

Canadian NATO
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
canadienne de l'OTAN

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the Political Committee Meeting
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
March 31 – April 4, 2008**

Report

The Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association has the honour to present its REPORT on the Sub-committee on NATO Partnerships visit to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, held March 31 – April 4, 2008. The Canadian delegation was represented by Senator Raynell Andreychuk who is the General Rapporteur for the Political Committee.

Headed by Karl A. Lamers (Germany), Chairman of the Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships (PCNP) a delegation of NATO Parliamentarians visited Saudi Arabia from 31 March to 4 April to exchange views on issues of common concern. The meetings were conducted in a very open, frank and hospitable atmosphere in which the 13 parliamentarians from nine NATO member countries discussed a broad range of issues, including Saudi Arabia's foreign and security perspectives and recent developments in the region. Major subjects raised also included the fight against terrorism, the Middle East peace process, NATO's operations in Afghanistan, as well as security and stability in the Gulf.

OVERVIEW

During this first-ever visit of a NATO PA delegation to Saudi Arabia, parliamentarians were received by King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, Interior Minister His Royal Highness Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz, and other senior members of the cabinet as well as the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, H.E. Ali Al Mohia, and other government officials. The delegation also met with Members of the Majlis Ashoura and experts of the Institute for Diplomatic Studies. Discussions revealed agreement on a broad range of topics, particularly with regard to the need for international co-operation to combat terrorism and the importance of keeping the Gulf region stable. Saudi interlocutors acknowledged NATO's contributions to stability "out of area", but held a more skeptical view as to whether NATO and the international community will be able to succeed in Afghanistan. Saudi interlocutors underlined that the door is open for continuing the dialogue.

The delegation had the privilege of a 90 minute audience with King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud. To tackle a world "in disarray", the King informed the delegation of his recent initiative to encourage an inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue among Muslims, Christians, and Jews to promote better understanding and peace among the people.

Responding to questions by the delegation the King underlined that Saudi Arabia is successfully tackling extremism on three levels: On the operational level, there have been numerous arrests of terrorists; on the financial level, the responsible Saudi authorities have acted decisively to dry out financing of extremist organisations; and ideologically, the kingdom is actively combating radical ideologies. As to security and stability on the Arabian Peninsula, King Abdullah said that no country alone can completely provide for its own security. He added that stability in the Gulf also depends on many outside factors and that security can no longer be provided on a regional basis only. The world has become a "global village", he said, arguing that it is no longer

possible to isolate one region from another. In this context, he also pointed out that many of the Gulf's problems have spilled beyond the region.

The delegation and Saudi Arabian officials repeatedly stressed the importance of reconciliation among different religions and the delegation recognised the outstanding example provided by King Abdullah's recent initiative which calls for a dialogue among Muslims, Christians, and Jews. During the visit the delegation also emphasised the common interests and common concerns of NATO and Saudi Arabia which include the security and stability of the region, finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the fight against terrorist groups, and combating proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Saudi officials repeatedly said that they welcome continued dialogue and co-operation with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. The hosts and the delegation concluded this first visit of a NATO PA delegation to Saudi Arabia with the pledge to continue the dialogue to identify common goals and instruments.

SAUDI ARABIA'S POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL STABILITY

Saudi officials emphasized that their country wants to live in peace and harmony with all its neighbours. Members of the Majlis Ashoura underlined Saudi Arabia's active contributions for security and stability in the Gulf. A member of the Majlis said that "Saudi Arabia stands as a beacon of peace in an unstable region", adding that "the region needs co-operation with NATO". Experts at the Institute for Diplomatic Studies stressed Saudi Arabia's constructive role for peace and stability in the region and its positive contribution to the global economy. Moreover, as home of the two holy Mosques, Saudi Arabia's influence on Muslim countries goes well beyond its immediate neighbourhood.

PRIMARY SECURITY CONCERN FOR SAUDI ARABIA: THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Saudi officials considered the Israeli-Palestinian problem at the heart of most conflicts in the region and the main promoter of terrorism in the region and beyond. The chairman of the Majlis Ashouras Foreign Affairs Committee, Sadaka Yehia Fadil, and other Saudi officials expressed strong criticism of Israel's treatment of its Palestinian neighbours. Asked about a possible recognition of Israel, the chairman of the Majlis Ashouras Foreign Affairs Committee said that "there will be no (formal diplomatic) recognition of Israel unless it accepts the rights of Palestinians". Host country speakers pointed to Riyadh's efforts to find a solution to the conflict and also stressed the contributions to ease the plight of Palestinians. Moreover, academic experts added that Saudi Arabia has often assisted fellow Muslim countries.

