

## Canada stands by decision not to join war



CTV.ca News Staff

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Canada's decision not to participate in the U.S.-led war in Iraq will not strain relations with the U.S., Defence Minister John McCallum told CTV's Lloyd Robertson Thursday.



"While Canada and the United States have come to different conclusions on Iraq, Canada is as much the U.S.'s strongest friend and ally as it was a week ago."

"Since Sept. 11, we've been 100 per cent committed to the war on terrorism and that's why we're still in the Gulf."

Asked whether the orders may change for the Canadian Forces who are in the Gulf as part of Operation Apollo so that

they'll be redirected to fight in Iraq, McCallum was deliberately non-committal.

"That's an example of a hypothetical question. And once in a while I've gotten into trouble answering such questions. What I can say is that the government is aware of such possibilities and is discussing them."

"I think that in war, with all of its unpredictabilities, one can never say that one's policies are written in stone. We have to see how it evolves. Our policy at the present time is clear. I'm not saying there's nothing that at a future date would cause a change. But we're clear about where we are as of now.

In a short statement to reporters Thursday, Prime Minister Jean Chretien refused to either condone or condemn the U.S. military campaign.

"We're not part of the war," Chretien said. "It's very clear. They (the U.S.) know that we don't have any troops there and there will be no troops."

"We hope the war will be brief with a minimum of casualties on both sides. At this point, there is no use to debate the reason why some people think war is necessary."

He added that he did not want to condemn the war and thereby boost Iraq's position.

"We should not say anything that should comfort Saddam Hussein," he added.

The House of Commons voted Thursday evening to back the federal government's decision not to join the war on Iraq. Liberals, New Democrats and Bloc Quebecois MPs voted in support of a Bloc motion backing the anti-war stance. Most Canadian Alliance and Conservative members opposed the

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motion, which passed 153-50.

The vote was largely symbolic, since foreign policy is exclusively a government matter and the decision had already been made.

Earlier in the Commons, opposition MPs again pressed the government to clarify Canada's role in the military campaign. Citing reports that Iraq had fired a salvo of al-Samoud 2 missiles into Kuwait, Alliance foreign affairs critic Stockwell Day asked if the news would compel Ottawa to reconsider its role in military action.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Bill Graham responded, "We will continue our work in the future with reconstruction, with humanitarian aid, but we do not believe that it is appropriate to engage in a military intervention at this time in these circumstances. We've made that clear, we continue that as our strong policy."

Chretien announced earlier this week after the collapse of diplomatic efforts aimed at ending the crisis, when Chretien said Canada would not join a war without a new UN resolution sanctioning it. After the U.S. issued its ultimatum to Hussein, France -- one of the biggest opponents to using force against Iraq -- said it was willing to join the U.S. coalition in the event that Baghdad used chemical or biological weapons.

When pressed by reporters on whether Canadian troops would fight under the same scenario, Chretien said "We don't want to anticipate."

Relations between the neighbours has been strained for months over Canada's refusal to support the U.S. stance on Iraq and various anti-American comments made by Liberal officials. Most recently, Natural Resources Minister Herb Dhaliwal said Tuesday that U.S. President George Bush let Americans and the world down by not acting like a statesman in the crisis.

CTV's Mike Duffy says, "the basic mood here in the prime minister's office is: 'This isn't our war, let's not say anything to exacerbate Canadian-American relations'."

### **Attacks from opposition**

Tory leader Joe Clark probed the legal questions informing the government's position in the House of Commons Thursday. Pointing to standards of international law, Clark asked the prime minister if he was opting out of the war over questions of its legitimacy under international law.

"I'm not here to debate the legality or the illegality of the situation. The Americans have decided that they have the right to do what they're doing and we decided that we're not to participate. This is the legality for us," Chretien responded, adding, "We're not participating because we said at the beginning a year ago that we would participate if we were to have the support of the Security Council. It was not achieved so we're not participating and our position is very legal."

Canadian Alliance Leader Stephen Harper denounced the decision not to assist the U.S.

"This is not an act of independence," Harper said. "My great fear (is) a country that does not embrace its own friends and allies in a dangerous world, but rather thinks it can use them and reject them at will."

Graham said he talked to Secretary of State Colin Powell this week and the U.S. understands the Canadian position.

"We have agreed to stay in close touch in the difficult days ahead," Graham said. "We remain one of the strongest friends and allies the U.S. has."

On Wednesday, after bombing had begun, NDP Leader Jack Layton called on Chretien to take his refusal to contribute troops a step further and form a multi-party coalition that would travel to Washington to urge U.S. officials to end the war "as quickly as is absolutely possible."

"Our first thoughts are for the Iraqi children and families with missiles raining down upon them," Layton said, calling for fresh antiwar protests. "We can't give up our opposition to this war now. We have no choice now but to protest. We must speak out."