

Halifax International Security Forum

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The Honorable Leon Panetta, U.S. Secretary of Defense, makes his opening remarks during the launch of the third annual Halifax International Security Forum.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay opened the three-day Halifax International Security Forum on 18 November with an evaluation that “this Forum comes at a difficult time when we must find ways to be more productive, more agile and more nimble. Most of us struggle to decide the how [to do that], and that is the *raison d’être* to this forum, to bring people together in an informative, intelligent and calm way to discuss these important and sensitive issues and to learn from each other.”

MacKay was speaking to 300 participants from 40 nations – political and military leaders, academics, principals of business and non-governmental organizations, and media. They tackled some 30 topics in open discussions and several off the record sessions. Those attending in person and by Internet were treated to a series of major discussions by some of the world’s leading thinkers, leaders, writers and practitioners of the international community.

Democracy

Many discussions revolved around the revolutions and civil protests throughout the Arab world (Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania,

Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Western Sahara, and of course, Libya). This movement has been named Arab Spring.

It is now ten years since the tragedy of 11 September 2001. During that decade, military operations were initiated in Afghanistan and Iraq, and a series of catastrophic financial failures, beginning with the U.S. institutions Fannie Mae and Freddy Mac, were followed by a previously unimaginable series of sovereign debt crises throughout Europe. The advent of ubiquitous social media allowed individuals to report everything they see others around the world. “[This] is a source of continual disruption the likes of which we have never seen before, and we are only beginning to get a handle on how we have to prepare to respond... It’s the ability of individuals to connect with each other in ways that mean you can have consistent, rolling social and political movements that governments have never encountered before,” suggested Princeton University’s politics and international affairs professor, Anne Marie Slaughter.

Enthusiastic western democratic governments can be forgiven for wanting to encourage and accelerate progress towards democratization, but Zaffar Abbas, editor-

in-chief of the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn*, cautioned that “you cannot enforce or impose democracy or it will collapse” a reality that western governments, development and aid organizations sometimes fail to remember.

The creation of democratic governments, institutions, culture and society is an unavoidably slow and difficult process. It began in England with the Magna Carta of the 13th century and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and along the way there was the English Civil War (1642-1651); the United States shook off the fetters of British colonialism with the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution.

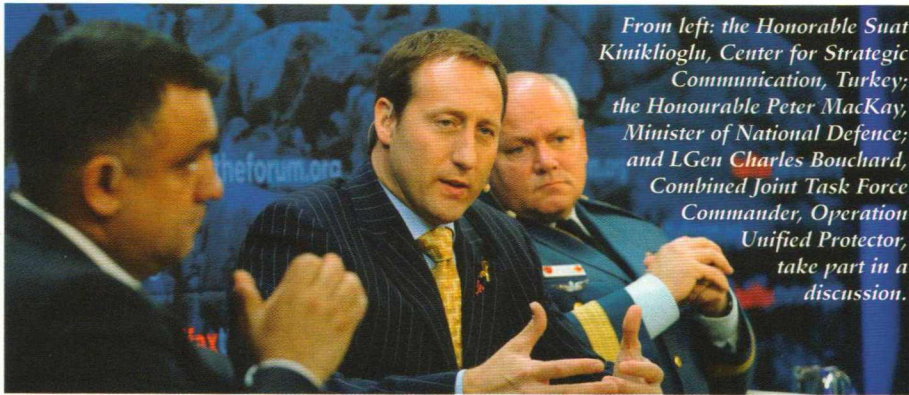
The Forum concluded that the Arab Spring was not a uniform phenomenon across the Middle East – each one launched independently against the various dictatorial regimes within its region. No two revolutions were alike, with Egypt now facing challenges that come with operating under a new form of military government, and Tunisia making noticeable progress under its new civilian authority. Libyans and Syrians, on the other hand, experienced very different responses to their demands for social and political reform.

“There are huge challenges moving forward despite positive dynamics. Countries like Egypt and Tunisia have little chance of collapsing while transitioning [to democracy], but it’s different in Syria,” noted Paul Salem, director of the Carnegie Middle East Centre in Beirut, Lebanon.

The rebels in Libya demanded an end to violence and urged authorities to respect human rights. They wanted to ensure the safety of foreign nationals; allow the safe passage of humanitarian supplies and the lifting of restrictions on all forms of media.

“Libya should not be a blueprint for the future,” cautioned Canadian Lieutenant-General Charles Bouchard, who was commander of the Combined Joint Task Force for NATO’s *Operation Unified Protector*. “Libya is just one more campaign in which we need to draw some valid lessons learned, apply them collectively, and engage into the future [...] This was a NATO success but the victory belongs to the people of Libya. They won the war, now they have to win the peace as well.”

Sheik Mohammad Abu Luhoum, head of Yemen’s Justice and Building Party, suggested that the international community has a moral responsibility to have faith in these aspirations for freedom, and that



From left: the Honorable Suat Kinklioglu, Center for Strategic Communication, Turkey; the Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister of National Defence; and LGen Charles Bouchard, Combined Joint Task Force Commander, Operation Unified Protector, take part in a discussion.

the “Arab Spring will bridge the gaps in misunderstanding.”

Missing from the discussion, however, was acknowledgement that the aftermath of a revolution seldom fast-tracks the introduction of democracy. The French Revolution (1789) was followed by the Jacobean Reign of Terror, The Russian Revolution (1917) ushered in the repressive Stalinist government, and the Cuban Revolution (1958) brought the Castro regime to power.

