

Canadian NATO  
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire  
canadienne de l'OTAN

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation  
respecting its participation at the Transatlantic Forum  
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)  
Washington D.C., United States of America  
December 6 – 7, 2010**

# Report

## INTRODUCTION

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Parliamentary Assembly (PA) sponsors the annual Transatlantic Forum, which is usually held in early December in Washington, D.C., at the United States (US) National Defence University (NDU). The event is hosted by the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) of the NDU and the Atlantic Council of the US.<sup>1</sup> The Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum provides NATO parliamentarians with the opportunity to discuss US national security policy issues impacting alliance affairs, with senior US government officials.

Again this year, from 6-7 December 2010, a Canadian delegation participated in the forum. This year it was led by Mr. Blaine Calkins, M.P., and included Mr. Claude Bachand, M.P., Mr. LeVar Payne, M.P., Mr. Mario Silva, M.P. and Mr. Peter Stoffer, M.P. The delegation made numerous interventions in every session of the forum.

## THE PROGRAM

The two-day Forum program covered a wide range of issues. On the first day, the first session featured an overview of the US-European relationship and the US global agenda. A senior official from the US State Department noted that NATO plays a key role in US national security policy, particularly in US efforts to 're-set' relations with Russia. Nonetheless, some European participants wondered if increased US activity in the Pacific would lead to reduced American interest in Europe. The State Department official said that US Pacific interests would not be pursued at the expense of good relations with Europe.<sup>2</sup>

In the second session, a US assessment of the Lisbon NATO Summit was delivered by a senior Department of Defense official.<sup>3</sup> He reinforced the notion that NATO is a central pillar in US national security policy and noted that the new strategic concept adopted by NATO in Lisbon gave the alliance a workable and achievable roadmap for the future. He also felt that NATO re-engagement with Russia and the agreement on transition in Afghanistan were significant successes.

A former NATO Assistant Secretary General for Defense Investment admonished NATO members for reducing their defence budgets at a time when, in his view, increased spending was needed. His characterization of NATO as a military alliance met with some criticism from those who saw NATO as more of a political alliance that needed to find a better balance of 'hard' and 'soft' power. Many parliamentarians recognized the presence in some countries of 'voter-fatigue' over defence spending,

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<sup>1</sup> See the NATO PA Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum website at <http://natopa.ibicenter.net/default.asp?SHORTCUT=22>. See the NDU website at <http://nduweb03.ndu.edu/index1.cfm>. See the Atlantic Council of the US website at <http://www.acus.org/>

<sup>2</sup> See the National Security Strategy of the US at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See information on the NATO Summit in Lisbon at [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_67814.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_67814.htm).

particularly in the face of rising budget deficits, increasing costs and frustrations regarding long-term nation-building in Afghanistan.

Session 3 focussed on US involvement in the international arms control agenda. A US Assistant Secretary of State in the Department of State reviewed President Obama's long-term vision of a world free of nuclear weapons. For the present however, Russian strategic nuclear forces remain active and the US must accordingly remain alert and responsive. In a spirit of cooperation, the US and Russia signed a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) in April 2010, the ratification of which, according to the speaker, was a priority for the final session of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress.<sup>4</sup> Since the expiration of the old START in December 2009, there have been no US strategic arms inspectors in Russia and no Russian strategic arms inspectors in the US, thereby leaving the world's two largest nuclear powers without a framework of cooperation, a situation she characterized as clearly undesirable for the world.

A US Special Envoy is working for a new Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty with Russia. The US hopes that any new CFE agreement will be based on the principles of maximum transparency; reaffirmation of host-nation consent for the deployment of foreign forces on their territory and the establishment of a limitation or restraint regime of some kind.

