

Canadian NATO
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
canadienne de l'OTAN

Report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association

Joint Meeting of the Defence and Security, Economics and Security, and Political Committees

Brussels, Belgium

From February 17 to 19, 2020

Report

The Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association, Canada's delegation to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA), has the honour to present its report on the Joint Meeting of the Defence and Security, Economics and Security and Political Committees, held in Brussels, Belgium from 17-19 February 2020. Canada was represented at the Joint Meeting by: Cheryl Gallant, M.P., Acting Head of the Canadian Delegation; the Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu, Senator; the Hon. Pierre J. Dalphond, Senator; the Hon. Josée Forest-Niesing, Senator; the Hon. Victor Oh, Senator; Mrs. Julie Dzerowicz, M.P.; and Mr. Jack Harris, M.P. The Delegation was accompanied by Mr. Jean-François Pagé, Association Secretary, and Mr. James Lee, Association Advisor.

The objective of the annual Joint Meeting in Brussels, which also includes Officers of the Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security and the Science and Technology Committee, is to provide delegates with an update on NATO activities and operations as well as a forum to discuss key issues that the Alliance will face throughout the year. As usual at the Joint Meeting, representatives of the NATO PA met with the NATO Secretary General as well as Permanent Representatives to the North Atlantic Council.¹ Delegates were also briefed by the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defence, as well as senior NATO and European Union officials.

The proceedings of the Joint Meeting were conducted under the Chatham House Rule.

Before the Joint Meeting began, Canadian delegates met and were briefed by Canada's Permanent Representative to NATO, Ambassador David Angell and his staff, as well as by Canada's military representative to NATO, Vice-Admiral Darren Hawco.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

During the Joint Meeting, Canadian and other delegates were briefed on and discussed a range of topics: NATO's Political Agenda; Security in the Cyber Age; NATO's Defence and Nuclear Policies; the Transatlantic Relationship, NATO, and the European Union (EU); NATO Operations; and the Evolving Security Landscape in the Middle East and North Africa Region and NATO's Role. Among the themes common to all these discussions were the need for NATO to be able to continually adapt to changing circumstances, as well as the fundamental importance of consultation and unity and the Transatlantic bond between North America and Europe.

The following sections summarize key points of the discussions under each of these topics.

NATO's Political Agenda

NATO is a political-military alliance that takes decisions by consensus, and as such consultation and unity have always been considered key to the effectiveness of the Alliance.

¹ NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA), [In Brussels, North American and European legislators affirm enduring commitment to transatlantic link](#), 19 February 2020.

Russia's 2014 illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region, as well as its subsequent destabilization of that country's Donbas region, led NATO to significantly strengthen its military defence and deterrence posture in the years that followed. However, less emphasis was placed on also reinforcing the political dimension of the Alliance. This situation was exacerbated by the 2016 election of United States (U.S.) President Donald Trump, who has publicly questioned the value of NATO, and of consultation with traditional allies. Just three months before the Joint Meeting, French President Emmanuel Macron suggested in an interview with *The Economist* magazine that, without the ability to count on the U.S., allies were experiencing the "brain death" of NATO.²

At a summit in London in December 2019, NATO leaders agreed, among other things, that "solidarity, unity and cohesion" were cornerstone principles of the Alliance, and invited the Secretary General of NATO to develop a proposal for a forward-looking reflection process to "further strengthen NATO's political dimension including consultation."³ (This process was soon renamed "NATO 2030.")

At the Joint Meeting, delegates were told that the political dimension of the Alliance was very important to its effectiveness and adaptability, and that everything NATO did on the political front was designed to support its strategic goals. It was stated that the decision by Alliance leaders to begin a reflection process to strengthen NATO's political dimension was critically important, and that work was currently underway on the mandate for this process. It was also underlined that NATO parliamentarians must play a role in strengthening the political dimension of the Alliance, including through the NATO PA.

Delegates were briefed on and discussed key issues on NATO's political agenda. These included the need to: preserve consensus when dealing with Russia, develop even greater consensus on the threat from terrorism in its many forms, focus on Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDT), and work together to respond to the rise of China.

Delegates were told that one important issue on NATO's political agenda was the future of arms control. It was stated that arms control is pursued not as an end in itself, but because it contributes to international stability. In addition, even in the case of bilateral nuclear agreements, such as those between the U.S. and Russia, it makes sense to first engage in dialogue among Allies in order to then be able to reach agreements based on shared interests.

