



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

## Remarks With Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Maxime Bernier After Their Meeting

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC

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**SECRETARY RICE:** Good afternoon. I'm delighted to welcome my Canadian colleague Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier from Ottawa to spend time here with me at the State Department. We've just recently saw each other in Paris at the donors conference for the Palestinians and then just a little before that at Annapolis for the Annapolis conference on Middle East peace. In fact, it demonstrates Canada's very important and strong role and interest in the process of Middle East peace. Canada has been a very important part of this, going all the way back to Madrid, when it has taken a lead on refugee issues. So we had a long and extended discussion of what remains to be done so that the Palestinians and Israelis might achieve a two-state solution and live side by side in peace and security.

We also had an extended discussion of Afghanistan, where because Canada and the United States share common values, share a strategic partnership through NATO, we are working together, fighting together to help the Afghan people emerge from their long years of tyranny and as a safe haven for terrorism to a new and free and secure freedom. And that will mean for all of us a safer world because Afghanistan as a failed state was, of course, very much the near-term cause for the emergence of a trained and capable al-Qaeda.

The contribution of Canada is both invaluable and effective. And I want to thank the Foreign Minister, but I want to thank also the people of Canada for that extraordinary contribution. I want to say to the families of those who have given the ultimate sacrifice there that their sacrifice is not in vain, it is in the cause of freedom, a noble cause, and in a cause that will make us all more secure. And also, as to the American men and women in uniform on the front lines of the defense of freedom, I would say also to Canadian families who may be spending holiday this time without their loved ones who are fighting in Afghanistan, that Americans will hold in their prayers and thoughts not just Americans, but also Canadians and all who are fighting with them, because this is an international effort, an effort that is a NATO effort under a United Nations mandate. It is a concerted effort of the international community and I want to thank Canada for its part in it.

We've also discussed some bilateral issues and I've been very glad that you were able to come. I think it's been a very fruitful discussion. Thank you.

**FOREIGN MINISTER BERNIER:** Thank you, Secretary Rice. I'm very pleased to be here. And yes, we had a very good discussion about America and the issues that we face together. And as you know, our policy in America is to promote freedom, democracy, the rule of law and we are doing that. And also we discussed, like Secretary Rice just said, the Afghanistan. It's one of our most important foreign policy. And we have, I think, a good team there on the ground and we will work with the Afghan Government to be sure to build this new government and also for freedom for the Afghan people.

So also we discussed other bilateral issues, like the border, and we know that it's important to have secure and safe borders that we share together. And it's important also that we can have the goods and the trades and the travels between our two countries must be efficient, but also secure. And this meeting, it's always important, like Secretary Rice has said, we've met each other in Annapolis. And I can tell you that the process, the peace process in the Middle East, it's an important peace process and I want to again congratulate you for your efforts that -- with what you're doing there. It's -- I hope and I'm optimistic that it will have a good ending at the end of 2008. So congratulate for your works on the peace process and also at the Paris donors conference.

(In French.)

So thank you very much. And it was, like I said, a very good discussion that we had together and I appreciate your hospitality.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Thank you.

**MODERATOR:** We have time for two questions a side.

**QUESTION:** This is for Madame Secretary. How close do you think North Korea is to giving a complete declaration of its nuclear activities and what are the sticking points? And on a related nuclear note, did you manage to narrow down the differences on a new sanctions resolution on Iran in the conference call today?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Sue, only in the spirit of the holiday am I going to answer both. First of all, on North Korea, we expect a complete and accurate declaration from North Korea. The -- we have currently Sung Kim, our negotiator, is in North Korea and it's an important discussion. I am not -- at this point, I'm not following moment by moment what he's finding there. But I would hope that the North Koreans understand that a lot is at stake here, that in fact, we have made good progress on the disabling of the Yongbyon facility and its associated facilities. We have made good progress in terms of beginning the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. But this is now a crucial step, because if we're to move forward and if we're to move forward on all of the benefits that would come to North Korea through the successful completion of this second phase, we really must have an accurate declaration. So I look forward to his report.

As to Iran, we continue to work with the P5+1, within the P5+1. We are all in agreement that the two-track strategy that we have been pursuing is the right strategy because we need to convince Iran that it should stop its enrichment and reprocessing activities. Enrichment and reprocessing is after all the long pole in the tent because that's how one gets fissile material that can either be used in civilian programs, but can certainly be used in a nuclear weapons program. And so that is why the world has been focused on that in two separate Security Council resolutions. We obviously still have tactical differences that need to be worked out -- about timing, about what's specifically in the resolution. But I want to underscore that the two-track strategy that we have been pursuing is the correct one and among the six that is agreed.

**FOREIGN MINISTER BERNIER:** (In French.)

**QUESTION:** (Via interpreter.) This is a question addressed to Minister Bernier and perhaps also to Secretary Rice. Canada currently is the only Western country to have a prisoner in Guantanamo. Will you make any representations to Secretary Rice regarding the possibility of his release?

**FOREIGN MINISTER BERNIER:** So I will answer in French first.

(In French.)

(Via interpreter.) The proceedings are underway and it is currently in the appeals process, so I believe it would be improper for me to comment at this point in time.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, of course, it is in -- it's in the process and we take very seriously the concerns about the case and we are following the procedures.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Mr. Foreign Minister, President Bush just talked a little bit about Afghanistan in his press conference and he talked that he was worried that a lot of countries could have a kind of Afghan fatigue and Secretary Gates was just overseas and kind of taking NATO allies to task for not contributing enough to the effort. Does this concern Canada? Do you feel that Canadians will get this kind of fatigue? And what could Canada and the United States do to make allies more committed to the effort?

