

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

**Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association**

**Washington, D.C., United States of America  
December 11-13, 2017**

# REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

The Canadian delegation to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA), attended the annual Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum (the Forum) in Washington, D.C., held 11-13 December 2017.

Organized by the Atlantic Council of the United States and the National Defense University, the Forum provides NATO parliamentarians with the opportunity to engage in dialogue with policy experts and United States (U.S.) government officials to deepen their understanding of U.S. national security and foreign policy issues impacting Alliance affairs<sup>1</sup>. The evolution of U.S. foreign and defence policy since President Trump's 2016 election was a primary focus of this year's Forum.

The Canadian delegation was led by **Ms. Leona Alleslev, M.P.**, which included – from the Senate – **the Honourable Senator Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu** and **the Honourable Senator Jane Cordy**, and – from the House of Commons – **Mr. James Bezan, M.P. and Mr. Colin Carrie, M.P.** The delegation was accompanied by Jean-François Pagé, Association Secretary, and Katherine Simonds, Advisor to the delegation.

## SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

### A. U.S. Strategy in a Changing World

The Forum opened with a panel discussion on the increasingly volatile and unpredictable global security environment and explored how the forthcoming U.S. National Security Strategy would seek to address these threats. From the Alliance perspective, NATO is facing challenges on both sides of the Atlantic and from the north, east, and south. Global terrorism, cyber threats, hybrid warfare, and shifting balances of power are undermining the rules-based international order, according to the speakers. As an alliance of like-minded countries who share common values, including the rule of law, democracy, and human rights, the panelists underscored the need for NATO members to remain steadfast in their commitments to collective defence. One delegate emphasized that no nation can face the challenges of the future alone. While the U.S. has reaffirmed its commitment to collective defence under Article 5, some delegates observed that there was a growing tendency for the U.S. to view its relationships with allies through a transactional lens.

Delegates were reminded that burden sharing has emerged as a major focus of current U.S. collective defence policy, particularly whether or not NATO allies are meeting the 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) defence spending target agreed to during a recent NATO Leaders' Summit. U.S. interlocutors emphasized that security in the North Atlantic is a shared responsibility, and that Article 3 of the Washington Treaty commits member states to maintaining and developing their individual and collective capacity to

---

<sup>1</sup> The Transatlantic Forum is conducted under Chatham House Rule. This report, therefore, highlights the key themes of the discussions without attribution.

resist armed attack. While defence spending trends in the European Union (EU) have risen in recent years, 12 NATO member countries have not yet put forward any plans to meet the Wales Summit Defence Investment Pledge.

The panelists encouraged NATO parliamentarians to do their part to ensure that the Alliance is capable of responding to modern challenges and to bolster solidarity amongst member states.

## **B. Challenges in the Middle East**

Several issues were raised in the context of NATO's southern flank. Participants agreed that there was room to expand NATO's role in the Middle East, including through intelligence coordination, logistics training, and enhanced contributions to NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan.

One panelist declared that Daesh had lost 99% of the territory it once controlled since the Global Coalition Against Daesh (the Coalition) was formed, and that 7.7 million people once under their control had been freed. In addition to the military campaign, the Coalition's 75 partners are pursuing four lines of effort. For example, at the height of the conflict, 40,000 foreign fighters had moved into Iraq and Syria to support the caliphate. In response, Coalition members are working to stop the flow of foreign terrorist fighters and have developed unique information sharing arrangements to prevent foreign terrorist fighters from moving across borders. Participants mentioned that Turkey has been instrumental in the effort to stop the flow of terrorist fighters. Additionally, counter-finance and counter-messaging mechanisms have also been employed to restrict Daesh's financial and human resources. Humanitarian and stabilization efforts are ongoing, and it is expected that reconstruction will require long-term commitments. Despite the Coalition's successes, the international community must prepare to address the next stage in the evolution of Daesh's strategy, panelists warned.

Delegates heard that the U.S. was increasingly viewing Iraq and Syria through the prism of Iran's armed interventions and Russian influence in the region. According to one speaker, the significant drawdown of Russian troops in Syria is unlikely to occur until President Assad holds power across the whole country. Panelists were more optimistic about the political and security situation in Iraq, but noted that reconstruction needs were significant, and concerns about Iran's influence remain. In order to maintain the positive momentum garnered in Iraq, speakers recommended that the international community commit to long-term engagement and provide capacity building support for state institutions, including the security sector.

