

Canadian NATO
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
canadienne de l'OTAN

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
Visit to Australia by the Defence and Security Committee**

Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

**Australia
September 22-26, 2008**

Report

The Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association has the honour to present its report on the *Visit to Australia by the Defence and Security Committee*, September 22-26, 2008. The visit was led by Committee Chairman Julio Miranda Calha, and the delegation consisted of Parliamentarians from 12 different NATO countries. The Canadian delegation was represented by Senator Joseph Day.

Australia's relationship with NATO has deepened dramatically in the last several years, largely as a result of on-the-ground cooperation in Afghanistan. While there are specific operational areas in which cooperation could be improved, current arrangements between the two sides are broadly satisfactory. Australia is comfortable with its status as a 'Contact Country' in which it has a flexible, pragmatic relationship with the Alliance based on mutual interests, and it would not like to see an over-institutionalization of the relationship.

In addition, the deepening relationship between the Australian executive branch and NATO should be accompanied by a deepening of inter-parliamentary dialogue between Australia's Parliament and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

The delegation's aims for the visit were several. First, the NATO member state parliamentarians sought to demonstrate by their presence the gratitude of the NATO nations they represented for Australia's significant contributions in Afghanistan. In addition, the delegation was looking to learn about senior Australian officials' views on the Australian relationship with NATO, their assessment of progress in Afghanistan, and their security concerns writ large. Finally, the delegation sought to increase parliamentary contacts with an eye towards reviving the participation of Australian parliamentarians in the Assembly's activities.

A central element of the visit, therefore, was dialogue with members of the Australian parliament. The delegation's program also included meetings with the Minister of Defence, the Chief of the Australian Defence Forces, senior officials from the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, military officers recently returned from Afghanistan, the defence contractor Thales Australia, and independent experts. In addition, the delegation visited two major military installations: Victoria Barracks in Sydney and Laverack Barracks in Townsville.

Finally, The Chairman of the Committee and several officers also delivered a public lecture at the Parliament House in Canberra on the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's role, and shared their views on issues such as the conflict in Afghanistan, NATO-Australia relations, and the future of the Alliance.

I. AUSTRALIA'S STRATEGIC WORLDVIEW AND DEFENCE POLICY

Several officials and independent experts described Australia's strategic view as resting on three broad pillars: its longstanding alliance with the United States, increasing engagement with the region (especially Indonesia), and engagement with the multilateral system, especially the United Nations.

The bilateral alliance with the United States is the first and most important element in Australia's security policy. While it also has longstanding ties and cooperative arrangements with the UK and Canada, it is the relationship with the U.S. and its strategic pre-eminence in Asia that continues to have priority as Australia shapes its security policy.

Australia sees relatively stable major power relations in Asia, but strategic competition still exists. Among the principal challenges in this regard are the rise of China and India, unresolved historical issues such as the Korean conflict, and competition on the South China Sea.

The delegation visited the Australian National University (ANU) for discussions with Professor Hugh White and several colleagues. According to Professor White, Australia's geographic proximity to a number of relatively weak and small states has led it to focus its military on expeditionary capabilities and stability and reconstruction activities. This has led it to develop a force structure based on a small, relatively light Army built on counter-insurgency and stabilization operations, and high-level air and maritime capabilities. Australia spends about 2% of its GDP on defence, a budget which has grown 3% per annum for the last several years.

The production of a new Defence White Paper, whose previous version was published in 2000, was underway as the delegation visited. The paper offered the Rudd government an opportunity to re-define Australia's defence and security policies by sketching out the threats Australia was facing and how it planned to respond.

Experts and officials including Shadow Defence Minister David Johnston agreed that Australia has enjoyed broad consensus in defence and security policy over the last several decades. For example, defence spending increases proposed by the previous Howard government had received bipartisan support. Mr. Johnston described a twenty-year consensus on overseas deployments in support of Australian security interests and those of its allies. The broad consensus and strong continuity on defence and security policy would likely result in a White Paper that largely mirrored previous efforts and would call for significant continuity with previous decisions.

