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Butt out of Canadian military, Ottawa tells Bush

Minister miffed by U.S. calls for Canada to boost defence budget

PRAGUE (CP) - Defence Minister John McCallum lashed out at U.S. President George W. Bush on the eve of a NATO summit here today, saying the leader of the world's largest superpower should mind his own business when it comes to how much allies spend on defence.

He made the remarks after Bush chided some of the weaker members of the western military alliance for not spending enough on their armed forces.

"I would not urge the president of the United States or the U.S. Ambassador (Paul Cellucci) to do my job - to ask for more defence spending," McCallum told reporters in a scrum with Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham looking on.

"I think that is a Canadian matter, I think that a number of Canadians were a little bit ticked off ... So while Mr. Bush may be asking for what I'm asking for, I'm not asking for his help."

In a hawkish speech calling for military support from NATO members should the U.S. go to war in Iraq, Bush said some NATO allies were not doing their part to shell out for their armies, navies and air forces. But he did not single out any countries by name.

"Ours is a military alliance, and every member must make a military contribution to that alliance," he said. "For some allies this will require higher defence spending. For all of us it will require more effective defence spending, with each nation adding the tools and technologies to fight and win a new kind of war."

Chrétien also defended his government's record on military spending, saying Canada has increased funding by 25 per cent over three years.

"The Americans always compliment the Canadians when we participate with them (in military operations)," he said, citing distinguished records for Canadian military in Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan.

"I'd like to spend more money on defence, I'd like to spend more money on everything, but we have to make these decisions when (the budget comes) in February."

McCallum would not disclose the contents of a letter from U.S. officials sent earlier this week requesting Canadian assistance in the event of a war in Iraq.

But he noted Canadian forces are already operating in the region.

"We have a number of assets in the region because of Afghanistan. We have three Hercules (transport planes), two Auroras (maritime patrol planes) and two ships - two or three depending on when they're coming or going," he said.

Bush implored NATO members Wednesday to be willing to force Iraq to disarm, saying the alliance should make rogue states and terrorism its targets within or without Europe's borders.

Chrétien said Canada would wait for Iraq's response to a UN Security Council deadline for weapons disclosure before planning further action.

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