

**DEFENCE AND
SECURITY**

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**SUB-COMMITTEE ON
TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY AND DEFENCE
COOPERATION**

VISIT TO HALIFAX, CANADA

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Defence and Security Committee Subcommittee on Transatlantic Security and Defence Cooperation visited Canada from 25-28 September. Led by Subcommittee Chair **Sven Mikser** (Estonia), the delegation of fifteen members of parliament from member and associate countries met with military commanders, government officials and independent analysts. The delegation also toured several vessels at the Canadian Forces Base in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

2. Most of the discussion focused on Canada's ongoing plan to revitalize its military over the next five years. The government plans to spend an additional 12 billion Canadian dollars over the next 5 years. A significant part of this plan is to increase the active duty force by 5000 and the reserves by 3000. The military is being restructured to better cope with emerging dangers and improve jointness between the services, and improve its ability to work with other government ministries that may be involved in security operations.

3. Other meetings focused on the peculiar situation of Canada as a country with a huge land and sea area, middle-sized population and proximity to the United States (US). The delegation was repeatedly made aware of the consistent efforts of Canada to maintain a distinct foreign and security policy from that of the US, while at the same time accommodating the reality of the tremendous degree of interdependence between Canada and the US. The vast majority of Canada's foreign trade is with the US and maintaining a free flow of people and goods across the border is of the highest importance.

II. MEETINGS WITH CANADIAN MILITARY OFFICIALS

4. Several themes were consistently emphasized during the meetings with the Commander of Joint Task Force Atlantic **Rear Admiral Dan McNeil** and his staff. First, Canada is increasing its defence budget by 12.8 billion Canadian Dollars to fund much needed improvements in its defence capabilities. Second, Canada is committed to participating in international missions. Third, Canada is working to improve joint operations between the branches of the military and with its international partners. Fourth, Canada is consistently aware of its close relations with the US and strives to maintain an independent voice and policy within the context of a highly interdependent relationship.

5. Canada recently created the Marine Security Operations Center (MSOC) based in Halifax. The MSOC is a joint facility that brings together all of the government entities responsible for the marine areas of Canada including the Coast Guard, Border Security Agency, Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Ministry of National Defence. It provides a single secure location where the representatives from those bureaucracies can collect, share and assess information regarding potential threats to Canadian security and enhance their common awareness of any situation. The MSOC collects and distributes data on shipping as it approaches Canadian waters with several days advance notice. This gives authorities time to assess and focus on vessels that have a higher probability of carrying contraband or otherwise be engaged in activity that could harm Canada or the US. The MSOC has close bilateral arrangements with its sister organization in the US and the two are working to improve their interoperability through officer exchanges and other programmes.

6. Questions from the delegation focused on cargo screening and cooperation with the US. There is clearly never enough time to screen all cargo and only three percent of all cargo is actually screened before entry into Canada. Solid intelligence and analysis is critical to focus attention on the most likely targets. Canada has a close relationship with the US in this regard, and the level of cooperation is increasing. Canada receives a considerable amount of intelligence

from the US and is at times challenged to cope with all of the information provided by the US exchange officers stationed at the MSOC.

7. Like most other Alliance members, the Canadian armed forces are going through a process of military transformation. The goal is to improve Canada's ability to participate in international operations and secure its national territory. Military commanders briefed the delegation on the significance of the base at Halifax, which in itself represented a transformative step in joint operations. It combines the strengths of the military services and also draws on the strengths of other government ministries and departments with related portfolios. The military is also being restructured into six task forces and Halifax is home to the Joint Task Force Atlantic. The current structure is being reformed to break down the stovepipe organizational structure to improve joint planning, training and push operational decision-making down to the regional task force level. The point of this is to develop a more efficient and responsive force that can better combat terrorism and the problems arising from failed or failing states.

8. Other concrete steps are being taken as well. A critical issue is expanding the size of the military. Over the next few years, Canada plans to increase the size of the active duty force by 5,000 and the reserves by 3,000. This will give the military additional flexibility as participation in international operations is stretching current forces. There is some concern about how quickly the force can be increased and the effects of training on the current force. Trainers will have to be drawn from the existing force which could put further pressures on current operations.

III. MEETINGS WITH FOREIGN AND DEFENCE POLICY EXPERTS

9. The delegation also met with several academics and former military officers now resident at Center for Foreign Policy Studies including retired **Vice-Admiral Duncan Miller** and retired **Commodore Eric Lehre**. Some of them cast some doubt on the military's plans for additional spending and transformation objectives, noting that much of the above mentioned spending increase is pushed into the last two years of the plan. They were also critical of the procurement system and noted the very serious need to add more personnel to the armed services.

