



**Report of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth
Parliamentary Association**

**Commonwealth Conference on Parliamentary Scrutiny and
Oversight of National Security**

London, England

November 21 to 23, 2023

Report

Iqra Khalid, M.P., Vice-Chair of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), and Rob Morrison, M.P., attended the 2023 National Security Conference, hosted by the United Kingdom (UK) Branch of the CPA, held in London, England, from November 21 to 23, 2023.

Participants at this seminar included delegates from 12 Commonwealth countries, various members of the UK House of Commons and House of Lords, and academics and experts in the field of national security.

PURPOSE

Recent global disruptions mean that security-related issues are again at the top of international agenda. While some of these problems are universal, others are particular to individual jurisdictions. In the Commonwealth, there needs to be active work to ensure that laws relating to national security are fit for purpose. Delegates were given the opportunity to improve their understanding of the security environment and their capacity to thoroughly examine national security legislation during this three-day conference.

The conference encouraged the exchange of valuable insights and meaningful discussion between parliamentarians across the Commonwealth, with an emphasis on fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Focusing on scrutiny and oversight, the conference explored global trends in national security, including topics such as conflict resolution and peacebuilding, cybersecurity and climate change, amongst other salient issues. There were also practical sessions on budgeting and scrutiny, which enhanced skills relevant to parliamentarians' work.

DAY 1

Session 1: Navigating the Global Security Landscape: Exploring Emerging Trends and

This session provided an overview of the current global trends in national security. It highlighted traditional and non-traditional emerging challenges and threats that nations face, which require planning and policymaking. It examined geopolitical shifts and regional dynamics, transnational threats such as terrorism and organised crime, cyber threats, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and their security implications.

Session 2: Role of Parliament in Scrutinising and Overseeing National Security Laws

Delegates explored the importance of parliamentary oversight in ensuring effective national security laws. They analysed the checks and balances between the executive and legislative branches to uphold democratic principles and protect individual rights. The session also highlighted tools available to delegates for effective scrutiny of national security laws and enhance understanding of parliamentary mechanisms for oversight.

Session 3: Evaluating National Security Laws

This session focused on the criteria for assessing the effectiveness and appropriateness of national security laws. Delegates enhanced knowledge on how to strike the right

balance between security needs and safeguarding civil rights, ensuring that laws are robust, proportional, and respectful of human rights. The UK's recent National Security Act was used as a case study to discuss challenges and potential pitfalls, allowing delegates to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in creating effective and comprehensive laws.

Session 4: Strengthening Financial Oversight of the Security Sector

Financial oversight of the security sector is difficult due to its complex and sensitive nature. In this session, participants were acquainted with the functions of the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee. In particular, their responsibilities in scrutinising government spending related to national security and defence and probing the value for money of these expenditures. Case studies were highlighted, discussing insights gained and the lessons they offer.

Delegate observations from day 1:

- National security should be based on resilience, deterrence, and commitment to safety.
- State hostage taking and arbitrary detentions need international cooperation to resolve.
- Climate change and technological advancement are two of the biggest issues of our time.
- Illicit financial flow is a spectrum from tax evasion to avoidance to terrorism supply. Crypto currencies and cash rich businesses are on the higher risk areas of the industry.
- The consequence of a global shadow economy – no one country has the full picture of the impact. That is why international cooperation is vital to resolving this global issue.
- There needs to be greater inter-departmental and cross-sector collaboration in the same jurisdiction as well as across global cooperations.
- Artificial intelligence in national security is an emerging challenge.
 - Fast paced development in the private sector
 - There are over 200 pilots in the UK alone
 - Supply chain improvements
 - Decision making in government by ChatGPT as an example
 - Fully autonomous weapons?
 - Data sets that AI is based on needs scrutiny
 - There are no 3rd party audits of these data sets
 - Moratorium proposed for use of AI within government departments
 - Challenge of the government not being able to compete financially with the private sector when it comes to AI
- Economic security vs. national security.
- Diaspora communities need to be engaged and educated on the foreign interference issue.
- Social media disinformation and propaganda campaigns work both ways – we are not just targets; we are also aggressors in some instances.

