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Keynote Speaker - The Impact of Climate Change on Canadian-U.S. Defense

The Honorable John McKay

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KEYNOTE SPEAKER – THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON CANADIAN-U.S. DEFENSE

The Honorable John McKay

MR. PETRAS: And now it is time for our luncheon keynote presentation, which is going to take another and different look at the impact of climate change, that from the perspective of national security and national defense.

And to introduce our afternoon keynote luncheon speaker is our own executive committee member, former Secretary of Defense for Canada, former Attorney General for Canada, Peter MacKay.

(Applause.)

MR. MacKAY: Thank you very much, Stephen. I want to thank the Institute and everyone for being here for this important discussion. I have the real pleasure to introduce John McChi or McKay, depending on how you like to pronounce it.

John, I used to get his mail as often as I got mine when we served in parliament. Actually, he has been a lawyer and a lawmaker for over 21 years in the parliament of Canada, elected six times, perhaps soon to be seven. John has served on numerous parliamentary committees, but more than that, what I know of John is that he is tremendously committed to public policy making, to his community of Scarborough and Guildwood, Ontario. He has been an active parliamentarian, somebody who very much took part in some of the difficult and contentious debates that should happen in our legislatures.

And he has been a leading voice on very important issues around public policy. He is also in my estimation underestimated in terms of the contributions that he made to private members bills, which I can tell you are very rare birds.

It is difficult for an opposition party member, let alone even a member of the government, who doesn't sit in the cabinet to bring out legislation in the parliament of Canada. John has done something that I don't think any of the parliamentarians have accomplished in over 150 years.

He was able to move to legislation two bills, one while in opposition and another while a member of the government, one involving an important public policy matter that was little known, and that was flammable cigarettes. And there are hundreds of people who have died as a result of cigarettes that would ignite. And John brought in legislation to curtail that. He also worked in many compassionate areas, areas around social responsibility that Larry and others have referred to, social responsibility that brought about greater corporate action and accountability. And most recently, he has been working on a bill that touches very near and dear to my heart -- my wife is a human rights activist -- and it has to do with modern slavery, one of the real scourges that undermines our society, the modern slavery that goes on in our countries but around the world, is truly an area that requires much greater attention, much greater legislation, and much greater focus.

And while John and I were on opposite sides of the aisle, we crossed paths many times throughout our political career and even crossed swords on occasion, in parliament and in committee.

That there can never be any doubt is that John McKay's commitment and perseverance is for the betterment of his community, his country, and the world. He has traveled extensively on parliamentary committees to places like Africa and impoverished regions with a mind to try to help and to move in a positive direction.

And so I am very pleased and we should all be very thankful to be here to present on important issues around national security and defense that are very much impacted by the effects of climate change, and we will need people like John to continue to lead this effort in government.

So ladies and gentlemen, please welcome John McKay.

(Applause.)

MR. JOHN MCKAY: Thank you, Peter, those are the nicest words you have said about me in year.

(Laughter.)

MR. JOHN MCKAY: Peter's and my appreciation for each other sort of dipped when he was the minister of defense, and I was the liberal party's critic for defense. But we have since regained ground I have to say.

Peter, I was heartily pleased when you retired in 2015 because now I, too, don't have to send your mail back to you, and I am so sick of saying I am not Peter MacKay. I am not asked at any more, so thank you.

And it is good to see that everybody has got a life after politics. I see my friend Joe over here. It is just delightful to see him. Joe is one of the most thoughtful guys that the House of Commons has ever had in the history of the House of Commons.

And I saw John Godfrey here -- oh, there he is, he is still here. John was our intellectual bread bank, and whenever you wanted to talk about climate change, you talked to change, and Martha -- is Martha here as well?

There is Martha, and my good friend Jim, so all of whom seem to be extraordinarily well, and for those of us who are facing an election and maybe having that issue face us, it is encouraging and a comfort to see all of you here.

Now, it is a little intimidating to speak after experts. I will not make any profession that I am in any way, shape, or form an expert on climate change; did want to -- and this is the commercial announcement from the government of Canada having just tabled a budget -- you know how people say I am really pleased to be here. Thank you for the invitation, and they always say that in the beginning. You have no idea how pleased I am to be here.