Delegates also heard that Russia's longstanding violation of its commitments under the bilateral U.S.-Russia Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty had led the U.S. to withdraw from that treaty in 2019. In addition, they were reminded that the last remaining nuclear arms treaty between the U.S. and Russia, New START, was due to expire in early 2021 unless both countries agreed to extend it.

In terms of nuclear disarmament, delegates were reminded that NATO and its member states support the cornerstone Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), but oppose the recent *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*, which does

² "[Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead](#)," *The Economist*, 7 November 2019.

³ NATO, [London Declaration](#), Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London, 3-4 December 2019.

not include verification mechanisms. In the context of disarmament issues, delegates were told that NATO is not always good at publicly explaining and promoting what it does.

Security in the Cyber Age

All states, including NATO members, have recognized the importance of cyber security in recent years. A key step in this recognition was a large-scale series of cyber attacks on NATO member Estonia in 2007. Delegates were told that the Alliance has taken steps to strengthen its defensive capabilities in this area in recent years. These include:

- affirming at the Wales Summit in 2013 that cyber defence is part of the NATO's core task of collective defence, and that a cyber attack could lead to the invocation of NATO's Article V collective defence commitment;
- declaring cyberspace a domain of operations like land, sea, and air at its Warsaw Summit in 2016;
- increasing the tools NATO has available to protect its own networks; and
- continuing to enhance resilience across the Alliance.

Allies have also agreed on how to integrate sovereign national cyber efforts, shared voluntarily with the Alliance, into NATO operations and missions.

Although there are many non-state hackers, delegates heard that large-scale cyber attacks are most probably carried out by states, or at least state sponsored. However, as attributing responsibility for such attacks is both technically challenging and highly political, NATO does not collectively assign blame for attacks, although individual allies may do so unilaterally. Information sharing is critical to cyber defence, and it was recommended that Allies should continue strengthening their skills, spending, and staffing in this area. Notwithstanding work on the collective defence implications of cyber attacks in worst-case scenarios, in fact most such attacks are still the result of either criminal actions or accidents, and NATO also encourages member states to strengthen cybersecurity at national levels.

Following the conclusion of the Joint Meeting, a limited number of NATO PA delegates were able to participate in a special interactive cyber deterrence exercise hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia and CybExer Technologies.⁴ A Canadian delegate participated in this event.

NATO's Defence and Nuclear Policies

As noted above, NATO has significantly strengthened its military defence and deterrence posture in response to Russian actions since 2014. Delegates learned that, among other measures, the Alliance has increased its forward presence in the east of the Alliance,

⁴ See North Atlantic Treaty Organization Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA), [NATO parliamentarians tackle cyber security preparedness, response, and recovery in cyber crisis table-top exercise](#), 21 February 2020.

improved its readiness, started to focus on countering hybrid threats, and adopted a 360-degree approach to security and stability. The Alliance has also recognized the importance of space to its deterrence, defence and security, adopting a Space Policy, emphasizing the role it can play in sharing information and coordinating actions, and declaring space an operational domain. However, more work still needs to be done, including in areas such as defence capability development, adaptation to EDTs, and further strengthening complementarity between NATO and the EU.

On nuclear policy and forces, delegates were told that nuclear deterrence has long been at the core of NATO's deterrence, and were reminded that Alliance leaders had reiterated at their December 2019 London summit that "as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance."⁵ In terms of Russia, it was stated at the Joint Meeting that this country has increased both its nuclear capabilities and its related rhetoric in recent years. In addition, Russia's formidable communications skills focus on delivering simple messages, such as assertions that the U.S. and NATO are irresponsible, and that the Alliance is divided.

It was asserted that successful nuclear and other deterrence involves a combination of capacity, resolve and effective communication to influence a potential opponent. Within NATO, the U.S., the United Kingdom (U.K.) and France possess nuclear weapons. Delegates were told that Alliance resolve in terms of nuclear deterrence is demonstrated by means such as doctrine and policy, exercises and demonstrations, political statements, and broad participation in nuclear and other burden sharing. Delegates also heard that unity is NATO's "centre of gravity" in terms of communications on nuclear issues, and that the Alliance recognizes the need to be transparent and to educate both its citizens and potential opponents about its policies. Most of NATO's communications in this area focus on arms control, and it was stated that press coverage of NATO nuclear policies is generally negative.

