

Canadian NATO
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
canadienne de l'OTAN

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the Parliamentary Transatlantic
Forum**

Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

Washington, D.C., United States of America

December 5-6, 2011

Report

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) sponsors the annual Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum, which is usually held in early December in Washington, D.C., at the United States National Defence University (NDU). The event is hosted by the NDU Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) and the Atlantic Council of the US. The Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum provides NATO parliamentarians with the opportunity to discuss US national security policy issues impacting alliance affairs. The meetings are conducted under the Chatham House rule.

At the 2011 Forum, parliamentarians from 22 countries had the opportunity to hear from American policy experts, Washington-based journalists and senior government officials to gain an understanding of US strategic priorities and the ways that American domestic politics are shaping that country's international vision, particularly in the lead up to the 2012 Presidential Elections. The Hon. Pierre-Claude Nolin, Senator and Treasurer of the NATO PA, represented Canada at this year's Forum. He was accompanied by association advisor Melissa Radford from the Library of Parliament. This report summarizes the discussions at the eight sessions of the 2011 Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum. A detailed report is available on the NATO PA website.¹

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

America's Global Security Agenda and NATO Commitments

Presentations made by US government officials gave parliamentarians an understanding of US foreign policy priorities within the NATO framework. Speaking about the evolving situation in Afghanistan, officials noted that the US is satisfied with the way in which the security situation has improved over the last two years and recognizes the contributions made by Afghan and ISAF partners to this end. As Afghan forces gradually gain more responsibility for security, the US is mindful that sustainable funding is key to overcoming any resource constraints that could affect this transition. With respect to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the democratic movements in the countries affected by the Arab Awakening are not only of interest to the US but to the Alliance as a whole. The operations in Libya, though deemed a success overall, made evident some of the shortcomings within the Alliance. It also presented an opportunity for NATO to work closely with Australia, Sweden, Georgia and Mongolia – partnerships that should be further cultivated. In terms of NATO–Russia relations, the US wants to see closer cooperation and is continuing to make clear that the Alliance's missile defence program poses no threat to Russia. With respect to the economic challenges affecting all of the Alliance partners, the US will reduce defence spending. The US is deeply concerned that the American share of NATO's overall defence spending has increased from 50% to 75%. An important discussion at the Chicago summit will be how the Alliance can address costs and capability requirements during this time of fiscal constraint. NATO's Smart Defense Initiative and the EU's pooling and sharing program should be more coordinated and there needs to be more

¹ NATO PA, [REPORT - Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum, 5-6 December 2011, Washington D.C.](#), 11 January 2012.

innovated ways for Allies to share equipment, coordinate military efforts in the most efficient way possible. Officials made it clear to parliamentarians that the US sees NATO as an essential partner to countering threats and challenges from around the world.

The Transatlantic Relationship at a Crossroads: Security Priorities, Fiscal Challenges and Global Change

This session discussed some of the global issues that are and will continue to challenge transatlantic relations. These issues include the need for the Alliance to broaden its definition of “Atlanticism” considering the increase of south-south trade and diplomatic ties. While the Atlantic community tends to focus on economic growth in the Asia-Pacific, growth and development in Africa and Latin America are also important dimensions of global change. Another challenge is the potential ongoing effects of the economic crisis. In terms of the US vis-à-vis the Alliance, the US may choose or be forced to retreat into a more isolationist position. In terms of Europe, the economic crisis may cause deeper fractures between competitive Northern Europe and unstable Southern and Eastern Europe. Adding to these difficulties are the issues of demographics and immigration. Europe is struggling with a shrinking and ageing population while the US has less of a demographic problem. While Europe continually receives an influx of unskilled workers, most immigrants to the US are highly skilled. Experts worry that this may upset US-Europe relations. Another challenge is the energy issue. Breakthroughs in energy and environmental technology may prove to be a game changer. According to the speakers, new discoveries in shale oil and gas should not be used as diversions from the financially viable development of renewable non-fossil energy sources. Finally, the Euro-Atlantic community should take time for introspection and reflecting on where it fits within a changing global order. Despite the ongoing global threats and challenges, decisions need to be made on how best to progress in the future in order to ensure the relevance and stability of the Alliance.

Reconsidering The Security and Development Nexus

Parliamentarians heard from a representative of the World Bank on how the institution is adapting its approach to assisting fragile states in creating a stable and sustainable economy. Traditionally, it was assumed that once an appropriate amount of supply and demand was created, job opportunities would spontaneously emerge. It is now recognizing that approaches beyond the market, such as social peace and cohesion, are needed to create the right conditions for a sustainable economy. NATO and the World Bank have been working together in Afghanistan to help bring the country to a level of self-sufficiency in terms of security and a viable economy; acknowledging that these two factors must go hand in hand. The major challenge to generating a viable Afghan economy is that it is currently driven by the war and therefore would not be sustainable once the international presence leaves the country. According to the speaker, the international community needs to develop long term approaches (more than three-year plans) for assisting fragile states. The World Bank has created a new global hub of experts to develop sustainable approaches for fragile states in conflict or emerging out of conflict. This hub is located in Nairobi. While the World Bank is working

with the G20, the WTO and the African Union on these issues, NATO also needs to develop the capacity to work with a broad coalition of international actors.