We just came through a 36-hour voting marathon, and I had to say with my whip "I have to be in Cleveland on Friday. So that means I have to get out from this voting marathon, and because you are such a prestigious organization, he felt he had to release me.

But the national defense in the 2020 budget is committing \$225 million to infrastructure projects, which is something I want to talk about over the next few minutes, to reduce the department's carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent from 2005 levels -- 2005 levels by 2030.

But before I talk about why I am here, I wanted to talk about the permanent joint board of defense, and I am told that there was a -- okay. And I am told that clicker here -- oh, that's your clicker. This is my clicker. Oh yeah. -- we have a clicker. Clicker doesn't work. Does anybody --

DEAN SHCHARF: Press the big green button.

MR. JOHN McKAY: I am pressing the big green button. Ah, there we are, all right.

So the permanent joint board of defense of which I have the honor to co-chair was formulated -- formed in 1940 by Prime Minister McKenzie King and President Roosevelt, and you will see that the third person in that picture, barely recognizable picture in that picture is, of course, Winston Churchill looking at the conversation between the two best friends.

McKenzie King and President Roosevelt, both of whom were Harvard men, both of whom vacationed together, both of whom had a really strong relationship with each other; not quite comparable to the current relationship I might say.

(Laughter.)

MR. JOHN McKAY: And McKenzie King had the realization that regardless of the outcome of World War II, Canada's security interest would necessarily transition from being part of the British empire to being part of the continental defense of North America. Both came from political aristocracy.

It goes without saying that President Roosevelt was political aristocracy. McKenzie King was the grandson of William Lyon McKenzie King, who in 1837 led a rebellion against the British and briefly declared Canada as a Republic.

For his troubles, he had to leave Canada until the British got -- until the British calmed down for his omnipotence. No less, McKenzie King felt that as Canada transitioned, we would have to have a joint way of managing the defense of North America.

Winston Churchill as you can see was none too happy with the prospect. President Roosevelt at that time was very concerned about the undefended West Coast of Canada, so if you can imagine from the Alaskan panhandle down to the U.S. border, was a largely undefended space, and he felt that something had to be done about that.

And so in some respects, this was the genesis for the permanent joint board of defense, which meets on an annual and sometimes more frequent basis than every year and has met since 1940.

To give the importance that it deserved to this consultative body, the direct lines of report were from the Canadian co-chair directly to the prime minister, not through the minister of defense, not through anybody else but directly to the prime minister and the America co-chair directly to the president of the United States.

Now, my current co-chair is General Chris Miller. And it is the senior advisory body on continental defense that you've never heard of. All modern militaries include climate change in their planning.

So after we go through the various international issues facing both of our militaries and after we go through our hemispheric discussions, also all facing our

militaries, the reason that this body is so effective is that at the end it draws up a to-do list, an accountable to-do list.

But it probably accounts for 80 years of success. One of the most significant changes -- and of course, there are literally more changes than you can imagine facing Canada, and the United States in military planning is planning in the Arctic. And I think this is a map that possibly we don't look at enough.

Canada has had the great security fortune of having ocean -- having the Atlantic Ocean on one side, the Pacific Ocean on the other and this great mass of ice to the north. And it has served us well as a, if you will, security blanket.

However, with climate change and advances in technology, there has been major developments in the Arctic, and as you know from-- as you know, the climate change in the north is particularly exaggerated.

If you will, the north puts the change in climate change because there is so much happening by virtue of the melting that is going on with the polar ice cap, and what were literally frozen border conflicts are no longer frozen.

And so just to name three, Hans island, which you can barely find on the line between Canada and Denmark, sort of around Alert, there is a one kilometer square island literally in the middle of nowhere to which both Canada and Denmark claim jurisdiction. It is not likely that we are going to be going to war with Denmark over that. Nevertheless, it does give you a notion of why these things are difficult.

The Alaska Canada border, now Canada, wants to draw a straight line, straight up, straight north. United States wants to draw another line, which is equidistant from either shore, and I looked for a map, so I could give a better explanation, but the conflict in the Arctic, potential conflict in the Arctic is 21,000 square kilometers.

That's a lot of conflict and a lot of resources are in those 21,000 square kilometers, and it will be a test between our two nations as to how we handle that conflict. You will see the northwest passage there.