Session 4 focussed on Afghanistan. A US Army general officer explained that, as the US military 'surge' reaches its peak, the strategic and tactical momentum has been reversed against the Taliban, particularly in Helmand, Kandahar, Kabul and the eastern provinces. He cautioned, however, that any degree of success cannot be confirmed until we see the results of the 2011 'fighting season' that begins this spring. The poppy harvest occurs in May. Heavy fighting, if it is to come, is expected in June.<sup>5</sup>

The US military strategy has abandoned the notion of an 'exit strategy' in favour of a 'transition strategy' that may begin in June 2011, if circumstances are favourable.

A senior State Department official described US challenges in integrating their 'joined-up' civilian and military missions in Afghanistan. He identified their priorities as being education, health services and governance. With regard to governance, the US is looking to 'certify' selected Afghan ministries before they receive US development assistance funding. Accountability remains an important issue in the fight against endemic corruption in the Afghan government.

Finally, another US official outlined the existence and role of a US task force aimed at eliminating corruption in Afghanistan. As well, he claimed the overall poppy growing area in Afghanistan was noticeably declining.

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<sup>4</sup> The US ratified the new START in December 2010. See the US Department of State website on the new START at <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/newstart/index.htm>. See also "Controlling Weapons of Mass Destruction," on the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade website at <http://www.international.gc.ca/arms-armes/control-controlle/index.aspx?lang=en>.

<sup>5</sup> Current Canadian information on the military mission in Afghanistan can be found at <http://www.comfec-cefcom.forces.gc.ca/pa-ap/ops/jtfafg-foiafg/index-eng.asp>.

Session 5 was the final session of the first day, the subject of which was US relations with Israel, the Arab World and Iran.<sup>6</sup>

A US National Security Council official explained that the US has a three track approach to peace in the Middle East. First, US efforts related to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict focus on four core issues: territory, security, refugees and the status of Jerusalem. The US favours a two-state solution that includes a secure Israel. The second track addresses Israel-Syria tensions. The third track aims to help the Palestinian Authority to build national institutions from the 'bottom' up. Furthermore, the US has provided significant support to the training of a Palestinian security force in the West Bank.

Another National Security Council official discussed the US strategy toward Iran, which is based on the notion that Iran's exercise of its rights should be accompanied by Iranian recognition of its responsibilities. The US strategy is dual-tracked. One track offers incentives for good behaviour, while the second track imposes penalties for bad behaviour. In the US view, apart from the fact that the Middle East is volatile at the best of times, other Arab countries in the region do not want Iran to have a nuclear weapons capability. Talks with Iran have been conducted within the '5+1' framework – the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) plus Germany – but have not yet produced any meaningful or positive outcome.<sup>7</sup>

The second day, 7 December 2010, began with Session 6, devoted to an exploration of US-Russia relations.

It seems the US is somewhat frustrated by what it sees as Russian backsliding on issues of human rights and freedoms in the Russian Federation. It is also disappointed that Russian troops remain on Georgian territory.

On a more positive note, a prominent scholar of Russian affairs from Georgetown University highlighted the fact that Russia was currently engaged in its most significant military reform since 1860. It is moving from the model of a massed tank army to one with an expeditionary capability. According to this scholar, Russia currently spends about 4% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defence, an amount that remains vulnerable to volatile oil prices. Russia is also hoping to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), a move that could generate 3% growth in its GDP, according to this expert. The scholar noted that Russia currently has the 10<sup>th</sup> biggest economy in the world, but it is only the 36<sup>th</sup> largest trading partner of the US.<sup>8</sup>

However, he also claimed that despite this positive news, Russia still suffers from endemic corruption. There are also 'problems' looming in the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections. Expert observers are not yet sure if Vladimir Putin will once again run for the presidency and subsequently further solidify his grip on power. If this happens, broad American engagement of Russia might become more problematic.

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<sup>6</sup> See the US Department of State Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/index.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> See "No real breakthrough as 5+1 talks on Iran end," *Deutsche Welle*, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,6291682,00.html>.

<sup>8</sup> See US Department of State information on relations with Russia at <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/>. See Government of Canada information on relations with Russia at <http://canadainternational.gc.ca/russia-russie/index.aspx?lang=eng>.