The Arab Spring: The Administration Response and Lessons Learned

The uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly those that ultimately swept aside governments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya last spring, have caused the US and other Western countries to reset their relations with the region and its peoples. Autocrats in the region were tolerated by the West if they could guarantee a level of cooperation and stability. This, however, is clearly no longer the case and a confluence of conditions such as demographic “Youth bulge” and clear legitimacy deficits in these countries have provoked the desire for change. The US is paying close attention to developments in the region, particularly with respect to blocking the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, limiting the development of transnational terrorist entities and ensuring that the region’s oil and gas producers still have access to global markets. The US sees these uprisings as a clear failure by Al Qaeda to push its own agenda for change in the Middle East and North Africa. Those who were protesting were choosing democracy and good governance and not terrorism as a tool for change. Even though Islamist political groups have become important players, particularly in Tunisia and Egypt, they do not represent the views of Al Qaeda. The US is however continuing to monitor the more extreme Islamist groups. In terms of regional stability, officials are concerned about the relationship between Egypt and Israel, even though the Muslim Brotherhood has stated its commitment to the peace treaty. It remains to be seen if public opinion in Egypt differs. However, this may have helped to push Israel and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table. The US remains firm that Israel’s resettlement policy is counter-productive to these peace talks. In terms of current US policy towards the region, the administration is taking a two-level approach: opposition to violence and violent oppression and support for the right to assembly, free speech and information. The US will also support and lend assistance to governments choosing to make reforms in order to be more responsive to their people. So far, the US has offered technical assistance to Egypt and Iraq. The US has increased pressure on the Syrian government to end its violent crackdown on protestors. Its sanctions against Syria and Iran are part of a broader international effort. In terms of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the US does not expect revolutionary change in either country and continues to advocate national dialogue as a solution to internal unrest in the latter. Chaos in either country would have very adverse strategic implications for the US.

Coping with The Iranian Nuclear Challenge

The presenter in this session opened with an overview of how each US Administration since the 1980s has chosen to engage Iran, particularly on its nuclear program. Recently, the debate with respect to Iran’s nuclear program and how to deal with it has intensified. The speaker noted three main camps in the debate: attack Iran as it cannot be contained, induce Iran to encourage positive change by pressuring the regime itself, or pressure Iranian society as a whole through sanctions to cause the Iranian people to pressure their government to abandon the program. The speaker argued that the only real option is to contain and deter Iran because indigenous forces must ultimately be

responsible for any critical changes. A military strike would be problematic for various reasons: it would trigger a war, it would strengthen the regime vis-à-vis its own people, and ultimately, it will not end the nuclear program. The extremist elements of the regime would benefit and the actual knowledge Iran has cultivated with respect to building nuclear weapons would not disappear. A military strike would simply delay the program. The speaker noted that so far, Obama's policy towards Iran has been effective. The President has embedded American foreign policy back in the framework of the international system, which has improved the US's ability to engage with a range of partners. The speaker also recommended that the US continue its conditional engagement with the Iranian regime while engaging unconditionally with Iranian civil society. There are still options for the US if and when Iran acquires a nuclear weapons capability. For example, Russia and China have yet to take a more active interest in the situation considering that a nuclear Iran would be against both of their national interests. According to the speaker, Iran currently lacks access to the fissile material required to complete its nuclear weapons program. He further noted that Iran is unlikely to move quickly on its program as it is more motivated by prestige than by a perceived existential threat. In the meantime, he suggested that the Obama Administration and the West could do more to signal to Iran that it is not under threat. American and Iranian leaders have been obsessed with one another for thirty years and a change in this approach could lessen the risk of a major escalatory incident.

The Strategic Dialogue with Russia

The presenter for this session gave parliamentarians an update on some of the domestic challenges that will impact Russian defence policy, on Russian foreign policy under President Putin and on challenges in Russia-NATO relations. Domestically, Russia has been impacted by the global recession, particularly by the fall of energy prices, and will not be able to meet promised military and pension spending obligations. Russia does not have the resources to uphold its commitment to modernizing its military industries, it has abandoned a mass military mobilization strategy, and the Kremlin now hopes to build a smaller, more modern and mobile military force in the coming years. According to the speaker, this will not impact the current strategic balance in any meaningful way. In terms of Russia's foreign policy, as Putin resumes the Presidency, he will need tranquil relations with the US, particularly as American troops withdraw from Iraq and developments in Iran remain uncertain. However, with respect to Russia-NATO relations, Putin could continue to be a difficult partner. Although cooperation was accomplished with respect to Libya, Russia's determination to undermine the sovereignty of its neighbours, its strenuous opposition to NATO's missile defence efforts and subsequent threat to boycott the Chicago NATO Summit all remain significant sticking points. With respect to Russia's relations with its neighbours, the speaker noted that it is important to continue to bring Georgia and Ukraine into the transatlantic fold. The US and NATO must have a consistent policy on human rights in the region. With respect to missile defence, Russia will continue to foment divisions within NATO over the program. However, he also noted that it is not unusual for Russia to begin negotiations with a great deal of bluster as it has often done in the past. It may be that NATO and Russia are unable to strike a deal on missile defence, however some rules of the game should be able to be established. Finally, Russia's real challenge will be the

growing popular unrest taking place within the country. Recent street demonstrations are indicating that the country's youth are increasingly dissatisfied with the regime's high levels of corruption and neglect in addition to the economy's poor performance.