Now, Canada claims that as an inland waterway and if it is an inland waterway, we have environmental jurisdiction; we have fisheries jurisdiction; we have control over the passage and various other issues.

The United States and pretty well everyone else regards it as an international waterway. Now, we could probably make some accommodations with our American colleagues transiting that waterway. I am not quite so sure that we can make so many accommodations with Russian ships and Chinese ships that transit it that waterway. So this may well be a security flashpoint coming forward.

Now, to meet these ongoing security challenges, we are having to change our infrastructure programs and the elements and the military that we need to secure in order to protect our sovereignty. Okay.

This is like a regular -- there we are. That's what we are buying. Okay.
(Laughter.)

MR. JOHN McKAY: Okay. Well, that's not quite what we are buying. That's actually what we are buying. And Peter will, of course, be familiar with the Arctic offshore patrol vessels, which can navigate in light sea ice, and there is six underway in Peter's hometown right now, Halifax. I have been to Irving shipyards.

It is quite a dramatic facility and quite an amazing way in which they put these ships together.

The first one is out the door and in water and being retrofitted, and I am told that in June it will be turned over to the Royal Canadian Navy. And there is five - - four, possibly five more to follow.

So that is one of the ways in which the Canadian military has responded to climate change, but of course, building in the Arctic has unique challenges because, as I said, the Arctic puts the change into climate change.

So you can imagine building a building in the Arctic. Bear in mind Canadian military works on a 40-year timeline. So they have to project forward 40 years as to the stability of the land mass. What is going to be happening with this land mass? So if you are putting up a fuel depot, you want to make sure that it is on a stable footing.

If you are putting up a runway, you want to make sure that it is on a stable footing. If you are siting a wharf, you want to make sure that it is not going to be inundated by unanticipated water, and you are also wanting to be sure that it is not stranded.

So these are the difficulties that are facing the Canadian military and challenges which some are really, really quite extraordinary.

In addition to the Arctic offshore icebreakers, we need to -- I'm sorry, Arctic offshore patrol vessels -- we need to up our game with icebreakers. This is, I believe, our only icebreaker still in operation. We need at least three more. The procurement contract has not been let. The Russians by contrast have eleven.

Now, you've heard about the Russian militarization of the Arctic. I am grateful to Senator Sullivan for this graphic because it shows it in a way that few of us actually can appreciate.

We live -- not only do we live south of 70, we live south of 60, and some of us even here we are below 49.

So we don't actually appreciate that. The Russians are really citing a number of bases and planes and missiles. The missile challenge is becoming more and more difficult because of the aggressive way in which the Russians are developing their missiles.

You can now start your missile further back below the horizon, have it run faster and lower and be upon your target much more quickly than you have in the past. It used to be you had to send your missile up and then have it come down. Now you don't have to send it nearly as far up, and you are sending it a lot faster. That, in turn, puts your defenses on the other side in some difficulty because you have to be able to react to those missiles coming in.

Now, I am not talking about imminent threat, shall we say, but the military has to -- the Canada-US military have to plan for the worst, you know, plan for the worst and hope for the best.

As you can see, there is a cluster of base rates there at the Bering Straits between Alaska and the U.S.S.R., and then there is another cluster just off Norway and Sweden, and a lot of these are new.

And it does bring -- and it is entirely due to the fact that what was previously frozen is now a reality and can be navigated, and with the advances in technology, the borders, if you will, just became a lot closer.

These are, if you will, public source open source documents of Canada's presence in the military. Peter will be relieved that I am not going to talk about the jets. That's a Canadian joke by the way.

But one of the biggest challenges is replacing the early warning system. It is extremely complex to have an all domain warning system. As I say, you can imagine from the previous slide just exactly where those missiles and airplanes may be coming. These are not idle conversations.

The Russian military has, for whatever purposes best known to it, increased their encouragings into North American aerospace. We are having to scramble our jets much more frequently. We are having to react to these encouragings each and every time, and it makes for a very active north. The early warning system you see there has to be replaced, and to replace that, you have to take into consideration the issue of climate change. Before you could count on that ground being frozen. How can you now site a station where the ground may not stay frozen?

Example: The dew line, which was the previous action to this early warning system, was dismantled, and in large measure what couldn't be taken away was barrier. It was thought to be buried and frozen.

