



Conference of Defence Associations Institute

OPENING STATEMENT

TESTIMONY OF

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TO THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL DEFENCE

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Chair, Honourable Members:

It is a privilege to be asked to appear before you today to speak to the issue of NATO's Strategic Concept and Canada's Role in International Defence Cooperation. The subject is an important one. Canada is entering a period in international affairs when a return to first principles on security and defence policy, and an un-blinkered appreciation of Canadian national interests, are essential to ensure the future safety and security of citizens.

Before proceeding further, we should take a minute to explain who we are, a matter that sometimes gives rise to confusion.

The Conference of Defence Associations is the overarching organization of Canada's retired

defence professionals. It currently comprises 14 member and 38 associated organizations, among whom are such groups as the Air Force Association of Canada, the Canadian Infantry Association, the Navy League of Canada, and the Royal Canadian Legion. Since it was founded in 1932, the CDA has established a reputation as the "Voice of Defence".

In 1987, the CDA created the CDA Institute to serve as an independent think-tank on defence and security issues. Its functions are research and education, and its principal asset is its Board of Directors comprising over 40 former military officers, diplomats, government officials, academics and business leaders. The Institute is a registered charity and receives no grants from any agency of government.

One final note: neither the CDA nor the CDA Institute speaks for the defence industry of Canada. That is the function of the Canadian Association of Defence and Security Industries (CADSI) and other industry associations.

Strategic Concept 2010

This coming weekend, NATO will be holding a Leaders' Summit in Chicago. This will be the 25th NATO summit since the first was held 55 years ago. No official schedule attaches to the timing of the summits, but in recent years they have become almost annual events.

The last NATO summit was held in Lisbon in November 2010 – when NATO Leaders approved a new Strategic Concept for the Alliance. “Strategic concept” is a military term of art describing the purpose and intent behind a future longer term course, based on an estimate of global trends. A strategic concept is usually enunciated in broad terms to provide a framework for the specific measures to be taken, whether military, diplomatic or other.

NATO has issued seven Strategic Concept documents since its founding. Like the summits, no agreed timetable governs their issuance. Typically, they emerge from a sense that new developments require the Alliance to alter course – and that Leaders should provide guidance on the way ahead.

SC 1991 appeared in response to the end of the Cold War. SC 1999 reflected the dramatic developments of the 1990s and the beginning of NATO's expansion eastward. SC 2010 sought to take account of the transformative events of the post 9/11 world; NATO's unexpectedly arduous, complex and lengthy campaign in Afghanistan; the dissension among members surrounding the invasion of Iraq; and the realization of the costs and limitations of certain types of “out-of-area” military operations.

SC 2010 was notable for asserting that the Alliance has three principal tasks:

- To defend its members against all threats,
- To address the full spectrum of crises, before, during and after conflicts, and

- To enhance international security through partnership with relevant countries and other international organizations.

If these sound traditional, only the first regarding common defence is actually so. Since inception, most allies have seen the business of NATO to be the defence of their territory in Europe. Assuming responsibilities further afield is not something most want the organization to have much to do with. Tasking the Alliance with addressing the full spectrum of conflict, including rebuilding war-torn societies, and with developing ties to partners outside Europe, take most NATO members far outside their traditional comfort zone.

The emphasis placed on wider global engagement reflects how far thinking within the Alliance has travelled since the end of the Cold War. The irony is that Allies in fact are a lot less inclined to contemplate expeditionary operations today than they were ten or twenty years ago. There is a war-weariness among NATO member-states as a result of the campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya – and the international financial crisis has driven reductions in NATO countries' defence budgets from between 9% and 28%, with commensurate reductions in military capabilities. These reductions, in turn, have forced member-states to consider whether there are more effective solutions to resolving their defence problems – and to sharpen their thinking about what actually constitutes “the national interest”.

