

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 8-9, 2014**

Report

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) organized the annual Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum, held in early December in Washington, D.C., with the United States National Defence University (NDU) and the Atlantic Council of the United States (ACUS). The Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum provides NATO parliamentarians with the opportunity to discuss US national security policy issues impacting alliance affairs.

From 8th to 9th, 2014, parliamentarians had the opportunity participate in dialogue with senior Obama administration officials, policy experts and Washington-based journalists and deepen their understanding of US strategic priorities and the ways the US domestic politics are shaping that country's international vision.

Canada was represented at the Forum by Mr. Corneliu Chisu, Mr. Jack Harris. M.P., and Mrs. Joyce Murray, M.P.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Like for most NATO Allies, the developments in Ukraine and the deteriorating security situation in the Levant have been high on the US foreign and security agenda in 2014. Discussions reflected a consensus that the role of NATO will be pivotal in finding an effective response to Russia's assertive approach towards its neighbours to the west. Moreover, the threat posed by violent jihadist groups to the homelands of NATO allies requires close co-operation among the Allies and with the international community.

RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

There was a broad consensus that Russia's destabilising actions in Ukraine are the most serious challenge to order and stability in Europe. The West had hoped that the end of the Cold War would provide a foundation for a Europe whole, free and at peace. Moreover, it was hoped that all European states would recognise each other's sovereignty and right to choose their alliances without outside interference, respect their borders and refrain from the use of force.

Discussions highlighted that, by annexing Crimea, Russian President Vladimir Putin had made clear he rejects this vision. Instead, the Russian president seems to pursue a policy that seeks to rebuild a neo-Russian empire. His description of the collapse of the Soviet Union as 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century' is a reflection of this vision, a speaker reminded Forum participants.

Russia already has considerable leverage over Belarus, Kazakhstan and other states of the former Soviet Union. However, in President Putin's view, rebuilding a Russian sphere of influence would require control over Ukraine. From this perspective, President Putin cannot tolerate closer relations between Ukraine and the West. Rather, he needs to bring back Ukraine into the Russian orbit. With President Putin identifying Ukraine as an existential issue for Russia, there is an "asymmetry of interests", it was noted, i.e. Ukraine

is of more direct interest for Russia than for the West, and Russia can exert stronger economic leverage over Ukraine. Should Russia fail to establish full control over Ukraine, Mr. Putin would likely seek to hold Ukraine in limbo between Russia and the West at the very least, it was argued. As one participant commented, this probably explains why the Russian president now even appears to consider the EU, as well as the European countries which want to develop a closer relationship with the EU, as “enemies”. In the past, Russia had no apprehensions about EU enlargement.

Participants expressed the view that Russia’s aggressive actions may not end with Ukraine as President Putin’s objectives tend to escalate if he does not encounter any opposition. Discussions thus revealed a general understanding among the participants for the need to increase the cost of Russian intervention. This will require leadership and a transatlantic strategy which includes a complex set of policies. Europe and the United States have many strengths that far outweigh Mr. Putin’s options; the question is whether they are willing to use them. On the other hand, it will be easier for Russia to destabilise its neighbours than for NATO Allies to stabilise them. A weak response to Russian assertiveness raises the risk of war, it was argued. At the same time, NATO Allies need to avoid giving President Putin a pretext for intervention. Member states with a Russian minority should include them as much as possible.

In order to forestall any temptation to reproduce Russia’s aggressive stance against a NATO country, Allies need to make sure that Ukraine as an independent, sovereign country succeeds, discussions underlined. Ukraine today faces many challenges, first and foremost because of 20 years of poor governance. Russian interference, particularly the annexation of Crimea, has boosted Ukraine’s national identity – which however also now includes a strong anti-Russian element, one speaker noted. The parliamentary elections in October 2014 produced a government coalition which has almost a constitutional majority. However, as it comprises five parties, it may find it difficult to reach compromises. A crucial factor for the success of the new government is whether it can get down to work and deal with the very real economic challenges, including the high levels of corruption. If the West does not see real efforts by the Ukrainians, patience will wear out, one expert warned, noting however that it was encouraging that the government is looking into strategies to combat corruption. He added that it is already clear that the country will need financial assistance beyond support that will be provided by the International Monetary Fund, and the West should assist. One speaker challenged the view that aiding Ukraine would have a negative impact on EU economies and recovery. As signatory states of the Budapest Memorandum the United States and the United Kingdom have a special responsibility to Ukraine that the West should do more to support Ukraine is a view which is held by both Republicans and Democrats in the US Congress, participants learned.