The key to avoiding this previously inevitable step is to continue the constructive engagement between the international community and the nations emerging from the Arab Spring. While each nation’s effort at social and political reform is different, all need to remain engaged with democratic countries and with people who hold democratic values. It will take effort, the Forum concluded, to ensure that these countries keep moving in a positive direction.

Speaking about the very different situation in Syria, Radwan Ziadeh, founder and executive director of the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies, suggested “the international community has a responsibility to prevent the civil war rather than managing the civil war later on. It’s clear that the Assad regime will not stop the killings because he is investing in the civil war by continuing the killings.”

Freedom House president Paul Kramer agrees and told of his concerns about the perceptions among the people in the Middle East. He spoke of the June 2009 gathering in the streets of Tehran with people holding signs asking President Obama which side was he on. “We shouldn’t leave in doubt which side we are on,” Kramer expressed intensely. “We stand with the people who are opposing these authoritarian dictatorial regimes that engage in gross human rights abuses.”

Economy

The economy was the second major theme to the Forum, with participants expressing concerns for urgent action to address the financial meltdown in Europe, the debt crisis and how these events are affecting global markets and financial security.

This discussion preceded the U.S. Congress’ “Super Committee” deadline for voting a \$1.5 trillion in deficit reductions. America’s real estate market collapse two years ago created a global domino effect of financial consequences. Today, the Eurozone is dealing with serious infrastructure questions that are impeding economic recovery, and at the same time, the U.S. is about to embark on a presidential election with two profoundly divided parties. The international community is concerned that fundamental disagreements between the Republicans and Democrats will complicate the economic situation on a global scale.

“One thing we’ve seen is that the markets are thriving, or rather reacting to, the uncertainty in the Eurozone . . . there is no confidence in our ability to get out of [the economic recession]” observed Dr. Alan Mendoza, co-founder and executive director of the Henry Jackson Society, a non-partisan organization that promotes democratic geopolitics.

There is a direct link between economy and security. As national economies struggle with meeting increasing costs of governing, service delivery, and infrastructure, there is a needs-assessment of the cost of both national and international security.

With the level of interconnectedness and integration of the global economy, no nation is immune to the fiscal difficulties that the United States underwent and that the Eurozone is currently experiencing. This will inevitably lead to further discussions about cuts to defence budgets.

Smart Security

Canada’s Defence Minister Peter MacKay and U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta spoke to the need for increased creativity, resourcefulness and collaboration to maintain a credible level of international security, or “smart security.”

Smart security was initially identified as an alliance-wide requirement at the Munich Security Conference last February, when NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen spoke about fiscal challenges being faced by governments throughout the world. He warned against drastic defence cuts, advising that Europe would be “divided, weaker and increasingly adrift from the United States,” leaving European governments less capable of defending their populations against new threats. He introduced the concept of “smart defence” that it would enable member governments “to work better, more effectively and efficiently together.” NATO’s role in this debate would be to set the strategic direction, to identify possible areas of cooperation, [and] to act as a clearing house and to share best practices.”

James Hoge Jr., chairman of Human Rights Watch, expressed the “hope that, in this age of austerity, less money doesn’t mean less security.”

The question was raised if smart security in this age of austerity is possible with nations slashing budgets. The future will call for carefully pared national defence budgets and nations to work more closely to meet common challenges and avoid duplication in defence spending.

Will NATO’s role in this era increase in importance as countries look for innovative ways to spend less while meeting finance challenges of their individual nations? Can NATO meet the need as a common agency to coordinate the international security demands of the alliance and its members while avoiding compromising security?

The United States, as the global economic engine and the principal military power in the world, as well as NATO, has a unique position on the global stage. Former U.S. presidential hopeful John McCain spoke of America’s vision “to maintain a strong NATO, and even expand NATO, but recognize that counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency are now the highest priorities” of the 21st century. In addressing the reform movement of Iran, he said, with obvious regret: “the fact that we did not

give the demonstrators in Iran our moral support when a young woman named Neda bled to death in the streets of Iran will go down as one of our greatest mistakes of the 21st century.”

The Forum noted that as resources become more critical, NATO member countries will have to become more involved. Increased collaboration will allow nations to meet serious economic issues together. But it was recognized that resources are becoming more critical and alliance nations may not be able to rely on NATO to address common challenges while they reduce support for military and humanitarian missions. This points to increased levels of burden-sharing – with shrinking defence budgets, partner nations are having to accept increased operational responsibilities. As Dr. Liam Fox, U.K. Member of Parliament said, “The message must go out to all NATO allies: We cannot all have the same insurance without us all paying the same premiums.”

One possible way to reduce the defence onus on the collective public purse would be to increase the investment in soft power to alleviate the need for military power. Military equipment and technology are expensive, the Forum averred, while soft power tools and techniques can be equally effective, at a fraction of the cost. “Development and aid need to be put together and spent together,” said Slovenian Defence Minister Ljubrica Jelusic, “to make life better for other people.”

U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta voiced the new reality of the 21st century’s age of austerity, “The reality is that the United States military alone cannot be all things to all nations. We will sharpen the application of our resources, better deploy our forces in the world and share our burdens more and more effectively with our partners. And, frankly, all our allies need to do the same.”

The International Security Forum was successful in creating a collaborative environment for international dialogue on shared global concern. **FL**

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