Australia's military is of relatively small size, and is currently stressed by an extremely high operational tempo, according to Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, Chief of the Australian Defence Force. One response by the Rudd government has been the recent decision to move the rotational deployment schedule from six to eight months, for several reasons including increasing predictability for planners and soldiers.

At Land Command at Victoria Barracks in Sydney, the delegation gained a valuable overview of the Command's activities as well as information on force generation for Afghanistan. During an informative visit to the defence contractor Thales Australia, members reviewed the Bushmaster armored vehicle, whose V-shaped undercarriage has demonstrated its success in countering Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blasts. The delegation also visited the Australian Transformation and Innovation Centre (ATIC).

The delegation also visited Laverack Barracks in Townsville, one of the Australian Defence Force's largest bases. The delegation received a comprehensive briefing by the Commander of the Combat Training Centre, which conducts pre-deployment

training for personnel who will serve in Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force. The delegation was also briefed on the 3rd brigade, the Army's light infantry brigade, which forms the core of the Army's Ready Deployment Force.

In particular, the delegation appreciated the opportunity to meet with an Australian unit that had returned from deployment in Afghanistan in April. Commander of Reconstruction Task Force 3, Lt. Col David Wainright, shared several insights from his time in Afghanistan, including the need to challenge western mental models and exploit indigenous capacity building opportunities; the uniqueness of each province and thus the insufficiencies of a 'master plan' approach; the complexity of multi-national and multi-agency operations; the need to identify and focus on targetable population groups who could be swayed; and the utility of ensuring an 'Afghan Hand' is seen working on projects.

II. THE AUSTRALIA – NATO RELATIONSHIP

Australia and NATO share many common interests, and Australia supports and appreciates the role of Allied leadership in ISAF, according to senior officials from the Ministries of Defence and of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon underlined this point and expressed his appreciation for the increasingly regular engagement and dialogue with NATO.

According to Defence and Foreign Affairs and Trade officials, Australia has had contact with NATO for many years, principally through bilateral engagement activities with the US, the UK and Canada. As a result, Australia has been exposed to NATO doctrine and operating procedures, publications and standardization agreements, and various NATO working groups and technical bodies.

However, it was only recently that the relationship evolved to include cooperation towards defined objectives. Australian leaders, beginning over three years ago, have visited NATO headquarters and underlined the indivisibility of international security. Their core message regarding the global nature of security concerns and the global cooperation required to meet them was well-received at NATO, which found that Australia's strategic outlook and values made it a natural partner.

Concrete institutional steps to implement this cooperation moved quickly: an agreement for the sharing of classified information was reached in April 2005, and an Australian Defence Adviser to NATO and the EU was posted in Brussels in September of that year.

Officials repeatedly underlined that Australia is content with its current status as a 'Contact Country,' which allows for strategic dialogue and flexible, practical and tailored cooperation. In particular, Defence officials suggested that Australia greatly appreciated NATO's recent efforts towards including Australia more in planning and other activities. This included a package of cooperative activities from the Partnership for Peace (PfP) toolbox offered by the Alliance.

III. AUSTRALIAN VIEWS ON PROGRESS IN AFGHANISTAN

The operation in Afghanistan is the first ever Australian deployment to a NATO-led operation. Senior Australian officials suggested that Australia was engaged in

Afghanistan, despite many other and more geographically close engagements, because it recognized the need to participate in the front lines of the war on terrorism, which has already seen the Afghan conflict spread into Southeast Asia; because 9/11 and the UN mandate ensured the mission enjoyed broad political support throughout Australian society; and because of the need for Australia to be seen to be supporting the United States and its partners.

As described by Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, Chief of the Australian Defence Force, Australia's initial contribution was 240 troops, but this has steadily increased to close to 1,100 personnel.