Speakers were adamant that, judging by the available information, Russia is not implementing the 5 September 2014 Minsk agreement. It appears that the Kremlin does not want a real settlement, but prefers a “frozen conflict” and a permanently instable Ukraine.

The best outcome of the crisis in Ukraine is a negotiated settlement, participants agreed. Russia has too many levers against Ukraine and the latter will have no normalcy if Russia is not willing to come to an agreement. Given the current situation, one possible solution would be to provide all regions in the country with a degree of autonomy that allows them

to exercise their own rights and protect their cultural heritage within Ukraine's current borders. It was suggested that this could include the issue of Russian as an official language. A broader question is how Ukraine can develop closer relations with the West without severing its active economic relations with Russia. At least one speaker suggested that the issue of Ukraine's possible membership in NATO should be off the table for some time. Similarly, discussions about Crimea should be delayed, but the issue will need to be addressed at some point, the speaker argued.

Beyond Ukraine, it was noted that President Putin must not be allowed to succeed in his approach by creating "frozen conflicts" in Moldova, the South Caucasus and the Western Balkans. Existing unresolved conflicts should not prevent NATO Allies from working closely with partner countries. The EU in particular should look east and offer association and membership in the longer run, it was argued.

As to the security of Allies themselves, it was suggested that Europe needs to send a signal to President Putin that his moves will not be accepted, particularly as he is exploiting any sign of weakness as a possible window of opportunity. Abandoning Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) for instance would be seen as such. NATO must therefore demonstrate that Article 5 remains the cornerstone of the Alliance. To that end, the Allies need to revitalise NATO which requires European member states to invest more in defence, US speakers stressed. The Alliance also must develop a strategy to counter subversion. Moreover, US troops should be stationed in the Baltics and the Balkans, not least because they would serve as a deterrence measure, it was suggested. As Russia challenges the vision that the Balkans will be part of Euro-Atlantic structures the United States needs to put more focus on this region, one speaker emphasised.

Several discussants held the view that the sanctions imposed on Russia have achieved what they could achieve and that the focus on energy has been the right one. However, although sanctions are hurting Russia economically, they have not produced the intended political goal, it was noted. While the sanctions should be maintained as long as the Russian leadership does not comply with the agreements, Allies should also focus on other elements of a strategy, experts argued. Sanctions also undermine the Russian business community which prefers integration in the world economy and lead President Putin to disentangle Russia from the West, they noted.

Speakers called on European members to develop a new energy strategy which reduces their dependence on Russia, including looking into the exploration of shale gas. The United States on the other hand could adapt its laws to allow the export of shale gas.

Apart from European security, there are still other issues where Russia and the West have common interests, it was argued. For example, while Russia has been arming and aiding the Assad regime until now, it could play an important role in settling the civil war. Similarly, despite the heated rhetoric and even if major progress is unlikely, there are still talks between Russia and the United States over nuclear arms control.

The U.S.-Russian relationship was assessed as being in a worse state than at any time before Gorbachev, and seems to be entering a very long period of antagonism. It was pointed out that there have been consistent problems in U.S.-Russian relations for the last 22 years and it has been impossible to talk to Russia about joint interests in the post-Soviet space. Since July 2013, bilateral U.S.-Russian relations were influenced by three

main events: the Snowden revelations, the Syrian crisis (where the United States worked with Russia) and Ukraine. Looking forward, one speaker commented that the United States will go back to practical Cold War concepts of containment and address issues like hybrid and information warfare. While there are some issues on the international agenda on which Russia and the United States can work together, bilateral U.S.-Russian relations are likely to be stalled for the remainder of President Obama's mandate.

The events in Ukraine provided a reminder that despite active efforts the West has been unable to create a post-Cold War security structure in which Russia has a stake. Forum participants emphasised the need to avoid a re-division of Europe and revitalise the vision of a Europe whole and free in which Russia finds its role in peace. The question is how the Russian leader can be persuaded that a Europe working together is better. President Putin has blamed the West for everything that is wrong in Russia. As a result of an intense propaganda campaign, Russians now hold an overwhelmingly hostile view of the West; for example more than 70% of the population considers the United States to be an adversary.

Discussions revealed a consensus that there is a need to keep communication lines open with Russia and with the Russian people in particular. More channels of dialogue would be helpful. However, reaching the Russian people and developing a strategy to counter the disinformation they receive by the Kremlin-controlled media is not an easy task. This is not only because the Kremlin limits the activities of independent foundations in Russia, but also because Western governments have cut funding for many institutions which have been working in this area. In the short term Vladimir Putin might have succeeded in rallying a majority of Russians behind him, but whether he will be able to do so in the long term remains to be seen, participants noted.

