

Press Releases: Press Availability at the U.S. – Canada 2+2 Ministerial

Press Availability
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland, and Canadian Minister of Defense Harjit Sajjan
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SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you all for being here with us today. Secretary Mattis and I are very pleased to welcome our Canadian counterparts, Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland and Minister of Defense Harjit Sajjan, to Washington. Welcome. It was a great day, and indeed, it was my honor to host this State Department 2+2 Strategic Dialogue, and it's a great opportunity for us to have gotten some serious work done, but it's also a discussion amongst friends.

The four of us have gotten to know each other quite well. We've achieved a lot together. Our meeting today comes after the historic signing of the

United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which was a tremendous victory for all three countries. I want to especially thank Minister Freeland for her efforts to make this happen. Look, the final deal is a home run. It modernizes NAFTA to address 21st century issues, 21st century economy, open trade and business, opportunities for United States farmers and manufacturers, reduce trade barriers amongst the three countries.

In today's meeting, the four of us discussed how we can continue to build off of this, take this achievement and make progress on a worldwide range of bilateral and global issues. On the bilateral front, we discussed our joint efforts to ensure North America is vigorously protected by both our militaries in close cooperation with one another. We also had the chance to discuss our bilateral cooperation to promote economic security by countering technology transfers, intellectual property theft, and other attempts to acquire sensitive technology from our two countries. This will enhance security by ensuring our economic competitiveness and preserving our military capabilities. These joint efforts support a comprehensive trading relationship and millions of jobs in our two countries.

In addition to domestic priorities, we worked through a range of global issues as well. We talked about our work in collaboration as members of NATO. We discussed our response to the situation in Ukraine. I expressed my concern over Russia's recent aggression in the Sea of Azov, where it rammed and opened fire on Ukrainian vessels. We also had the important opportunity to discuss our shared commitment to improving security in Iraq, where our nations have both made tremendous sacrifices in the name of freedom. I spoke, too, of the importance of applying pressure on the Iranian regime to stop its efforts to undermine Iraq's democracy and security. It was great to talk about how we've worked closely together on North Korea, and I thank my Canadian counterparts for enforcing all of the UN Security Council resolutions and encouraging other countries to maintain pressure as well.

Of course, given the close relationship between the United States and Canada, disagreements will undoubtedly arise from time to time, but our countries have always worked closely together to resolve these challenges, including through regular and open dialogue like we've had here today. I am very confident that as rough patches emerge, we'll work through each of those challenges.

With that, I'd like to turn things over to Foreign Minister Freeland to make a few remarks, and then if you'd introduce Secretary Mattis, that'd be great.

FOREIGN MINISTER FREELAND: Okay. Thank you, Mike. *Merci beaucoup. Bonjour, tout le monde.*

(Via interpreter) Hello, everyone, and thank you for being here. First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary of State Pompeo and the Secretary of Defense Mattis for their warm welcome today. Canada and the U.S. have one of the closest relationships in the whole entire world. We are allies and partners in areas such as trade, border protection, and of course, hemispheric defense and international security, especially through NATO and NORAD.

I would like to thank our hosts for giving us the opportunity to meet here today and to further discuss these topics as well as other issues of common interest for our two countries.

(In English) There are no closer partners in the world than Canada and the United States. We share the world's longest undefended border and we are each other's largest export market. Since the Second World War, we have worked side by side to build the rules-based international order and to fight for liberal democracy around the world.

This 2+2 meeting has been in the works for a while and it is a real pleasure to have been able to spend some time with our U.S. colleagues here in Washington to discuss our bilateral relationship and also some of the global challenges that we're confronting together. As is always the case when we meet, we discussed a number of issues around foreign policy, defense, and international security that reflect the deeply shared values that unite our two countries. We discussed China and the case of Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou, building on a conversation that Secretary Pompeo and I began soon after her arrest. We all agree that the most important thing we can do is to uphold the rule of law, ensure that Ms. Meng's right to due process is respected, and that the current judicial process in Canada remains apolitical. We also discussed some consular issues, two which are very concerning for Canada today: the detention of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor.