Members of the Majlis also emphasised the common interests and common concerns of NATO and Saudi Arabia. In this context they cited, among others, the security and stability of the region, finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the fight against terrorist groups, and prevention of nuclear proliferation. Members of the Majlis Ashoura and other Saudi officials repeatedly said that they welcome continued dialogue and co-operation with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

Saudi interlocutors considered the situation in Iraq as another source of instability. King Abdullah, as well as Prince Mugren and other Saudi officials emphasised that Saudi

Arabia is committed to a stable Iraq. Insecurity and instability in Iraq negatively affects Saudi Arabia and Iraq's other neighbours, therefore Riyadh has viable interest in Iraq's security and stability and has already provided financial support to its neighbour. Prince Mugren added that Saudi Arabia prefers a united Iraq and that it supports Iraq as long as its government is working for the Iraqi people. However, Riyadh is against any foreign meddling in Iraq.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION (WMD)

Saudi interlocutors expressed concern about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and Iran's nuclear programme was also briefly touched during the discussions. There was agreement among all participants that Iran should comply with the demands by the international community. Discussions also revealed consensus that a nuclear-armed Iran would destabilise the whole region as a whole and must be avoided.

COMBATING TERRORISM

Host country speakers agreed with the delegation that terrorism is an international problem, not an Islamic or national issue. Members of the Majlis Ashoura and other Saudi speakers stressed that "terrorists do not have any linkage to Islam". Several Saudi speakers underlined that the UN should have a prominent role in tackling internationally active terrorist groups. As to the threat faced by Saudi Arabian members of the Majlis Ashoura's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committees stated that their country has countered the threat of terrorism on all levels, including also in terms of security and ideology. The delegation and Saudi Arabian officials repeatedly stressed the importance of reconciliation among different religious groups and the delegation recognised the outstanding example provided by King Abdullah.

Prince Mugren, Head of the Security Services, stressed the need for international co-operation in fighting terrorist groups. In the context he reminded the delegation that Saudi Arabia had recently organised an international conference that brought together 17 organisations from different countries to discuss intelligence sharing. Saudi Arabia has strongly contributed to fight terror groups like al Qaeda and has actively shared intelligence with others, thereby preventing many terror attacks worldwide, he added. If the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be solved, 80% of the international terrorism would be solved, according to Prince Mugren.

Alluding to criticism that had been voiced in the international media that Saudi Arabia had allowed international extremists to develop, host country interlocutors, including the Interior Minister, strongly dismissed this notion. In contrast, they emphasised that their country has also been targeted by al Qaeda, but that it has been successful in combating internationally active terrorist groups. However, as the Interior Minister and others emphasised, no nation can win the fight against terrorism alone, but that close international co-operation was necessary.

AFGHANISTAN

Saudi interlocutors expressed skepticism about the security situation in Afghanistan. Dr. Al-Shamlan considered the "Taliban as strong today as they were before 9/11". Several host country speakers, including the Chief of Staff of the Saudi Armed Forces,

General Ali Al Mohia, and Prince Mugren said that “Afghanistan is a tribal conflict and that NATO is losing men and women for nothing”. General Al Mohia predicted that “there will be no peace in Afghanistan” and saw no solution for the country. However, no Saudi interlocutor suggested that NATO Allies should pull out from Afghanistan.

Members of the Majlis Ashoura suggested that many Afghans would consider NATO troops as “occupiers”, partly because they feel that Western values are being imposed on them. Some also questioned the legitimacy of the operation in Afghanistan. Members of the delegation reminded host country speakers that NATO’s presence in Afghanistan is based on the request by the Afghan government and based on a UN mandate. Some added that the Allies are not doing enough to reach out to the population and that not sufficient assistance is provided for reconstruction. Others pointed to unresolved problems, particularly the continued production of drugs which fuels the Taliban. That drug production and trafficking also poses significant problems for neighbouring countries, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, was pointed out by experts of the Diplomatic Institute.

Members of the delegation explained the role of NATO in Afghanistan and that its presence is based on the request by the Government of Afghanistan as well as mandated by the United Nations Security Council. Members of the delegation also underlined that there is recognition among all NATO Allies that success in

Afghanistan requires not only military, but also other instruments in the political, economic, and other realms.

Members of the delegation repeatedly pointed out that there has been progress in Afghanistan, including in reconstruction and building hope. Members of the delegation emphasised, the Allies will only remain as long as necessary in Afghanistan.

This first, and very successful, visit of a NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation concluded with a pledge by all participants to continue and deepen the exchanges over a broad range of issues of common concern.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Leon Benoit, M.P.

Chair

Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

TRAVEL COSTS

ASSOCIATION	Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)	
ACTIVITY	Political Committee Meeting	
DESTINATION	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	
DATES	March 31 – April 4, 2008	
DELEGATION		
SENATE	Senator Raynell Andreychuk	
HOUSE OF COMMONS		
STAFF		
TRANSPORTATION		\$5,619.26
ACCOMMODATION		\$233.91
HOSPITALITY		\$0.00
PER DIEMS		\$181.00
OFFICIAL GIFTS		\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES		\$0.00
TOTAL		\$6,034.17