Managing The Transition in Afghanistan and Engaging Pakistan

US officials briefed parliamentarians on current American priorities with respect to Afghanistan, which remains among the top security challenges for the US. They remarked that there has been positive anecdotal evidence with respect to the security transition; the second tranche of this policy is currently underway. However, security, economic and governance challenges remain and threaten Afghanistan's future. According to the officials, everyone in Washington working on the Afghanistan file is focused on this sustainability challenge. On the security front, Pakistan is an important player. The US was disappointed that Pakistan refused to attend the Bonn Conference on support for Afghanistan. Needless to say, 2011 was a particularly difficult year for US-Pakistani relations with US incursions into Pakistani territory, resulting in supply routes and bases of strategic importance to the US and NATO being shut down by the Pakistani government. Pakistan is still a weak, internally fragmented state with little authority over its border area, and its government continues to be overly preoccupied by what it sees as India's attempt to surround it by deepening ties with the Karzai government. The US believes that there is still space for cooperation with Pakistan considering that both countries have a goal to stamp out extremist elements in the region. Also, the officials noted that if the international community were to invest more in the regional peace process, it would decrease the burden of investing in the Afghan National Security Forces. In terms of economic sustainability, international contributions in Afghanistan rival the country's GDP; this high level of distortion puts the country's entire economy at risk. As coalition forces draw down, serious economic adjustments will need to be made. Financial support for the Taliban is coming from overseas donations while transnational criminal organizations are running the drug trade. The officials acknowledged that the success of replacement crops has been mixed; for example, it was successful in Helmand province, but did not work consistently in Kandahar. The US is looking to cooperate with China to help with stimulating economic growth; both countries have an interest in a peaceful Afghanistan free of extremist elements. In terms of governance, weak institutions and corruption are still challenging the authority and reach of the Afghan state. International engagement on capacity building for national and local governments, on developing checks and balances within the governing system, and on supporting the Afghan parliament will have to be sustained well beyond 2014.

The Foreign Policy Debate in American Politics

For the Forum's final session, parliamentarians had an engaging discussion with three Washington-based journalists with respect to the foreign policy debate in American politics. Particularly in the lead up to the US Presidential elections, and with the Republican primaries underway, parliamentarians were very intrigued to hear about this issue from the perspective of the media. All three speakers agreed that foreign policy issues have not been a serious topic of debate in the presidential campaign so far.

Instead, the focus has been on the economic recovery and employment issues. At the same time, Obama has enjoyed a number of foreign and defence policy successes. Populist sentiment seems to be dominating the Republican debates. The quick rise of the Tea Party movement is evidence of this and although its influence has waned, the tone of the current debate continues to exhibit what some have called a “purity test” among the Republican candidates which have led them to only speak to their hard core base. Democratic party politics, on the other hand, is being affected by the Occupy Wall Street movements. One recurring foreign policy issue that has come up is Israel, particularly due to the strained relationship between Obama and Netanyahu. This also garners support from very important electoral bases. Mitt Romney has gone so far as to promise visiting Israel first, as opposed to Canada, if he were to be elected President. Romney has also argued that Obama has rejected the notion that the US is an “exceptional” country – showing that American decline in the world is causing deep anxiety and making it likely that Republicans will begin to identify Obama as a “soft multilateralist.” The speakers indicated that this may cause Obama to distance himself from NATO allies during the campaign. In reality, however, the US is not moving towards an isolationist retreat. American and European economic and security interests are intrinsically linked. The Obama Administration has been more explicit than its predecessors in its commitment to working multilaterally to defend its national interests.

SUMMARY

The Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum offered Canada’s delegate an excellent opportunity to gain an understanding of current US foreign and defence priorities pertinent to the Alliance. Topics covered by the presentations included: the economic crisis and challenges faced by the Alliance, the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, understanding the security and development nexus, engaging Iran on its nuclear weapons program, engaging with Russia, the Afghan mission and the current nature of the foreign policy debate in American politics.

Canada continues to have important interests in all these issues.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honorable Senator Joseph A. Day
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)
ACTIVITY	Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum
DESTINATION	Washington, D.C., USA
DATES	December 5-6, 2011
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Senator Pierre Claude Nolin
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Ms Melissa Radford, Analyst
TRANSPORTATION	\$3,131.22
ACCOMMODATION	\$974.27
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$457.64
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$243.96
TOTAL	\$4,807.09