On Russia and Ukraine, Minister Sajjan and I expressed our condemnation of Russia's harassment of shipping in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait, and in particular its recent aggressive action towards an illegal seizure of three Ukrainian vessels on November 25th and the imprisonment of Ukrainian sailors. We call on Russia to release these sailors. Canada unwaveringly supports the people of Ukraine, its sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

We touched on some hemispheric issues, including the brutal authoritarian regime that is causing a dangerous crisis in Venezuela as well as troubling developments in Nicaragua. We took the opportunity to reiterate our support for the United States efforts towards a denuclearized Korean Peninsula and our efforts in the area of sanctions evasion.

In an ever-changing global landscape, it's important that countries are able to nimbly respond to flagrant violations of the international order. An effective and targeted sanctions regime is key to this. Canada and the U.S. both have Magnitsky legislation, and we discussed ways to work together even more closely in this area. As a founding member of NATO, Canada will continue to do its part for transatlantic security and stability. My colleague, Minister Sajjan, Harj, will speak to some of the important work that we're doing alongside the U.S. and NATO and as part of the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh.

As Mike said, we spoke about our trading relationship, and we talked about the fact that we now have a modernized trade agreement for our continent. And I do agree with Mike that this is a good deal for all three countries.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the fact that Minister Sajjan and I did raise one of those difficult bilateral issues that Mike referred to: the U.S. imposition of steel and aluminum tariffs under Section 232. Canada continues to take the view that these tariffs are unjust and illegal, and we spoke to our partners about how the national security justification for these tariffs we believe is inconsistent with our close relationship. I met earlier today with Ambassador Lighthizer, and we also discussed the 232 tariffs this morning.

The close relationship between Canada and the United States is a model for integration and creative collaboration on the world stage, and today was a great opportunity to talk about how we can work even more closely together on our continent and around the world. I'd like to thank you again, Secretary Pompeo, Secretary Mattis, for hosting us. Canada deeply values and appreciates our partnership and opportunities to continue to work even more closely together.

And it is now my pleasure to introduce a tremendous public servant, a great friend of Canada, Secretary Mattis.

SECRETARY MATTIS: Well, thank you, Minister Freeland, and I echo Secretary Pompeo's comment that ours was a discussion among friends. Minister Sajjan and I last saw one another just eight days ago in Ottawa, and today's meeting signals how our two militaries work to stay closely aligned on a range of issues worldwide. For Americans feel an enduring, almost familiar kinship with Canada, and in my case it is familial. My mother's family immigrated to America after my grandfather was wounded in action in World War I in the Canadian infantry.

Canadian and American forces have fought bravely alongside each other in the Great War, at Normandy, to Kandahar, Afghanistan following the 9/11 attack on our country. And today we continue our cooperation in pursuit of our mutual security. We are united in the North American Air Defense Command, where Canadian and U.S. fighters together guard the skies above North America and our 360 million people. We are united in NATO, where we uphold transatlantic unity and stand with European allies against the full scope of Russian malign influence, to include Moscow's recent brazen contempt of international law in the Kerch Strait and action against the Ukrainian people.

Canadian and U.S. trainers in western Ukraine and our battalions in the Baltics represent our combined efforts to build stability and deter further provocative activity. Canada and the United States are united in security because we are united in democracy, and democracies stick together for the common defense. Today we focused on enhancing our already strong cooperation in a number of areas that you've heard about, from foreign military sales to sanctions coordination. Like Secretary Pompeo, I am grateful for Canada's leadership enforcing unanimous UN Security Council resolutions on sanctions that support the denuclearization of North Korea.

Regarding the Middle East, we affirmed the need to continue the fight against ISIS's hardened core and to maintain support to our partners in Iraq, an approach endorsed as well by 16 nations we met with last week in Ottawa.

Accordingly, we are evolving our defeat ISIS coalition because we must not fall into complacency, recognizing that ISIS remains a strong terrorist enemy as it adapts to the crushing loss of its physical caliphate.

To close, last month Americans observed Veteran's Day. Canada has Remembrance Day. But whatever the name, together we recalled our shared battlefield sacrifices and the many instances when the maple leaf and the stars and stripes have flown side by side against threats to our shared values. Come what may, I am confident Canada and the United States will continue to work shoulder to shoulder now and in the future.

Minister Sajjan, my friend, the floor is yours.