US defence spending was the focus of Session 7. Discussion began with an expression of concern that the US had to get its fiscal house in order so that it could continue to pursue existing international commitments. One speaker characterized the challenge by invoking a quote he attributed to Winston Churchill, who is reputed to have told his war cabinet, “We have run out of money, so now we must think.”

Apparently, the US defence budget represents about 20% of the overall federal budget, but it constitutes nearly 50% of discretionary spending. There is an ongoing effort to reduce defence budget baseline by about \$100 billion, a magnitude that will demand significant cuts, such as those in the US nuclear missile arsenal, recently negotiated with Russia. Military manpower may fall by as many as 100 thousand personnel, including the repatriation of about 50 thousand personnel currently stationed in Europe and Asia. In addition, two particularly sensitive areas are being targeted for funding cuts – pay and health care benefits.

A senior official from the Department of Defense described a more traditional approach to budget cutting, whereby funding is based on requirements found in the overall national security strategy, which identifies US global interests and subsequently defines commitments, which are then prioritized. The US will continue to build adaptable sea, land, air and cyber forces that can be projected abroad. According to the official, none of these capabilities can be cut or discarded, but priorities can be assigned. Today, those general priorities are: 1) prevail in current conflicts; 2) prevent future crises; 3) prepare the force; and 4) preserve the force. Key enablers such as intelligence, logistics, communications and research remain important throughout.

A former Department of Defence senior official presented interesting views on the status of the all-volunteer US armed forces, characterizing them as a peace-time force. In his view, a volunteer, professional force is ‘nice to have’ and workable only in so far as resources and capabilities allow. Ultimately however, the US must remain capable of mobilizing national power in situations of dire need. At the same time, he recognized that the US can no longer act entirely unilaterally in world affairs. In fact, he described the US as ‘morphing’ from a super-power to a super-partner.

The last session, Session 8, featured a roundtable of prominent US journalists, whose comments were centered on the recent Congressional mid-term elections and the relative success of the Republican Party. There was some conjecture as to whether the so-called ‘Tea Party’ would live up to its billing as fresh catalyst for change in Washington. All were agreed on the fact that partisan political narratives were now starting to be developed for the 2012 presidential campaign period.

## **SUMMARY**

The US intends to maintain its global influence by rebounding from the worldwide economic downturn, continuously adapting its armed forces to meet contemporary requirements of the evolving security environment and engaging a growing roster of partners in various regions of the world. NATO remains a cornerstone of US international policy and a key element in US attempts to ‘re-set’ its relations with Russia.

Canadian values and interests are directly and indirectly affected by US global policy. It is therefore of some considerable advantage to Canada to have knowledgeable

parliamentarians attend the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum each year, to engage American policy makers in informed discussion and present Canadian views during discussions.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Senator Joseph A. Day  
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

## Travel Costs

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| <b>ASSOCIATION</b>                           | Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)  |
| <b>ACTIVITY</b>                              | Transatlantic Forum  |
| <b>DESTINATION</b>                           | Washington D.C., USA   |
| <b>DATES</b>                                 | December 6-7, 2010   |
| <b>DELEGATION</b>                            |  |
| SENATE                                       |  |
| HOUSE OF COMMONS                             | Mr. Blaine Calkins, M.P., Mr. Claude Bachand, M.P., Mr. LeVar Payne, M.P., Mr. Mario Silva, M.P. and Mr. Peter Stoffer, M.P. |
| STAFF  | Mr. James Latimer and Mr. James Cox  |
| <b>TRANSPORTATION</b>                        | \$16,091.19  |
| <b>ACCOMMODATION</b>                         | \$2,937.76   |
| <b>HOSPITALITY</b>                           | \$0.00   |
| <b>PER DIEMS</b>                             | \$1,552.84   |
| <b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>                        | \$0.00   |
| <b>MISCELLANEOUS /<br/>REGISTRATION FEES</b> | \$900.03   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                 | \$21,481.82  |