And Madame Secretary, on behalf of your generous holiday policy, there's an American being held in Nicaragua, Eric Volz. An appeals court has called for his release, but prosecutors are still holding that up. Is there anything the United States can or will do to make some kind of appeal so that he can be released? Thank you.

**FOREIGN MINISTER BERNIER:** So concerning the question -- the first question, as you know, in Canada, we will have a debate in January, at the end of January, beginning of February. Prime Minister Harper appointed an independent panel to discuss and to give us parliamentarians some options about the future of our missions in Afghanistan. So it's only the beginning and we'll have discussion, we'll receive this report, we will receive this report, like I said, at -- before the end of January and we'll have an open discussion.

And like the previous time, it will be a vote in parliament, in the house for the future of our military mission. And it's our job as a government, when we'll take our decision, to explain our decision to Canadian what we're doing there. And I hope that will be a vote to have our mission, our military mission extended for a couple of months, but it will be -- we're going to await the recommendations from the panel and after that, we'll have a position from our government and we'll have a public debate, so -- and I hope that we'll be able to have a strong commitment for the international community.

As you know, we are there until 2011 for the humanitarian aid and for our military mission, we are there until February 2009. So the discussion will be what we're going

do after February 2009 and that will be a debate that we'll have in Canada and I hope that we'll be able to be there for a couple of months, but it will be an open debate and the population and the parliamentarian will decide at the end.

**SECRETARY RICE:** I would just add that I think everyone, when we meet in NATO, we talk about the need of the entire alliance to share in the responsibilities of this most important mission that NATO has taken on. Canada is sharing in that responsibility. Canada is pulling its weight and it is the case that there are a number of countries that are fighting there under the -- under NATO and the UN mandate. But we are working with all of the allies to make sure that the responsibilities are spread more evenly and there is the matter of the military mission and there is also the matter of the reconstruction.

We talked again today about how to make the various reconstruction efforts on the civilian side more effective so that 2+2 equals at least 4, because we have a lot of different civilian missions in Afghanistan and obviously, in the kind of war that we're fighting there, it is extremely important to defeat the terrorist militarily, but it's also extremely important to work to win the hearts and minds of the people. And we are doing both and Canada is an extraordinary partner in doing so.

As to the case that you referred to, Elise, first of all, the court has spoken and it is our expectation that the Nicaraguan Government will do what it has said it will do, which is to release him. Whenever there is an American citizen involved, we are very much involved in following the case and in advocating on behalf of American citizens. And so we have had those conversations with the Nicaraguan Government and the court has spoken. We expect him to be released.

**QUESTION:** I'd like to ask Minister whether Canada raised the disproportionate casualties that Canadian troops are taking in Afghanistan relative to their numbers there and whether there was any discussion of the possibility that as the United States draws down its military presence in Iraq, whether U.S. commanders might be more inclined to beef up the American troop presence in those parts of Afghanistan where there's actual combat taking place.

**FOREIGN MINISTER BERNIER:** Yeah. As you know, we are in Kandahar and that's a very dangerous province. And I'm very proud of what our military are doing there. And yes, we suffer a lot of casualties. And -- but that being said, we still have to be sure that when this part of the country will be secure for -- after that, coming with our humanitarian aid. So you cannot have economic development without security. You cannot have prosperity without security. So what our military are doing there is to secure these provinces. And you know, we're in -- it's a dangerous mission, but it's a mission that we're proud of. And all our allies, they know -- I don't have to raise it -- they know that what we suffer as a Canadian. And so I think the praise of what we're doing like President Bush and Secretary Rice just said and we'll see. The NATO -- we'll have an important NATO meeting in April and we'll have a discussion with our allies and the NATO members for the future of the NATO mission also.

**SECRETARY RICE:** I would just add that Canada is fighting in a very tough area. The United States, of course, increased its contribution in Afghanistan earlier in the year because we -- obviously, we've been carrying a lot of -- in this mission and we've also taken heavy losses in the areas in which we're fighting. But it is an absolutely essential mission to stabilize Afghanistan.

We learned the hard way what happened when we allowed a failed state to emerge in Afghanistan under Taliban control that then allowed the al-Qaida to burrow in, to train, to become equipped, to fundraise, to use the assets of a state, like Afghanistan, to improve their capabilities as terrorists. And as a result of that, they were able to use that platform for the attacks of September 11th. And it was the United States that was attacked on September 11th, but of course, it could have been any of us and it has been others as well.

And we just have to remember that in the war on terror what we are trying to do is to help states like Afghanistan become self-sustaining states that are not going to be safe havens for terrorism. That's what we're doing there. And in order to do that, you have to help a young -- actually increasingly capable, but young Afghan military -- fight off the terrorists and the Taliban and you have to help the Afghan people build and reconstruct their lives and their societies. We have a good ally in this young Afghan democracy. And we've learned the hard way many, many times throughout history that unless you do the job and finish the job, it comes back to haunt you, one way or another. And so that is why the work that we are doing together in Afghanistan through NATO, through the UN, is so crucial, but not just to the future of Afghanistan, it's crucial to the future of the United States, Canada and all civilized nations.

Thank you very much.

**FOREIGN MINISTER BERNIER:** Thank you.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Thank you.

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