It's not unreasonable to wonder, therefore, whether there is a disconnect between the shifts in the world addressed in SC 2010, NATO's aspirations, and member-states' willingness to resource them at a time when they find themselves in tight financial circumstances and are taking a much narrower view of how their national interests are affected by events elsewhere.

Which brings us to the Chicago summit, where this matter is likely to dominate discussion.

The Chicago Summit

The summit is scheduled to kick off at mid-day on Sunday (May 20) and conclude mid-afternoon on Monday. In addition to leaders from the 28 member-states, another 30 or so heads of state and government from other countries have also been invited to attend. So, it is to be a 24-hour meeting with as many as 60 participants. Not exactly an occasion for deliberative decision-making.

Summit agendas are notoriously prone to being overtaken by late-breaking developments. But whatever Leaders end up discussing, the product of the meeting will be a lengthy Summit Declaration covering just about every issue that matters to the Alliance. NATO planners have flagged three of these for special attention: Afghanistan, future military capabilities, and partnerships with countries and institutions outside of NATO.

One can be sure officials and ministers have been working diligently for weeks to bridge differences among allies over these issues. If there are still matters to be settled, Leaders themselves will likely take them up at the much smaller G8 summit at Camp David on Friday and Saturday.

Afghanistan

On Afghanistan, it is about two things:

First, whether individual Allies will continue to provide forces to combat the insurgency and to train the Afghan national army and police so that they can assume responsibility for their country's security by the end of 2014. Some troop contributing nations have already announced they are moving up the date for withdrawing their forces, some to 2013, some even to 2012. Prime Minister Gillard of Australia has announced that the bulk of Australian forces are to be withdrawn in 2013, a year earlier than planned. During the recent electoral campaign in France, François Hollande said that if elected president he would withdraw all French forces by the end of this year. Both are due to attend the summit.

The second dimension of the Afghanistan issue is what kind of future support individual Allies will be willing to commit to. The Afghan

government and its security forces cannot survive in the short to medium term without continued heavy financial assistance from the outside. On May 1, the United States signed a "strategic partnership agreement" with Afghanistan pledging to provide military and economic assistance for ten years – though without specifying the nature and amounts involved.

The desire to draw down in Afghanistan is not surprising, with public support for the Afghan mission declining across the Alliance and economies struggling to survive. In the circumstances, it is doubtful the Chicago summit will break new ground on the issue.

Military capabilities

On military capabilities, historically few Allies have had forces which could be deployed overseas. The major exceptions have tended to be the US, UK, and France – and to a lesser degree Canada, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain (with Germany capable but constitutionally constrained). Today, of the two million men and women under arms in Europe, only a few hundred thousand can be employed effectively, supplied efficiently, and fight purposefully away from home.

The Lisbon summit approved measures to deal with some of NATO's most pressing gaps in military capability – ballistic missile defence, intelligence collection, surveillance and reconnaissance, maintenance of readiness, training and force preparation, effective engagement and force protection. In conditions of financial constraint, the solution NATO has settled on to help close these gaps is an initiative entitled Smart Defence.

In brief, Smart Defence proposes that Allies accord national priority to closing NATO-wide capability gaps, and that they do so through arrangements among themselves to achieve common solutions through specialization, avoiding duplication, and achieving economies of scale. Specialization could be a recipe for doing less with less, but it does offer the possibility of developing new capabilities through nations funding together what they could not on their own – for example, heavy

airlift. It should be noted, though, that NATO does not dictate to sovereign states, so the success of Smart Defence is completely reliant on how many states choose to sign on.

Some examples of Smart Defence are worth noting. The British and French are already well advanced in various cooperative arrangements and common funded projects which seek to reduce their reliance on US-supplied capabilities – a matter of importance to the United States itself as it faces its own fiscal demands in the midst of undertaking its “strategic pivot” to Asia. The changed mindset on which Smart Defence depends is also on display in an agreement reached between the Germans and Dutch. Henceforth, German tanks will defend Holland, the Dutch will disband their tank battalions, and the savings will be invested in improving the anti-missile systems of Dutch frigates which could be deployed on NATO missions.