Panelists also discussed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a U.S. perspective. One speaker underscored that President Trump views an agreement between the two sides as "the ultimate deal." Delegates inquired about the viability of this outcome in light of the U.S. announcement to move the American Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, which had resulted in increased tensions in the region. One speaker contended that no real achievements had been made in terms of negotiations between Israel and Palestine since Camp David in 2000, and that the recent announcement would move the negotiations forward. Other participants suggested that the decision was taken largely for domestic political purposes.

### **C. U.S. Defence and Deterrence Strategy**

Panelists and parliamentarians examined how the U.S. defence and deterrence strategy was adapting to address key international security threats and emerging power dynamics. One speaker suggested that Russia and China continue to believe in spheres of influence and have adopted a pre-1914 view of great power relations. As such, this expert believes that both Russia and China are seeking to regain power in ways that undermine the interests of NATO. Another panelist told delegates that since World War II, the U.S. defence and deterrence strategy has been guided by ensuring favourable balances of power through alliances with like-minded nations. At the same time, the U.S. is now seeking to make sure these alliances are more equitable. While NATO members share a common history, they also share a common responsibility, said one panelist.

Global terrorism, the instability stemming from the refugee and migrant crisis, and Russian revisionism were identified by experts as the most pressing challenges to the NATO Alliance. Delegates were urged to guard against the threat of disunity amidst Russia's disinformation campaign. Speakers argued that NATO must remain relevant, and the U.S. strategy in this regard is to focus on maintaining advantages in areas of competition, leveraging partners, and making the Alliance more agile. In 2018, the U.S. had committed to augmenting capabilities to improve Allied deterrence, ground force posture, and joint effectiveness. The speakers commended those delegates whose countries had put forward what they viewed as "realistic plans" to meet Wales Summit defence spending commitments and targets in the future.

### **D. Redefining U.S. Relations with China**

U.S.–China relations were also a focus during the Forum. In summarizing the current context, one expert said that under President Xi Jinping's consolidated authority, China has emerged as a major economic and military power, and that the U.S. must adjust its policies to respond to this reality. Another participant cautioned that although China is positioning itself to take on a more active global leadership role, its economy may already be stagnating. For example, China's debt amounts to 300% of GDP and many Chinese banks hold a significant amount of uncollateralized debt.

Some experts suggested that China's foreign relationships are positive overall, and its hard power is increasing. One participant indicated that since 1996 – when President Clinton sailed naval assets through the Taiwan Strait following a Chinese missile launch in Taiwan's trajectory – China has engaged in two decades of military modernization. One participant claimed that China is pursuing the military capabilities necessary to win a war over Taiwan if required and has built up its navy and ballistic missile forces to do so.

In Southeast Asia, particularly among ASEAN members, there has been a collective shift towards China. While the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership was damaging to relations between the U.S. and some Southeast Asian states, U.S. officials contended that it was focusing on bilateral engagement in the region.

Much of the discussion concerning U.S.-China relations centered on North Korea. The panelists stressed that North Korea's commitment to developing nuclear weapons and missiles was astonishing, and that their rate of advancement had been anticipated by few. Experts described North Korea's antagonizing actions as being motivated by the desire for prestige and recognition as a legitimate nuclear state. In order to avoid legitimizing North Korea's actions, speakers underscored the importance of maintaining sanctions, particularly those that inhibit North Korea's ability to earn foreign currency through China. China had recently been pressured to stop buying coal and crustaceans from North Korea – a change welcomed by the international community. The role and influence of China in North Korea was discussed extensively. Some panelists were of the view that China was concerned about damaging its relationship with North Korea, while others urged participants not to overestimate China's influence, considering the partnership between Russia and North Korea.

### **E. Russia: A Foreign Policy and Domestic Challenge to the Alliance**

Russia's ongoing destabilization efforts in Eastern Europe and beyond was a major theme of discussion throughout the Forum. Speakers provided an overview of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election as well as discussing the resulting additional sanctions that the U.S. had recently placed on Russia. Russia's hybrid warfare tactics, weaponization of energy supplies, and continued modernization of its nuclear and conventional military capabilities pose a threat to NATO member countries, according to the panelists.

Some participants felt that NATO member countries should explore opportunities to engage in dialogue with Russia. However, the panelists advised that meetings with Russia should not take place until it had demonstrated concrete behavioural changes, such as: honouring arms control agreements and confidence-building measures; taking constructive steps in Syria; and placing increased pressure on North Korea.

