.78
PER DIEMS		\$1,855.19
OFFICIAL GIFTS		\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES		\$1,130.31
TOTAL		\$14,313.44