Meanwhile, very substantial reductions in military capabilities are under way throughout NATO, with little evidence that cuts are dictated by strategic thinking rather than simply fiscal constraints.

Partnerships

On partnerships, leaders at Lisbon launched a reform of NATO’s so-called partnership arrangements with countries on its periphery in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, and with selected “partners across the globe” making special mention of Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, amongst other nations. They also undertook to enhance NATO’s ties with the UN, the OSCE and the EU.

Some progress was made on this front at a NATO foreign ministers’ meeting in April 2011, and NATO has begun to organize what it calls “28 + n” events with non-member states wishing to participate in consultations on anti-piracy and other common problems. At issue is whether NATO is willing to put the mechanisms in place to allow non-member states full participation in NATO decision-making on operational issues.

What the Chicago summit will conclude on each of these fronts remains to be seen. But it would not be surprising were the Summit Declaration:

- to reaffirm NATO members’ unwavering commitment to the cause in Afghanistan, while acknowledging individual member-states’ right to support the cause in their own way,
- to laud the merits of Smart Defence as the way to bridge the capabilities-resources gap, while expressing understanding for the financial difficulties Allies find themselves in, and
- to resolve to build stronger ties with non-member states, especially those who have been contributing to ISAF, but drawing the line at any fundamental change in how NATO takes decisions.

Canada’s role in international defence cooperation

What does all this mean for Canada and its role in international defence cooperation?

The first point to note is that NATO has always been a means to an end – not an end in itself. The Alliance has been democratic states’ most valuable political and military organization, first for the successful defence of Europe and then for providing the stable environment allowing the peaceful reintegration of the Soviet captive nations into the European system. Over the years, NATO has supplied the political decision-making mechanisms, common operational doctrine, and standardization of equipment to allow an eclectic group of states to function together as arguably the world’s most effective instrument for international peace and security.

This is as true for Canada as for any other member-state. Canada’s membership in NATO has been good for Canada’s security and has given Canada a voice on decisions affecting its security it would not otherwise have had. This has been the case since the government of Louis St. Laurent chose NATO over other

possible options for a defence alliance for Canada in the dark days of the late 1940s.

We do not doubt that NATO continues to serve Canadian purposes, and that Canada should remain in NATO for the foreseeable future. It is one of the principal pillars of the international collective security regime on which we rely. But that is not to argue that Canada should necessarily continue to accord NATO the priority in future that it has in the past. We joined NATO for very pragmatic reasons – it suited our security interests at the time. The same pragmatism, we believe, should govern our appreciation of what our security interests in the 21st century might require.

The world has moved on, our interests have changed, and we should start thinking about the defence arrangements we will need to protect those interests.

Canada's stake in a secure Europe has always been high and remains so today. That is why we twice went to war in Europe, why for decades we stationed troops there, and why defence ties with Europe remain strong.

Meanwhile, Canada has growing security interests elsewhere.

- First, there is work to do at home. North America today is as much a “theatre of operations” as any other continent. Since 9/11, a host of new national and bi-national defence and security arrangements have been put in place building on the foundation of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence created in 1940 and NORAD established in 1957. But the territory and maritime approaches of Canada remain poorly monitored and defended.
- Second, the Arctic is more important to us than it used to be, while also becoming more vulnerable as development occurs, access to the Northwest Passage increases, and boundary disputes become more acute.
- Third, the Americas are commanding more and more of our attention for political,

economic and security reasons – perimeter security being but one example.

- And fourth, trade and immigration are shifting Canada's focus from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The Asia-Pacific region now accounts for four of our largest trading partners, eclipsing our levels of trade with any other part of the world except the United States. The Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative and our eventual participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership will only accelerate these trends. Immigration across the Pacific is booming.

Our appreciation of these trends, however, has not been matched by consideration of how to protect the interests they have exposed. We believe a fundamental rethink of Canada's national security strategy is in order.