The impact of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) was discussed, and delegates heard that the eFP is successfully signaling Allied solidarity to Russia. The utility of sanctions was deliberated at length, with some participants expressing concern about "sanctions fatigue." NATO and the EU represent obstacles to Russia's expanded power in Europe, and experts suggested that robust support should be offered to partner nations that are especially vulnerable to Russian pressure. Experts recommended that going forward; Allies should continue to invest in modernizing NATO capabilities, including the NATO Response Force, logistics, and transportation. In particular, the Alliance should focus on: ensuring quicker decision making; increasing readiness levels; and enabling the rapid deployment of forces across borders.

### **F. U.S. Trade Policy**

Forum participants also learned about the Trump Administration's trade agenda. The speakers underlined that American trade policy is a priority issue for President Trump and that he is concerned about U.S. trade deficits stemming from free trade agreements. As such, the U.S. has withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), put on hold the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the

U.S. and European Union, and pivoted to bilateral trade agreements with key partners. Some participants noted that the severity of U.S. trade deficits had been exaggerated in certain cases, such as in the case of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The speakers explained that from the U.S. perspective, unfair trade barriers were impacting U.S. exports. In response, the U.S. was focused on identifying where trade barriers could be eliminated to increase trade and investment for all parties involved.

The U.S. is also examining Chinese trade policies and practices, participants were told. Distortion of subsidies of state-owned enterprises, product dumping, and World Trade Organization rules violations were among the issues raised, and the interlocutors suggested that the U.S. and the EU could work together to address some of these concerns. Opportunities to negotiate a bilateral free trade agreement with the United Kingdom following Brexit are also being explored.

### **G. The U.S. Environmental Agenda**

Delegates heard from a panel of experts focusing on U.S. environmental policies. One panelist reasoned that the Trump Administration's view of environmental policy is inextricably linked to its energy policy priorities, and that the U.S. is striving for "energy dominance" by capitalizing on the abundance of resources it has, such as coal and liquid natural gas (LNG). A growing focus on nuclear fuel as well as coal would require significant investments, possibly amounting to "bailouts" for some companies, one panelist argued. It was suggested that this approach could shift the cost of re-opening plants to the taxpayers, discourage investment in renewable energy, and stifle productivity in the energy sector. Another speaker contended that enhanced American LNG exports could be used to counter Russian energy geopolitics.

"Cooperative federalism" was a term introduced by one speaker to describe the increasing role played by states in energy policy as a reaction to the federal government's rollback of certain energy and environmental regulations. When asked whether the Trump Administration views climate change as a threat multiplier, one panelist explained that the Pentagon continues to account for climate-related stressors such as food and water shortages, or the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters, in its assessment of risk.

### **H. The Digital Revolution, Social Media and Politics**

Debates about the influence of the digital revolution on media and politics featured heavily throughout the Forum. Participants agreed that social media has had a remarkable impact on traditional journalism. Issues related to big data analytics, "clickbait" tactics, and the anonymity associated with social media platforms were discussed. Several delegates expressed concern about the use of botnets to spread "fake news." A range of possible countermeasures were considered. Panelists mentioned that social media companies could play a larger role in developing standards, and that governments should decide whether to regulate these issues.

### **BRIEFING AT THE CANADIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Canadian delegates participated in a briefing session hosted by the Canadian Ambassador to the United States, David MacNaughton. Ambassador MacNaughton, along with other senior officials from the Canadian Embassy, provided an update on the status of NAFTA negotiations and key issues in the Canada-U.S. defence and security relationship.

## **CONCLUSION**

The annual Transatlantic Forum is a strategic opportunity for NATO parliamentarians to reinforce the Alliance's enduring commitment to the transatlantic link. By meeting with their counterparts and engaging experts, Canadian delegates gained valuable insight into the priority issues facing the U.S. – Canada's closest defence and security partner – while at the same time promoting Canadian interests and values. The 2017 Transatlantic Forum allowed legislators from NATO member countries to engage in frank discussion about the diverse challenges facing Allies at a time of shifting geopolitics, and to identify priorities for robust cooperation in the lead up to the NATO Brussels Summit in 2018.

Respectfully submitted,

Leona Alleslev, M.P.  
Chair of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association

## **Travel Costs**

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Washington, D.C.
<b>DATES</b>	December 11-13, 2017
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu, Hon. Jane Cordy
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Leona Alleslev, James Bezan, Colin Carrie
STAFF	Jean-François Pagé, Katherine Simonds
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	\$ 13,072.42
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	\$ 7,462.31
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	\$ 0
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	\$ 2,612.30
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	\$ 0
<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>	\$ 1,942.13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 25,089.16</b>