NATO'S ONGOING ADAPTATION TO THE CHANGING INTERNATIONAL SECURITY LANDSCAPE

Participants generally agreed that recent events have changed the widely held perception among Allies that a direct threat to the European homeland is low. Although those who spoke on the subject recognised that member states are facing formidable challenges on the eastern and southern flanks most were optimistic that the Alliance will be able to cope with these successfully. NATO has adapted successfully to the end of the Cold War. The policies adopted by member states, in particular enlargement, have contributed greatly to make Europe a more secure place. The strong networks of partners that NATO has created play an important role for Euro-Atlantic security and improve NATO's flexibility and interoperability, discussants agreed.

The 2014 Wales NATO Summit marked another milestone; among the achievements of this Summit is the agreement on 78 major tasks which increase the readiness of NATO forces. The Summit also identified areas where NATO needs to make progress, such as joint intelligence and medical support. NATO-led operations in Afghanistan, Libya, and in other theatres have highlighted capability shortfalls. Defence budget cuts in many member countries have negatively affected readiness and overall resilience, participants agreed. The challenge for many Allies is thus to maintain, respectively to develop, a mix of capabilities that allows them to address the security challenges at NATO's periphery. Participants agreed that the challenges are numerous. Moreover, in contrast to the

monolithic threat posed by the Soviet Union, which was “comfortably understandable”, today’s ever changing security landscape features many different challenges and actors. As one speaker noted the Westphalian state is shrinking, while other actors, including also individuals whose personal wealth is higher than the GDP of small countries, are becoming more important.

One of the strengths of the Alliance is its ability to co-operate and to adapt to a new environment. Thus, NATO is now looking into ways of using innovation to prepare Allied armed forces to prevail over the enemy in future conflicts. One of the key areas in the future is cyber space, thus NATO is developing a comprehensive system for cyber defence. Allies are also increasing the number of exercises to maintain the level of interoperability achieved in Afghanistan. In 2015 NATO will organise Trident Juncture 2015, a high visibility exercise which will include over 25,000 troops and take place across Italy, Portugal and Spain. The new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) will provide new capabilities which greatly increase NATO’s ability to address the crises in the east and south of NATO, while the NATO follow-on mission in Afghanistan, operation “Resolute Support”, will be a clear signal that NATO remains committed and able to provide security assistance to Afghanistan, participants learned.

SYRIA, IRAQ AND SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

The unexpected and rapid rise of the so-called “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL), or “Islamic State” (IS) was one of the most significant developments of 2014 and the threat that ISIL poses to regional stability and the security of NATO member states was a key focus of discussions.

Contrary to its name, it was underlined, the IS is neither Islamic nor a state; rather, it exists only by terror, fear, extortion, and plunder; neither is the IS a result of the Arab Spring, but rather a reaction to the vicious response by autocratic regimes to the demonstrations. The conflict in Syria is a case in point: Basher Assad’s repressive response to the demonstrations in Syria reproduces the model followed by his father more than 20 years ago. A different response by the regime to the demonstrators’ demands would most likely have produced a different outcome. ISIL, which had been present in Iraq for a decade, got a new lease of life with the civil war in Syria.

Participants generally shared the view that the options for the United States and the West to influence developments in Syria are limited. The United States is focusing on building up the capacity of the moderate opposition and encouraging others to do the same. Thus far, it has provided approximately \$300 million in civilian assistance. The United States is also supporting the United Nations special envoy for the Syria crisis, Staffan di Mistura’s efforts to generate bottom-up local ceasefires.

Ultimately only a political transition can settle the Syria conflict, participants agreed. The Assad regime cannot be a potential partner in combating the IS, even though it now depicts itself as such. In reality, the Assad regime did not fight ISIL until recently, participants were told.

In Iraq, growing sectarianism has promoted the rise of ISIL. In order to defeat ISIL, Iraq needs to get the Baathists and Sunni tribes to break away from the terror organisation, it was argued. Moreover, the Iraqi security forces, which are undermined by corruption, must

be reformed. A first major step should be the restoration of command functions. The United States is committed to support the Iraqi government and will have some 1,500 personnel deployed in the country. The assistance provided includes training of the armed forces as well as supporting the law enforcement authorities. Speakers stressed that the international community must support Iraq while also pressuring the government in Baghdad to implement its pledges for inclusiveness. Unfortunately, the fact that relief appeals have been massively undersubscribed, demonstrates a certain “donor fatigue”, speakers regretted. Western governments should consider supporting Iraq an investment, it was argued. In assisting Iraq defeat ISIL, Allies are acting in their own interest. More than 16,000 fighters from many countries have joined ISIL, and there are already spill-over effects from Syria and Iraq to neighbouring countries.