The Transatlantic Relationship, NATO, and the European Union

Among the key pillars of NATO's strength over the decades has been the Transatlantic relationship between North America – which includes NATO allies the U.S. and Canada – and Europe, which includes all other NATO members. The United States has provided the largest contributions to NATO for decades, and European allies in particular have depended on the U.S. commitment to the Alliance, and therefore to Europe. While it has maintained this commitment, the U.S. has also argued that other allies, and particularly those in Europe, should spend more on defence and develop more significant and interoperable military capabilities.

A further complication is the fact that 22 of NATO's soon-to-be 30 members are at the same time members of the EU. In addition to enlarging, over the years this union has deepened its role in the foreign affairs and defence policies of its member states. Efforts by EU members to develop stronger military capabilities within the union have been criticized by some in the U.S. and elsewhere as distracting from, rather than strengthening, NATO. A further criticism of EU defence initiatives has been that these exclude non-EU states, including NATO allies. For years this argument applied mainly to

⁵ NATO, [London Declaration](#), 3-4 December 2019.

Turkey, which is not an EU member and has disputes with the union, including in the eastern Mediterranean. However, the decision of the U.K. to leave the EU means that this argument about the exclusion of non-EU states might now also potentially apply to it.

On the U.S.-NATO relationship, delegates were told that although President Trump's statements and actions have caused many to question his administration's commitment to NATO, the U.S. Congress has continued to demonstrate strong support for the Alliance. This was shown once again as Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi led a large bipartisan U.S. delegation to participate in the 2020 Joint Meeting.⁶

From a European perspective, delegates heard that the Transatlantic bond between Europe and North America was more important than ever. For this reason, the December 2019 London Declaration by NATO leaders, which reaffirmed "the enduring transatlantic bond between Europe and North America," was very welcome.⁷ Delegates also heard that NATO remains a cornerstone for the collective defence of those EU states that are also NATO members.

Concerning EU defence initiatives, it was stated that defence cooperation between NATO and the EU has increased in recent years, with joint declarations issued in 2016 and 2018. While a number of delegates emphasized the need to ensure that EU defence efforts complement and strengthen NATO rather than weaken it, it was asserted by Europeans that such initiatives were, in fact, strengthening EU member states, and therefore the Alliance. Several delegates stated that further discussion and cooperation could help dispel doubts on this score.

In terms of the participation of non-EU states, delegates were told that that EU initiatives may be open to third parties. In the case of the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), for example, it was explained that it is up to the EU members that choose to participate in PESCO projects to decide which other states can also participate. When asked about the case of the U.K., which had invested in some EU programs before its decision to leave the union, one presenter responded that that decision had some regrettable implications.

NATO Operations

Delegates were told that NATO's current operations focused either on collective conventional defence, or on projecting stability.

In terms of collective defence, the end of the Cold War saw a decrease in Allied conventional military forces and their readiness. Further, following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. called on Allies to get rid of heavy military forces in favour of lighter ones. As a result, by the time of Russia's aggression against Crimea in 2014, NATO was very weak conventionally, and Alliance members moved over the next several years to strengthen both their forces and their degree of readiness. However, delegates heard that more work was still needed, particularly in areas such as logistics and in practice moving multinational forces. In terms of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence

⁶ NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA), [In Brussels, North American and European legislators affirm enduring commitment to transatlantic link](#), 19 February 2020.

⁷ NATO, [London Declaration](#), 3-4 December 2019.

(eFP) in the Baltic states and Poland – one element of which is led by Canada – it was stated that although the combination of multiple national contingents below the level of brigades creates some operational problems, these are more than offset by the political unity demonstrated by these forces.

In terms of projecting stability, NATO continues to carry out its mission training Afghanistan's security forces. While the Alliance had previously stated that the Taliban would have to negotiate any peace agreement with the Government of Afghanistan, the U.S. has now directly negotiated an agreement in principle with the Taliban. Delegates heard that this agreement envisaged a reduction in foreign forces as a means of getting the Taliban to enter negotiations with the Government of Afghanistan. It remains to be seen how this process would play out.

Delegates also discussed the ongoing NATO operation in Kosovo. They were reminded that decisive NATO action over 20 years ago had stopped atrocities in Kosovo and that the Alliance still contributes to the stability of the region through its presence there.