- Social media platforms and accounts can be used to gather intelligence for national security concerns as opposed to shutting them down as they arise.
- National security register – an example of how perhaps the AI issue can be dealt with by creating a registry for all AI technologies monitoring system.
- Government doesn't necessarily need to be the ones providing the scrutiny. Parliament has significant convening power to scrutinize such issues.
- You cannot pick and choose which human rights you stand up for or which country's sovereignty matters more. Principles matter.
- Practical challenge of parliamentary scrutiny over national security is the ability or the lack thereof to access classified and sensitive documents and intelligence.
- Due process being the pillar of democracy especially when it comes to national security issues.
- Moving away from the crown prerogative and toward codifying abilities of the national security and intelligence community empowers the community while also strengthening democratic values.
- Human rights and national security are not polar opposites. It is about proportionality and necessity when it comes to balancing individual rights and protecting the public.
- Disruption v. prosecution.
- Ensure audit body understands access rights of the auditor.
- Practicality of access to documents, including clearances, etc.
- Reporting mechanism – can you actually report? Aggregate data? Risks to overcome?

DAY 2

Session 5: National Security Challenges and Solutions in Small Jurisdictions

This session explored the unique challenges faced by small jurisdictions in maintaining national security, including limited resources, vulnerability to external influences, and regional cooperation. Delegates were encouraged to share practical strategies, innovative solutions, and lessons learned to enhance security in small jurisdictions.

Session 6: Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict

This session addressed the pressing issue of violence against women and girls in conflict, including safeguarding women in the armed forces. Experts discussed the challenges faced by women and girls, such as sexual violence and exploitation, and proposed strategies to mitigate and prevent such violence. The session equipped parliamentarians with knowledge and touches on practical strategies to inform policy development.

Session 7: Budgeting Exercise

This session focused on strategies for prioritising national security needs and optimising resource allocation. Delegates learned how to evaluate cost-effectiveness and efficiency to ensure maximum impact from the allocated resources based. Two scenarios were explored, the first, making the most of limited resources, the second, identifying priorities when resources are not the issue.

Session 8: Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

This session explored effective strategies for achieving sustainable peace in conflict-affected regions. Experts shared insights into the root causes and dynamics of conflicts, highlighting successful case studies of peacebuilding initiatives worldwide. Discussions delved into the role of parliamentarians as well as other stakeholders, the importance of gender-responsive and inclusive approaches, and lessons learned.

Session 9: Climate Change and National Security: Risks and Adaptation Strategies

This session highlighted the intersection of climate change and national security. Delegates gained a comprehensive understanding of the risks posed by climate change, such as resource scarcity, displacement, and social instability. They also explored strategies for adapting national security policies to address these challenges effectively.

Delegate observations from day 2:

- There is no global applicability for national security strategies.
- Most states are small and so large states like Canada don't have applicability to them.
- Limited resources and small scales.
- Small organizations and lack of expertise force toward generalist administrations.
- High personalism, close social relationships and multi-functionality contribute to informal governance.
- Lacking economies of scale, limited resources and personalism pressure toward centralization.
- Small states have to stay open for trade – less negotiation power.
- Cooperation between small states can reduce risk.
- Case study - Seychelles:
 - Two types of small states – islands and land-locked and both have unique challenges.
 - Islands – mostly economy by ocean/sea and most challenging to protect borders because of ease of access.
- Role of peace agreements in violence against women and girls – spectrum between prevention and prosecution.
- Include more women in peace processes – lack of political will to make that happen.
- Culturally sensitive strategies depending on where they hail from.
- Stakes in different regions establish priorities for intervention by the global north.
- The global north picks and chooses which countries' human rights they want to protect based on their financial interests and geopolitical interests. It weakens their credibility.
- Men need to take ownership of the issue.
- Women in military.
- Tokenization of women.
- Ex. Afghanistan war to liberate women but look at where they are now.
- There is a difference between working in different spaces on this issue and working in silos on this issue.