In an effort to prevent the further spread of ISIL and defeat it, the United States is working closely with its partners in the region and with NATO Allies. The role of Saudi Arabia, which is supporting the train and equip programme for the Syrian opposition, was highlighted in particular; Riyadh has provided the Syrian opposition with considerable assistance. However, the bilateral relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States is also affected by other factors, including the nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1 where Saudi Arabia fears that a deal could embolden Iran. US interlocutors anticipated that even if there was a nuclear deal with Iran, some contentious issues, such as Tehran’s role in Syria and Lebanon, are likely to remain.

To successfully deal with ISIL, and the instability in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) more generally, speakers urged regional governments to address the needs of young people. A functioning education system that offers the young generation a good chance to succeed plays a crucial part in this. Yet, experts assessed that Arab governments are not able to cope with the youth bulge. More than half of the population in MENA countries is below 25; youth unemployment is about 20%. Many young Arabs perceive a growing gap between their expectation and reality. Unfortunately, experts noted that the top-down reforms initiated in countries of the MENA region have not worked well in the past; what is needed is more open governments – which is still lacking.

Experts stressed that Arab governments need to strike a difficult balance between measures that address security concerns and the protection of human rights and freedoms. Unfortunately, some of their responses to the threat posed by Islamist extremists are counter-productive. Measures that limit pluralism in the societies criminalise non-violent action, or stifle the media in an unprecedented manner can heighten rather than reduce the attractiveness of Islamist organisations, experts noted. Experts also called on Western governments not to be complicit by turning a blind eye on these developments. This is particularly important as many young people in the region are susceptible to the ISIL message which is very “counter establishment”. As one speaker noted, the West underestimates the impact of 250,000 Syrians being slaughtered by their government while the international community stands idle. In this sense, the West failed to meet the challenge in 2011 and 2012, experts argued, at a time when Western nations were preoccupied with the financial crisis and, after the experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, were wary of getting involved militarily.

Speakers also noted that the governments of the MENA region need to stand up to jihadi groups, and religious leaders must speak out and denounce the hypocrisy and the crimes

of violent Islamist groups like ISIL. Defeating ISIL will be a long-term effort, and tracking and countering ISIL's funding is a crucial aspect of it. More generally, NATO Allies have to show that their model based on democratic values and free markets still works. The West has to refurbish its own brand as it enters into a new era of ideological competition. Overall, experts noted that mechanisms to fight ISIL existed, but needed to be used more effectively and further developed.

Today, Tunisia is the only country in the MENA region that has engaged in a democratic process. While this has been successful so far, the difficult economic situation of the country makes it still vulnerable. In contrast, Egypt is seeing the return of authoritarianism while Libya is in a very dangerous situation and has the potential to become the "Syria of North Africa", experts warned.

THE UNITED STATES AND AFRICA

Events like the crisis in Mali and the outbreak of the Ebola pandemic have put African security issues again on the agenda. Thus far, the United States has dedicated \$703 million to deal with the outbreak of the Ebola virus and President Barack Obama has requested an additional \$6.2 billion from the Congress. The broad security priorities of the United States in Africa focus on peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and on strengthening the security sector in partner states. To that end, the US Departments of Defense and State have supported African states with approximately \$800 million in Fiscal Year 2013. The United States supports the work of more than 60,000 peacekeepers serving with the African Union (AU) and United Nations (UN) in Africa. More than 60% of peacekeepers deployed are Africans.

The US Africa Leaders' Summit in August 2014 was successful in developing the co-operation further, it was noted. At the Summit, the United States and six African states (Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Tunisia) agreed on the Security Governance Initiative (SGI), which envisages a comprehensive approach to improving security sector governance and capacity to address threats. SGI is a response to the threat to African development posed by violent jihadi groups and is designed to make participating African countries more secure for foreign investment. The United States has provided an initial allotment of \$65 million.

A second initiative of the Summit is the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership (A-PREP) which focuses on addressing shortfalls in Africa-based peacekeeping forces. A-PREP focuses on military training and assistance to Senegal, Ghana, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The United States plans to provide some \$110 million per year over the next three to five years for this programme.

Speakers suggested that Africa has, overall, made significant strides towards the improvement of good governance in recent years. This is also reflected in a decline in *coups* and violent conflict on the continent. However, challenges remain and the period until 2016 will be particularly interesting as 12 African countries will have presidential elections. A worrisome development has been attempts to abolish term limits of government officials.

