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Speech

by

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It is an honour for me as the speaker of the Senate of Canada to have this opportunity to speak at this plenary session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. One of my predecessors to serve as Speaker of the Senate of Canada was Senator Wishart McLea Robertson who was the first elected president of this Assembly.

Before making a few remarks, I would like to extend a heartfelt welcome on behalf of the people of Canada and their Parliament. I also hope that, at some point, during your busy schedule of hearings and discussions, you have had the opportunity to sample and enjoy some of the many offerings of this wonderful city and its environs. As you may have already noticed, Québec City holds a special place in the hearts of all Canadians.

One might also consider that it was in this historic city where the Quebec Conference of 1943 took place that the roots of the Alliance were planted.

Not long ago I had the opportunity to visit NATO Headquarters where I had the good fortune of meeting, among others, General Ray Heneault, Chair of the Military Committee and former Chief of the Canadian Defence Staff, Admiral Robertson, and Deputy Secretary General Rosso. Needless to say I was most impressed with the dedication to service shown by the Alliance leadership and their staff. It is this dedication that has helped our Alliance deal with its many challenges. I did take this opportunity to underscore my belief that NATO Headquarters must develop and deliver a robust communication programme.

As we all know, current Alliance discourse has come to be structured by two major historical moments; the end of the Cold War and the tragedy of September 11, 2001. These events have forced us to re-examine the principles according to which we manage the international environment. The conflicts in the Balkans taught us that ethnic hatred can still prove to be a far stronger motivator than reason when it comes to human relations. 9/11 taught us that our once "vaunted security" is far more vulnerable than we had thought. In addition we also have to come to grips with a variety of so-called "non-traditional" security threats, including environmental degradation, global warming, potential pandemics, failed states, trans-national crime, and so on.

As a consequence we have adopted a vocabulary informed by a broader and more subtle set of concepts than previously possible. Today, we speak of human security, capacity building, the sanctity of the individual, multilateralism, and the need to hold the authority of states themselves accountable.

We no longer accept the notion that the pursuit of genuine security for human beings, as individuals, is necessarily subversive of the foundations of international society. Intervention in the behaviour of states to protect individuals is now deemed an accepted principle of international relations. In fact, Rwanda has taught us that it can, at times, be an obligation. These views entail far more than the musings of disaffected intellectuals and idealists. They are attempts to come to terms with a reality we do not fully comprehend nor feel entirely comfortable with. What we are certain of is that today "security" means coming to terms with forms of domination and insecurities that had long been ignored or sacrificed on the altar of realpolitik.

The Westphalian order is over. Its legacy, the primacy of the state in strategic thinking, permitted a gap to develop between the meanings of the term security as applied to individuals and its meaning for the state. We now understand that for security to make sense at the international level it must make sense at the basic level of the individual human being. Thus, when attempting to understand the complexities of security threats we need to look for our raw data not only in the perceptions and histories of statesmen and diplomats; we also need to take into account the experiences of those rendered insecure by the present world order.

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We rightly continue to speak of the importance of foreign aid, but, we now also accept the fact that the principle of state sovereignty can be breached in order to save those victimized by the “state” and its agents. Human security, first and foremost, entails “physical security” – the basic security of the individual.

All too often, governments have claimed immunity from their abrogation of human rights by appealing to the international law principle which forbids intervention in the internal affairs of a recognized state. While not suggesting the abandonment of this principle, it is today possible to argue that international law protects the Sovereign people, rather than the government which rules them. Security that sacrifices individual human rights is not real security. Long term stability cannot be achieved by strategies that alienate and dehumanize segments of a nation’s citizenry.

The language of realpolitik is slowly giving way to the more nuanced and humanitarian principles of soft power and human security. This new lexicon has enabled us to widen our horizons and to put on the table security concerns formerly relegated to subsidiary, if any, relevance. It is, in part, because of this rethinking that we can seriously ponder the implications of a variety of so-called non-traditional threats for our long term “common security” interests.

This is not to suggest that we can divine a magic formula that will forever end internecine conflict and inter-state wars. It is simply to argue that we need to adopt new principles and methods for dealing with crisis situations and to ensure that the institutions charged with their implementation are functioning properly.

I was most encouraged when looking at the range of topics covered by your various committees. It is apparent that the members of this Assembly are giving careful thought to both current and future challenges.

The one most obvious characteristic of NATO is its expansion. This has proven an extraordinary success. Expansion has brought like minded nations together in common purpose and, one suspects, that further expansion is only a matter of time.

I had the privilege of visiting Croatia not long ago and meet with Her Excellency Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, Croatia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, who will be speaking shortly. I also took a run on one of Croatia’s navy’s “corvettes”. As we all know, Croatia is on the list of potential entrants, along with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. I share the hope of this Assembly that the Riga Summit provide these countries clear guidance as to when they can expect invitations to join.

NATO has had many accomplishments in the post-Cold War era. However, these are not always well known by our respective publics. We need to do more when it comes to spreading the good word about our Alliance. The responsibility lies both with individual parliamentarians and the executive. We need to have a more robust communication strategy with which to inform our publics of the work of NATO.

Finally, it is imperative that we provide our militaries the means with which to carry out their missions. As we Canadians have seen in Afghanistan, especially in the southern province of Kandahar, the difference between peace-making and war is a very thin line; indeed I think we can safely conclude that it has been erased. We therefore need to ensure that the men and women of our respective militaries are properly equipped and trained, and, when injured, receive the best possible care.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you well in your most important work. If quality of achievement is a determinant of being listened to, then I am certain that the assembled at Riga will be paying attention.

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