- Challenges in Africa – diversity and generational trauma – legacy of colonialism and colonialization – resource related conflicts.
- What is the role of the African union?
- Truth and reconciliation as a method of building peace in regions. The parameters depend on the region and their distinct challenges.
- Parliamentarians from across the world use conflict and division to divide and conquer – social media makes it easy for them to do so.
- The implementation of truth and reconciliation findings and recommendations is the biggest challenge in achieving peace. There need to be political will and resources dedicated to it.
- To what extent do misinformation and disinformation campaigns impact national security in the context of climate change. Climate deniers as an example.

DAY 3

Session 10: Building Cyber Resilience: National Strategies and International Cooperation

This panel discussion explored the importance of building cyber resilience through national strategies and international cooperation. Experts discussed the role of legislation, public-private partnerships, and information sharing frameworks in enhancing cybersecurity capabilities. Parliamentarians gained a broader understanding of the measures necessary to protect their nations' critical infrastructure and information systems.

Session 11: Scrutiny in Practice: Climate Change and Defence Committee Hearing Briefing

During this briefing session, the purpose, content and structure of the committee hearing exercise was explained by Ashlee Godwin, Head of International Affairs Committee and National Security Hub, UK Parliament.

Session 12: Scrutiny in Practice: Committee Exercise

This exercise used freeze frame methodology and was also facilitated by Ashlee Godwin.

Session 13: Regional Concerns Roundtable

Within their respective breakout groups, parliamentarians engaged in facilitated group discussions to delve into region-specific national security concerns. They shared insights, experiences, and best practices while addressing challenges such as regional conflicts, terrorism, transnational crime, and border security.

Presentations on Regional Good Practices and Collaboration Opportunities

Following the group discussions, participants reconvened to share their findings and insights. Each breakout group presented regional good practices and collaboration opportunities identified during the discussions. Parliamentarians gained valuable knowledge of successful approaches within their regions and explored avenues for enhanced cooperation across the Commonwealth.

Recap and Action Plan for Future Collaboration

The programme concluded with a closing session where participants discussed the key takeaways from the three-day programme. Parliamentarians collectively developed an action plan for future collaboration, identifying areas of mutual interest and potential joint initiatives to strengthen national security within the Commonwealth. The session reinforced the importance of continued cooperation and knowledge-sharing among Commonwealth Parliaments in addressing shared security concerns.

Delegate observations from day 3:

- The UK deals with attempted hacks in all sectors of government regularly, very much like Canada.
- The government duty is to respond. For example – reporting on threats from different countries.
- Willingness by citizens to freely give up their personal information impacts cyber security.
- Education and media literacy is key.
- Ex. Banning TikTok from parliament means national security community cannot monitor it and so cannot prevent the threats posed to parliamentarians on it.
- State actors v. non-state actors.
- Regulation is not the answer to everything – actors with bad intentions are not going to follow regulations.

Conclusion

Through their participation in the workshop, both delegates had the opportunity to make presentations on the subject matter of the conference using their experience as Canadian parliamentarians. They also learned about practices in other parliaments around the Commonwealth through discussion with the various experts and delegates from all countries. The two delegates played an active role in the discussions and in exchanging best practices during the rigorous discussions that took place throughout the program.

There were also opportunities to experience the work of the UK Parliament in practice; for example, delegates observed Prime Minister's Questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Alexandra Mendès, M.P.

Chair of the Canadian Branch of the
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	Commonwealth Conference on Parliamentary Scrutiny and Oversight of National Security
DESTINATION	London, England
DATES	November 21 to 23, 2023
DELEGATION	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Iqra Khalid Rob Morrison
STAFF	
TRANSPORTATION	\$4,668.70
ACCOMMODATION	\$3,373.20
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$1,633.74
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$498.69
TOTAL	\$10,174.33