Now it is no longer buried and frozen, and we have a significant environmental issue on the northern reaches of Canada to deal with it. So these are just part of the issues that are facing the Canadian military.

I have a real privilege of chairing this organization, co-chairing this organization, and I would say to this room -- and I am sure Peter would agree with me -- you can take great comfort in the relationship on a personal level, happened on a military to military level between our two countries. Ignore the rhetoric. Please ignore the rhetoric because the level of cooperation and dialogue is actually quite significant.

And because it is quite significant, our levels of security are well handled by the men and women both in uniform and out of uniform who represent it.

PJBD has recently grown to include diplomatic representatives and also people from homeland security and from public safety. And the reason for that is security and military are fast moving together. I will give you a little illustration.

My committee had before it Professor Clement from the University of Toronto last week. The subject that we are studying as a committee is the way in which financial services, in particular, but business in general are vulnerable to cyber security intrusions.

Professor Clement put up before us a slide of the cables that join Asia and North America, Europe and North America, and his point was simple: If you want to disrupt the cable traffic, the very infrastructure on which we depend, just attach a something or other to those cables. It is profoundly simple to do.

I related that immediately to an experience I had this summer. This summer I had the good fortune to travel on one of our frigates to Nacalutette down through Frobiture Bay and over to Greenland, New Greenland, and there we were met by the Danish general who is in charge of the NATO for that particular region.

And he talked about the various security risks, and I won't go into all of them, but one that really stuck in my mind was the fact that Russian ships seem to have an immense fascination of doing scientific research right over the top of the cables that join North America and Europe.

I don't know whether you can conclude anything from that, or I don't conclude anything from that, but here at one level the Danish general is giving his analysis of security risks that affect that particular part of the world, and a few months later, there is a University of Toronto professor telling us about how simple it would be to affect security and invade our infrastructure.

And if we think this is just an academic issue, take a look at your cellphone and ask yourself if I am sending an e-mail to somebody, where is that message going? Where does it go? Well, I don't know where it goes from Cleveland, but when you are in Toronto, it sometimes goes off to Chicago, bounces over to Boston, and back into Toronto. Sometimes it goes up to Montreal, goes down to North Carolina and then comes into Toronto.

We are quite vulnerable. Now, that is not a climate change risk, but it does illustrate the way in which those who would do us harm can easily do us harm and disrupt just normal ordinary lives.

So as I say, military issues and security issues are, I think, are becoming much more fused, and that is not only a result of changes in climate. But it is also a change in technologies that are moving at a pace that some of us -- I am having trouble keeping up. Of course, nobody in the room has had that same experience.

So with that, I am going to conclude, but I would reiterate, once again, you folks in the United States are well served by your people in the military. People I have met in the military in the United States are first rate, and I would say that as well with our Canadian military, they are first rate and are making the adjustments and responses as best they can, but as you well know, climate change is moving with tremendous pace, and technology is also moving with tremendous pace. And the interception of those two make it extraordinarily difficult to keep up with all of the security challenges that each of them have.

So thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. PETRAS: We have a chance for some questions.

MR. JOHN McKAY: You may have a chance for questions. I don't know if I will have any answers. Okay.

(Laughter.)

MR. GORDON: I notice you said there was one Canadian icebreaker and eleven Russian.

MR. JOHN McKAY: Yeah.

MR. GELFAND: How many U.S. icebreakers are on there? And by the way, I just love the way those maps look. It is an angle we rarely see.

MR. JOHN McKAY: I think it is an angle you are going to be seeing a lot more of.

And the short answer is I don't know.

I was on a U.S. Coast Guard exercise in Miami. Oh, man, they just ordered 56 of these things. Former minister of defense would drool to have those ships. So the short answer is I don't know, but whatever it is, there is not enough. I'm sorry.

MS. KOWALSKI: Thank you for your comments about some real security challenges that the U.S. and Canada are facing that relate to climate change. You mentioned the need for more icebreakers.

What other sorts of solutions do you want to see to try to address the problem and deal with the problem? Is it an issue focused more on climate mitigation or reducing emissions and things like that? Are there certain adaptation measures? What's the fix for it?

MR. JOHN McKAY: All of the above.

But I think one of the immediate needs is mapping. We actually don't know much about what's under the Arctic ocean, and that makes transit extremely hazardous, and there have been some recent examples where ships have run aground.