US officials underlined the trade and investment opportunities in Africa. Most of the world's fastest growing countries are located on the continent, even though most of the growth in

Africa comes from small countries and or from countries which started from a low economic development. Increased economic interaction with Africa provides a good chance to generate jobs, both in Africa and in other countries. Foreign Direct Investment in Africa has reached \$56 billion in 2013. The United States supports African states and regional organisations to expand trade and to promote growth opportunities. An important programme is the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) which provides African countries with duty free access to the US market. AGOA, which boosts job creation and helps African countries to export, expires in September 2015 but the Obama Administration is planning to renew the programme. The United States also supports increased efforts to fight corruption, which costs African countries billions every year.

There is a possible role for the Alliance in Africa, it was noted. African states would certainly appreciate to benefit from NATO's expertise in a number of areas, such as the integration of forces in a multi-national organisation and NATO's ability to deploy forces rapidly. The French intervention in Mali was a good example of quick reaction, as it prevented the crisis from becoming worse by moving a moderate number of troops in early. Closer co-operation between NATO Allies and African states would be mutually beneficial as both sides face similar challenges, notably violent jihadi groups like al-Qaeda or al-Shabab, maritime piracy, and illegal trafficking. In Somalia, the United States, the EU and NATO have been critical in enforcing security and their engagement against piracy in the Indian Ocean has been relatively successful, participants heard. Moreover, NATO already has established co-operation with the African Union through a NATO liaison office to the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa.

In any case, the demand from African states for training and equipment will increase in the future. This is due to the shortcomings of African forces and the fact that today's peacekeeping operations face a completely different set of challenges. While there is a degree of co-operation between the United States and NATO Allies, particularly the United Kingdom and France, in Africa, there is room for improvement, particularly in the mobilisation of resources. An integral part of the United States' and Allies' future engagement is monitoring and evaluating of programmes.

US ELECTIONS AND DOMESTIC ISSUES

The final session of the Forum touched upon US domestic issues. It was argued that the US political system is under considerable strain and that the polarisation of the political spectrum has continued to a point where American political parties now appear as if they have become parliamentary parties. While ideological polarisation does not necessarily mean gridlock, it has descended into "tribalism", sometime to a degree where it produces "ruthless pragmatism" along the motto "if you are for it, I am against". The "defined political seasons", i.e. the previous practice whereby six months of campaign are followed by a season of governing, are gone. The role the media plays in the public debate has exacerbated the problem as their business models work best in a tribal atmosphere, experts noted. Everything now gets filtered through politics. This political gridlock is reducing public confidence in government, it was noted. These changes taking place in the political landscape are not confined to the United States; there is a proliferation of new powers (including the United Kingdom Independent Party, UKIP), which are transforming democracies into "vetocracies". In many ways there is a 'rejuvenation of politics' as new

political actors evolve; unfortunately, these are failing in addressing problems, experts regretted. Thus, political gridlock becomes almost global and governments are hampered in their ability to govern.

President Obama has been criticised by his political opponents and also faces criticism from parts of the Democratic party. This and the fact that he is now considered a “lame duck” constrains the power of the presidency more than ever. This may have a negative impact on the completion of the trade agreements under discussion. The Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) plays an important role in deepening the transatlantic relationship, among others as it endorses jobs and economic growth, experts stressed.

Speakers noted that the US Senate Intelligence Committee’s “Study of the CIA’s Detention and Interrogation Program” reflects many divisions in the United States and the debates are taking place across party lines. Discussions revolve around the balance between privacy and security.

Concerning the role of the United States in the world, the view that Washington is becoming more isolationist would imply that it has to the option of isolating itself, experts analysed. However, the world does not allow the United States to become isolationist – and neither can the United States afford to be isolationist. The resurgence of the American economy, the strong Dollar, and low energy prices has an impact on numerous domestic and international issues. Nothing that has happened in 2014 is more important than the collapse of the oil price, one participant argued. This represents one of the most massive transfers of income in history; US consumers will save \$110 billion this year. With an 80% increase in oil production in 2013 the United States has become an oil state. However, the considerable budget constraints also put limits on US initiatives and engagements. Moreover, the wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan have made the American people war weary. The public is also cognizant of the costs, both financial and in human life.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)
ACTIVITY	Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum
DESTINATION	Washington, D.C., United States of America
DATES	December 8-9, 2014
DELEGATION	
SENATE	N/A
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Corneliu Chisu, M.P. Mr. Jack Harris, M.P. Ms. Joyce Murray, M.P.
STAFF	N/A
TRANSPORTATION	\$4,149.14
ACCOMMODATION	\$1,789.42
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$626.16
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$447.41
TOTAL	\$7,012.13