10. They also voiced some concerns about how the role of Canada in the international environment is perceived by the general Canadian public. They noted the lack of interest in security issues and that NATO was for most Canadians, simply "off the radar". In addition, they were concerned that Canadian perceptions of their forces as peacekeepers was not in line with the reality of the situation. According to the presenters, Canadians tend to think of their troops as involved mainly in peacekeeping operations that are less risky than combat operations, but these operations in fact entail significant risks and can rapidly shade into combat operations. There were concerns that this misperception would impact on support for the Canadian mission in Afghanistan as it takes over some operations from the US in the turbulent southern part of the country.

11. Questions from the delegation focused on issues of interoperability. In particular, some members of the delegation were concerned about worrisome trends in procurement in Europe that worsened interoperability. Vice-Admiral Miller shared those concerns and noted that in his experience interoperability is usually the last priority in procurement decisions and is often overridden by political considerations. He added that it took a complete legislatively mandated reorganization of the US Department of Defense (Goldwater-Nichols Act) to make push interoperability between the military services in the US. As important as it is, he believed that there is a widespread lack of political will to push interoperability as a key point in procurement decisions. Commodore Lehre added that despite this interoperability between NATO members is infinitely higher than between NATO members and non-NATO countries, and he cited his personal

experiences in exercises with Asian militaries. But he agreed that interoperability was at risk, particularly as advances in network centric warfare push the US, the UK, Canada and a few other allies further ahead of the rest of the Alliance.

12. Several experts in Canadian foreign policy emphasized how Canada's geography and demographics place it in a unique position. It shares a 5000-kilometer border with the US and has a very large national territory to control include vast coastlines. Yet, compared to this huge territory it has a relatively small population. Canada is also highly economically interdependent with the US. Most of its international trade is with the US and it is critical to the Canadian economy to keep a free flow of goods and people across the border. The US is highly dependent on trade with Canada and would suffer from delays or closures of the border, but Canada depends even more on this cross-border traffic for its economic well-being.

13. **Professor Denis Stairs** of Dalhousie University gave the delegation an overview of Canadian foreign policy with an emphasis on the driving factors. Canada has a different perspective from that of the US. In basic terms, Canada is not a super power and has a political orientation more like that of Europe than the US in many ways. As a middle-sized country it has a keen interest in multilateral institutions that it can use to maximize its influence. Regardless, the overwhelming imperative is to maintain a useful relationship with the US. Eighty-eight percent of Canada's trade is with the US and there is tremendous horizontal integration between businesses on both sides of the border. The trade is in the range of 1.5 to 2 billion Canadian dollars per day. Canada's continued economic prosperity depends on the free flow of people and goods across the border.

14. Therefore, Canada often finds itself in the position of having to reassure its southern neighbour that Canada is doing all it can regarding security, particularly regarding counter-terrorism. This is important even if Canada is not a target of terrorist activity. If there was a terrorist incident in the US and the perpetrators entered the country through Canada, the likely result would be a significant tightening of the border with serious consequences for Canada.

IV. MEETINGS WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

15. Canada and the US work very closely on border security cooperation. **Greg Goetbe** of the Border Security Agency described how they built a "21st century border" by focusing on potentially problematic persons or cargo and allowing the vast majority of the traffic move across the border with minimal inspections. Through cooperative US-Canada programs, shipping companies and individuals can apply to be pre-cleared by both governments. Canada and the US have integrated border enforcement teams that operate on each other's territory and facilitate cooperation and information sharing. The two countries are also taking additional steps to ensure a common approach to risk assessment. Part of this cooperation extends to Mexico as well, so there is increasing cooperation on preventing and responding to threats in the broader North American region.

16. **Michael Eyestone** of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs briefed the delegation on the broader changes in Canadian foreign policy. The main emphasis is on securing Canada's place in international affairs by better focusing its limited resources. Canada will enhance its relationships with up and coming powers such as India, Brazil and China, while at the same time adjusting its defence policy to better cope with new threats. More funding and personnel will be directed towards international affairs, but those resources will be better targeted. Diplomacy and engagement in international forums will be more focused on securing outcomes rather than simply engaging in the process for its own sake. Development assistance is also slated to come under better management. He cited an increased emphasis on return on investment and instead of

simply measuring the volume of aid. He also noted that no amount of aid can take the place of the private sector and that assistance should help create the conditions for investment. In the long term this will lead to sustained development.
