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International security forum establishes Halifax as world-class city

[By Tim Dunne](#)



Fabrice Pothier, head of policy planning for NATO, Alberta Premier Alison Redford, and United States Senator John Barrasso hold a session at the Halifax International Security Forum in Halifax on Nov. 17. (THE CANADIAN PRESS)

Some say that the recent annual Halifax International Security Forum (HISF) is a waste of funds, a waste of time and a waste of a weekend. They are wrong.

According to a former Republican U.S. presidential contender, Senator John McCain, the HSIF is “one of the world’s more important meetings” of military and civilian leaders, decision-makers, advisers and senior journalists. Forum president Peter Van Praagh defined it as “about the relationships that are fostered and strengthened; the ideas that are articulated and challenged; the insights and information that inform real decisions made by leaders on the front lines, around the world.”

Over the past several years, Halifax has attracted several interesting meetings and conferences concerned with international issues.

NATO’s Committee of the Chiefs of Military Medical Services brought more than 150 medical practitioners from some 50 nations to Halifax in 2008 for their biannual meeting.

Dalhousie University’s Centre for Foreign Policy Studies hosts an annual maritime security conference to look at the many issues and challenges facing nations that use the oceans for their commerce.

NATO’s Combined Joint Operations from the Sea Centre of Excellence and the Centre of Excellence for Operations in Confined and Shallow Waters conducted their second international conference in June; it brought together marine security specialists and seafarers from the military and business sectors to discuss issues of global maritime security.

The HISF annually provides a forum for an “informal, unscripted, discussion-based atmosphere that encourages interactive and free-flowing exchanges.” Participants meet for two days “to focus on pressing security issues,

conduct bilateral meetings, and network.”

Conceived and hosted by Defence Minister Peter MacKay, conference attendees recognize there are some continuing problems, such as the Middle East peace process, international terrorism and uncertainty in Afghanistan and Pakistan. But, MacKay notes, things are also changing in ways we couldn't foresee at the end of the Cold War in 1989. These changes will alter the perceptions and realities that we have become accustomed to since then. New weapons and new methods of warfare can overturn our thinking about military operations.

The world has become less predictable, more threatening, and increasingly complicated and unstable. Canadians are not immune to transnational crime, terrorist activity and maritime piracy that jeopardize this nation's peace, order, and our way of life.

The HISF consists of about 300 people from more than 50 nations, representing governments, militaries, the international academe, journalists and non-governmental organizations, brought together into what both Van Praagh and MacKay call “a community.”

The forum addressed security issues such as the Syrian civil war, the emerging economic and military power of China, energy security, cyber security and warfare, and the missing presence of women in the government and governance of emerging democracies.

HISF provided a platform for open and candid discussions by high-level representatives like U.S. senators McCain and Mark Udall (D-Col.); Afghan Defence Adviser Abdul Rahim Wardak; French General Jean-Paul Paloméros, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, and their Canadian counterparts.

MacKay noted that HISF, now in its fourth year, “has evolved into the premier event for leaders and experts to discuss the most relevant, urgent global security issues ... and Halifax provides the perfect atmosphere for the exchange of ideas that will inform the thinking and decisions of key leaders around the world.”

Halifax has been a strategic city throughout its two and a half centuries. In the beginning, it was the gateway to British North America; home to the British Navy during the War of 1812; starting point for the Second World War naval convoys that sustained Britain and enabled the Allied operations on D-Day; the historic home of the Royal Canadian Navy's Atlantic fleet and a centre of excellence for Cold War anti-submarine warfare capabilities.

This city and this province are also home to a prominent and progressive defence, security and aerospace family of industries that is a major player in national and international military equipment programs and is in competition with similar industries in other provinces and in other nations.

HISF reinforces Halifax as a strategically important city and a world-class centre for discussion and deliberation about international security, where leaders, thinkers and journalists can benefit from the combination, collaboration, convergence and collision of ideas and ideologies.

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