And as you can see, even if your ship is based in Nacaluette or New Greenland or whatever and you have an incident somewhere along the northwest passage, it is a long time to get there.

The trip I was on this summer, in addition to a few of us who are parliamentarians and some business people; actually were some Canadian Army along with Rangers. There are 1,800 Rangers, and these are local indigenous people especially commissioned by the military to provide a watching of what's going on.

There was -- the training exercise had to be canceled. This is in August, it had to be canceled because of conditions which our ships could not sail. So that's a significant adjustment for getting to do something that may well be an emergency. You just simply can't get there.

Yes, sir.

MR. MARFISHER: John, Mark Fisher, Council for Great Lakes Region. Thanks for the presentation. I guess the question I have for you is the U.S. military strategically over the years has done a number of different reports about the climate change and the threat globally but also to continental United States. I haven't seen the Canadian Armed Forces, at least in a public way, speak to it as -- in an open end way as I think the U.S. military has.

Is there some consideration about how to bring about being more clear and open about that particular risk and threat to the Canadian geography, first question.

And second question is, you know, for permanent joint board and defense perspective has there been any discussion about doing a strategic assessment in terms of the climate change for continental defense, right, and really understanding what the trend looks like and how do we collectively respond?

This morning we heard -- I think it might have been -- I don't remember who it was -- who indicated that the sea level rise for the U.S. Navy alone is going to be in serious position for ports and infrastructure, and has there been any discussion about doing a continental assessment about climate change, and how do we collectively prepare and respond to that risk?

MR. JOHN McKAY: Let me say that the capitalized military has not been as vocal as I think they should have been. They did release the policy papers in response, they are engaged. There was quite an extensive -- an extensive paragraph and discussion about the impacts of climate change on military preparedness. On the page ABD, it drives us crazy. You know, it is difficult to imagine what this is going to be. With respect to the replacement to the early warning system, we are not even sure we can land site it any more. I mean, if you are going to be in all domain, that means you are going to be under the water; you are going to be on the water; you are going to be on the land. You know, in the air, you are going to be up in space, and you might as well layer in cyber space. That's pretty significant and a major challenge.

In addition, NORAD wants to site one of its main bases somewhere further north. There are six sites under consideration, three of which are in Canada. The Americans, in particular, want to refurbish, tool up in the north end of Greenland, and that may be an option. That's not our -- by that, I mean Canadians' preferred option, but that's one of the things that is on the table.

Sorry. I always have to give the former impasse door --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I just wanted to remark, I am not sure how that changed since the Soviet Union went out of business, but in the olden days, all of the Soviet Navy's capital ships had icebreaker problems, so their ability for the icebreaking table will shift, will be seriously greater than eleven.

MR. JOHN McKAY: Excellent point, and I don't know whether people have considered. That may well have. I just don't know.

GOVERNOR BLANCHARD: I am assuming that your counterparts in our country here -- and I am confident you are correct when you say the working relationship is outstanding and trusting and has been forever, at least since 1940 - - but I am assuming they kind of ignore the cosyng up of my president or I should say the President of the United States to Mr. Putin, this love affair with Mr. Putin, his willingness to paraphrase Soviet propaganda.

I am assuming our military people kind of let that roll off and continue our vigilance and our cooperation. Is that correct?

MR. JOHN McKAY: I did put in in the previous iteration of the speech some comments about fake news and fake signs, and that it is all a conspiracy theory, but power is greater than mind where bigger paychecks persuaded me that I would create a diplomatic incident if I made any commentary along those lines as well.

I think the core point, though, is very simple. Military to military cooperation, Homeland Security, the public safety cooperation, minister to minister is really quite good and certainly with Madison and Sadjen (*sic*), there is a really fine working relationship there.

So I think people need to take some comfort in that. It does make for some awkward moments, and certainly over a beer or something a little bit stronger, there is some commentary that might even happen. But by and large, ignore that, get on with the business, and for the years I have been involved with it -- and I am sure again Peter could reiterate that -- it has been a solid working relationship.

MR. PETRAS: Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. PETRAS: Okay. So we are going to take a quick five-minute break, five minutes only, and we are going to come back with climate change and economy.

Thank you.

(Recess had.)