

US Defense Secretary Gates to join world top brass at NATO security forum in Canada

By [Global Research](#)

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OTTAWA: Top brass from Europe and the Americas, including US Defense Secretary Robert Gates, gather this week in Canada to discuss the future of NATO, the war in Afghanistan and other pressing security matters.

Gates will be joined by counterparts from Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Germany, New Zealand, and the Netherlands as well as French President Nicolas Sarkozy's military adviser at the meeting from Sunday to Tuesday in Halifax.

The Nova Scotia city is hosting the inaugural Halifax International Security Forum, organized jointly by the Canadian government and the German Marshall Fund, a public policy institute for strengthening transatlantic ties.

Over three days, delegates will discuss Afghanistan, Iran, piracy and port security, Arctic security, nuclear proliferation, and the future of the 28-member North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Behind closed doors and at dinner meetings, they will also talk about Pakistan, Iraq and the Middle East, China and North Korea, pandemics, energy security, and the geopolitical consequences of the economic crisis.

"The hope is that people will talk to each other and work out their differences on important security issues," Will Bohlen, a spokesman for the German Marshall Fund told Agence France-Presse.

"Afghanistan, NATO, nuclear proliferation – these are all perennial issues and will continue to be challenges for a long time," he said.

But Arctic security and piracy are new topics for a forum of this magnitude to be discussing, said Bohlen. "These haven't been dealt with before on this scale."

Gates is set to give the keynote address, "likely touching on Afghanistan," said Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell in Washington.

"Clearly we can't really discuss security issues these days particularly with an audience comprised of a lot of NATO members without discussing pressing security issues that they are all dealing with, which is Afghanistan," he told AFP.

Gates is expected to also discuss "everything from the Arctic and the security issues there,

to South America and the challenges there,” he said.

Dan Dugas, director of communications for Canadian Defense Minister Peter MacKay, told AFP his delegation was keen to hear what others say about Afghanistan and the future of NATO.

“NATO is the greatest alliance ever put together but now it faces the question of where it goes and how will it achieve it,” he said.

Canada is a leading member of the military alliance. It currently has some 2,800 troops serving with NATO’s International Security and Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

The Canadian delegation in Halifax will also measure responses to its claims to the Northwest Passage and vast swaths of Arctic seabed also claimed by the United States, Russia, Norway and Denmark.

“We plan to reiterate arguments for Canadian control of the Arctic and it will be interesting to hear what other countries have to say about it,” Dugas said.

A key difference of this event from similar summits held previously in Europe is that guests were invited from New Zealand, Japan, India and elsewhere, not just from Canada, the United States and European nations.

This marks an evolution to broader involvement in security matters of concern to NATO, said Bohlen.

“A lot of security challenges are not limited to the transatlantic sphere,” he said. “And there’s greater cooperation and partnerships around the world now to deal with new security threats.”

Others attending the meeting, said by organizers to be first of its kind in North America, include US Senator John McCain and NATO’s top commander in Europe, Admiral James Stavridis.

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