In the Middle East, years of civil war and the rise of Daesh have significantly weakened the Government of Iraq, which in 2018 requested that NATO establish a non-combat, advisory, training and capacity-building operation there. At the time of the Joint Meeting, the NATO Mission Iraq (NMI) was commanded by Canadian Major-General Jennie Carignan. While NMI was reported to have proceeded well, delegates heard that the U.S. killing of Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani in January 2020, one month before the Joint Meeting, changed the political landscape. The Iraqi parliament passed a non-binding resolution demanding the expulsion of all foreign forces – and in particular the Global Coalition Against Daesh – from the country. However, delegates were told that, for its part, the Government of Iraq wanted NATO to continue, and even increase, its presence there for the time being.

The Evolving Security Landscape in the Middle East and North Africa Region and NATO's Role

NATO increased its partnerships with non-NATO countries following the end of the Cold War. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, NATO has been engaged with partners in the Mediterranean – states that do not often meet in other contexts – for 25 years, and engaged in political dialogue with partners in the Gulf for 15 years.⁸

The September 2001 attacks on the United States led to a greater focus on counterterrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and as noted above, delegates heard that Russia's illegal and destabilizing actions in recent years resulted in a refocusing on collective defence. Given that the Alliance could no longer focus on only one threat, it adopted a comprehensive, 360-degree approach to security that included attention to its south.

⁸ The seven Mediterranean Dialogue Partners are: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. See NATO, [NATO Mediterranean Dialogue](#). The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, which was launched in 2004, involves four countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council: Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. According to NATO, Saudi Arabia and Oman have also “shown an interest in the Initiative.” See NATO, [Istanbul Cooperation Initiative \(ICI\)](#).

Delegates were told that the MENA region matters to the Alliance in tangible ways. For instance, the Mediterranean Sea essentially acts as a bridge between Europe and the region. From a negative point of view, however, instability in the region increases illegal migration to Europe. This is important since the region can be seen as an arc of instability that includes several fragile states. In recent years it has also become a theatre for geopolitical competition, as shown by Russia's actions in Syria, and China's investments in Africa. For all these reasons, NATO has an interest in helping the countries of the region to stabilize it.

It was stressed that economic, socio-political, demographic, and climate-related factors contribute to state fragility, which in turn is fertile ground for the rise of non-state armed groups, including terrorists. Although NATO does not have a mandate to respond to climate-related issues directly, it does pay attention to the impact of climate on security. Delegates were told that it is much more effective to prevent the development of problems than to intervene later to address them. They heard that there was a pressing need for greater international involvement to support both development and governance reforms in the region and that NATO, in conjunction with local partners, had a role to play in helping create the conditions for stability. The Alliance is already engaged in training security forces in Iraq, for example, and the Iraqi government has requested that it increase the support it offers. In response to questions, delegates were also told that NATO was monitoring the situation in Libya closely, where it supports calls for the de-escalation of violence and a political solution. In addition, although the Alliance recognized the importance of the conflict in the Sahel region, delegates heard that the Alliance was not involved there as a military actor, although it was examining what more it could do in its partnership with Mauritania.

In addition to the formal Joint Meeting, some Canadian delegates also had the opportunity for further discussions on arms control, Women Peace and Security and human security at NATO. They concluded these are very important for the Alliance and should be more fully resourced and mainstreamed in its work.

The 2020 Joint Meeting of the Defence and Security, Economics and Security and Political Committees allowed Canadian delegates to hold in-depth discussions with senior NATO and other officials, as well as NATO parliamentarians, on defence, economic and political issues of concern to the Alliance. By doing so they learned about key issues on the Alliance's agenda, while at the same time contributing to the debate and advancing Canadian interests.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Dzerowicz, M.P.,

Chair of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION

Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association

ACTIVITY

Joint Meeting of the Defence and Security, Economics and Security, and Political Committees

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| DESTINATION | Brussels, Belgium |
| DATES | From February 17 to 19, 2020 |
| DELEGATION | |
| SENATE | Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu Hon. Pierre J. Dalphond Hon. Josée Forest-Niesing Hon. Victor Oh |
| HOUSE OF COMMONS | Mrs. Julie Dzerowicz Mrs. Cheryl Gallant Mr. Jack Harris |
| STAFF | Jean-François Pagé James Lee |
| TRANSPORTATION | \$ 55,465.12 |
| ACCOMMODATION | \$ 10,632.42 |
| PER DIEMS | \$ 3,841.35 |
| MISCELLANEOUS | \$ 0.00 |
| TOTAL | \$ 69,938.89 |