

## Canada shoots down Afghan extension amid reports of U.S. pressure

By Alexander Panetta – 7 hours ago

OTTAWA — The Canadian government shot down suggestions it might be arm-twisted by the Obama White House into extending its Afghanistan mission beyond 2011.

There are signs the U.S. government is preparing a diplomatic push to get Canada to stay.

But Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon told a news conference Tuesday that he has not yet received that kind of pressure, and suggested that any such effort would be futile.

"Let me be perfectly clear: Canada is abiding by the motion that was adopted in our Parliament," Cannon said.

"Our position is perfectly clear - we are not going beyond 2011."

Parliament voted last year to set 2011 as an end date, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper has repeatedly said he's not interested in an open-ended military commitment to Afghanistan.

He has said Canada could continue providing technical support and humanitarian aid without continuing its combat role.

But third-party intermediaries have told The Canadian Press they were contacted by the White House and asked for advice on how to get Ottawa to change its mind.

Cannon made his remarks in a news conference at the United Nations, where he delivered a speech urging the world body to bolster its presence in Afghanistan outside the capital, Kabul.

He also defended Canadian diplomats against accusations they mishandled a controversial file.

Government documents suggest embassy officials in Kabul were warned Feb. 15 that other countries had concerns about the Shiite family law.

The sweeping legislation included several contentious provisions - most notably one which would allow men to demand sex from their wives at least every four days.

The legislation has been derisively dubbed by international critics as the "Afghan rape law." Its defenders argue that, by Afghan standards, the law could be considered liberal.

Canada protested vigorously, along with other countries, when an international furor finally erupted.

Cannon declined to blame any diplomats for failing to alert Ottawa sooner. He said nobody at the time was aware of the specifics of the law, including the secretive way in which it was drafted.

In the aftermath of the controversy, Ottawa deployed a legal team to Kabul to help the Afghans vet legislation.

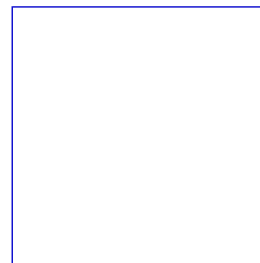
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