The focus of the Australian commitment is a contribution to the Dutch-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Oruzgan province, principally dedicated to combat engineering. This included the construction of civilian facilities such as schools and medical centres, as well as forward operating bases for Afghan security forces. Australia also deploys Chinook helicopters¹, a Special Forces Task Group, a Radar Control and Reporting Unit in theatre, as well as a number of staff officers attached to the headquarters in Kabul and Kandahar. Finally, Australia has also made a contribution to the UK-France Helicopter Trust Fund, which endeavours to provide means to upgrade otherwise unsuitable helicopters for deployment to Afghanistan.

In addition, Australia's Foreign Assistance Program has pledged 580 million Australian dollars since 2001 to Afghanistan, and it has deployed several police officers to provide advice and training to the Afghan National Police, focusing closely on counter-narcotics.

The nature of Australia's contribution is shifting, as in the coming months a training team similar to the NATO Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) will be deployed within Australia's existing commitment. This reflects the overall change in focus of the mission towards training and mentoring the Afghan National Security Forces.

Defence officials noted that in standing up its Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force, Australia sent 25 soldiers to train at the NATO Joint Multinational Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany. These trainers would then train other Australians at home, ensuring a compatibility with NATO OMLTs.

Australia is in Afghanistan "for the long haul," the delegation was repeatedly assured. However, this did not mean that there was a 'blank check' mentality: Australia expected others to sustain and increase their efforts in order to ensure that the strategic stalemate does not worsen, allowing the insurgents to outlast the will of the international community. A long-term sustained effort featuring international, regional, and Afghan government action would be necessary in order to ensure a self-reliant Afghanistan, with effective governance, self-securing, economically viable, not allowing a terrorist safe haven and with an effective counter-narcotics policy.

¹ The helicopter contribution was especially significant as the two deployed represented 1/3 of Australia's total Chinook force and thus the maximum deployment. The helicopters could range across the whole of southern Afghanistan as ISAF assets.

While Australian defence officials termed the endorsement of NATO's comprehensive political-military plan, in cooperation with non-NATO troop contributors, a significant milestone, they saw its implementation as a major challenge and underlined the need for consultations on assessments to continue.

Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon had yet to see much implementation of NATO's new plan, he told the delegation. His concerns included the lack of major new troop commitments other than that of the U.S.; any new approach on counter-narcotics; the difficulties encountered by the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy Kai Eide, potentially indicating a lack of necessary support from UN Headquarters and UN member states; and difficulties regarding the role of Pakistan. He suggested that progress would require more money, more troops with more counter-insurgency experience, and more coordination, as well as fewer caveats.

Afghanistan had not yet reached 'critical mass' in security terms, according to Mr. Fitzgibbon, who underlined that aid workers still cannot work freely across Afghanistan. He suggested a U.S.-led 'surge' strategy, similar to that undertaken in Iraq, but of much greater amplitude than that suggested by the U.S. presidential candidates, would be necessary to achieve the appropriate levels of troops in theatre.

IV. DEEPENING PARLIAMENTARY DIALOGUE

In meetings with the leadership of the House and Senate of the Australian Parliament, as well as in discussions with the Joint Committee on Defence, Foreign Affairs and Trade, the delegation stressed the value and importance of renewed participation of Australian parliamentarians in Assembly activities. Australian members suggested that they understood the dialogue had lapsed, in that Australia had not participated since the early 1990s. However, they underlined their new understanding of the potential utility and importance of reviving that dialogue. It was agreed that the Assembly would send appropriate information on its events to Parliamentary officials, and that it would be given all appropriate consideration by the Australian Parliament.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Leon Benoit, M.P.
Chair
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)	
ACTIVITY	Visit to Australia by the Defence and Security Committee	
DESTINATION	Australia	
DATES	September 22-26, 2008	
DELEGATION		
SENATE	Senator Joseph Day	
HOUSE OF COMMONS		
STAFF		
TRANSPORTATION		\$16,143.36
ACCOMMODATION		\$1,804.58
HOSPITALITY		\$0.00
PER DIEMS		\$926.85
OFFICIAL GIFTS		\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES		\$0.00
TOTAL		\$18,874.79