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McCain: Afghanistan surge is vital, but so is long-term plan

~ MacKay, Fitzgerald call for new maritime security standards to address piracy ~

HALIFAX, Canada (November 21, 2009) – U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) said Saturday that a military surge is key to success in Afghanistan, but that there needs to be a long-term plan for political, economic, and social stability in the country.

“It’s not going to be easy,” McCain said at the Halifax International Security Forum, a high-level conference on security and defense issues. “Casualties will go up, I’m sorry to say. It will require a degree of steadfastness that will try the governments of not only our allies, but us as well.”

He argued that a specific timeline of withdrawal would be detrimental to the mission, that winning is the only option. “The exit strategy *is* success,” he said. “It’s not a matter of sustainability, it a matter of success. It’s about breaking the enemy’s will.”

McCain was joined by General (Ret.) Rick Hillier, formerly chief of the defence staff of Canada, Najam Sethi, Editor-in-Chief of Pakistan’s *Daily Times*, and Michael Semple, Research Fellow at Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University.

The discussion broadened to include Pakistan’s position in the region, and the critical role it needs to play in promoting regional security. “If I had three priorities for Afghanistan it would be Pakistan, Pakistan, Pakistan,” Hillier said.

“I suspect that without bringing Pakistan on board in terms of the solution rather than the problem,” Sethi said, “it’s going to be very difficult to make progress in Afghanistan.” Sethi added that the surge was “too little, too late.”

Semple focused on the need for an effective peace process rather than just a strong military strategy. He explained the importance of giving the Afghan people a government they can believe in, and developing a strong and coherent relationship between the international community and Afghan leaders. Success will be derived from “the impression that the commitment [to Afghanistan] is long enough to ensure that there will be a stable environment.”

The morning’s second panel focused on maritime security. Canadian Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway Peter MacKay said that the only successful way to combat maritime piracy and terrorism is by setting international standards for certain practices.

“This is a problem that’s not going away,” he said. “My concern is that I don’t think the international community has taken on a coordinated approach.” He went on to say that “this is a very serious problem that could literally grind economies of the world to a halt.”

U.S. Admiral Mark Fitzgerald, commander of the U.S. Navy in Europe and Africa, explained that the problem extends beyond traditional piracy to include hostage taking, drug trafficking, illegal fishing, and illegal immigration. He said that this problem is often exacerbated because “we tend to focus on single countries, when we need to focus on regions.”

“Piracy is not really a naval problem,” Fitzgerald added. “They’re out there robbing the bank and then using the sanctuary of land as a hideout. You really have to go after the hideout.”

MacKay and Fitzgerald were joined by Norwegian Minister of Defense Eimert van Middelkoop, who stressed the complexities between defense and security in dealing with maritime issues, but emphasized the importance of the military’s role. He added that depleting fish stocks is not an excuse for piracy and that “the problem is the lack of the rule of law in Somalia.”

“It’s a hell of a job, and it will take years,” Van Middelkoop said.

The Halifax International Security Forum is a high-level meeting that brings together leaders from around the world in politics, military, government, business, academia, and media. Over three days, more than 300 participants take part in an intellectual, interactive exchange on pressing strategic issues. The Halifax International Security Forum provides a unique venue for thought-leaders and policymakers to discuss such issues as nuclear proliferation, Arctic security, the conflict in Afghanistan, and maritime security.

The Halifax International Security Forum is organized by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (www.gmfus.org) in cooperation with the Government of Canada, the Department of National Defence, and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. This major international conference – the first of its kind in North America – is being held November 20-22, 2009, in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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