DEFENSE MINISTER SAJJAN: Great. Thank you, Secretary Mattis, and thank you, Secretary Pompeo for your being tremendous hosts. Secretary Mattis and I also share another mutual understanding, which is we're both from the West Coast as well, which he reminded me of early on.

As my colleague Minister Freeland said, we have had a productive meeting to discuss our shared defense priorities. The United States is Canada's most important ally and defense partner. Our relationship is longstanding, deeply entrenched, and multifaceted. It was – our relationship was forged on the battlefield fighting side by side. It is rooted in our shared geography, in our common values, in our historic connections, and in our highly integrated economies, and it is unique in its levels of integration and military-to-military cooperations at all levels and across the globe. The Canadian Armed Forces and the United States military stand shoulder to shoulder to protect and defend the continent of our citizens.

NORAD is the most notable example of this cooperation. We have been working together seamlessly for over 60 years since its inception to protect North America against current and future threats. Our militaries are highly interoperable. We are constantly learning from each other through our regional, continental, and international exercises. We provide collective transatlantic defense through NATO.

We are participating in multinational efforts to – also to enforce sanctions against North Korea. At the UN command in Korea, Canada is the second-largest contributor after the U.S. And earlier this year, General Eyre became the first Canadian to hold the post of deputy commander. And last week, as Secretary Mattis just said, Canada co-hosted the counter-ISIS ministerial meeting in Ottawa, and we discussed the next steps to ensure the lasting defeat of Daesh and its networks, and Canada remains committed to the coalition. This is evident through our Operation Impact and our leadership of the NATO training mission in Iraq.

As Minister Freeland mentioned, Canada also supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Russian aggression. We have trained more than 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers as part of Operation Unifier, and at any given time we have about 800 – over 800 Canadian Armed Forces members deployed on Operation Reassurance, and they are supporting NATO deterrence measures in Eastern and Central Europe alongside our American allies. Canada

is also leading NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group in Latvia, similar to the U.S. presence in Poland, and we have recently extended this mission by four years.

In the Asia-Pacific region Canada is engaged in Op Projection and working with the U.S. and other partners on regional security and defense cooperations.

And ladies and gentlemen, these are just a few examples of the depth and breadth of the Canada-U.S. defense partnership. Our cooperation offers both countries greater securities, and we will always remain strong allies and partners and even better friends.

Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: We now have time for a few questions. We would ask each reporter to please limit your question to one and no follow-ups, please. For the first question, I'd like to call on the BBC, Barbara Plett Usher.

QUESTION: A question to the Secretaries of State and Defense. Yesterday the Senate voted to withdraw troops from Yemen, or to end U.S. military involvement there I should say, and to unanimously censure Mohammed bin Salman as responsible for the Khashoggi killing. What is your response? What action will you take, and can you afford to ignore this?

And to the Canadian foreign minister, are you concerned that President Trump's comments linking trade and the Huawei case suggest a perception that Canada is acting on the Americans' behalf in a trade war? And are you worried that Canada is becoming collateral damage in what is a trade tension between China and the United States, because China has arrested Canadians, but on the other hand it has agreed to suspend tariffs on U.S. cars.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So perhaps I'll begin. So we certainly saw the vote yesterday. We always have great respect for what the Legislative Branch does, and we are in constant contact with members on Capitol Hill so that we understand fully their concerns and do our level best to articulate why our policies are what they are and how we can ensure that we're getting the right policy for the United States of America and to keep our country safe. And we'll certainly do that in light of yesterday's vote, and President Trump's been very clear about the importance – not only importance of holding accountable those who murdered Jamal Khashoggi, but the importance of protecting American citizens.

There are hundreds of thousands of people that the Iranians killed and been involved in their deaths all across the Middle East. There's real risk to the United States of America. You'll recall that the Iranians and their explosive devices killed hundreds of American soldiers, and President Trump is determined to make sure that we protect America all the while holding accountable those who committed the heinous murder of Jamal Khashoggi.

SECRETARY MATTIS: I don't want to repeat what the Secretary said. I'll just add that besides that vote yesterday in the Senate, which we respect, there

was also progress announced by the UN secretary-general in Stockholm to end the war, which required our engagement with all the parties and a strategic approach to ending that war that has gone on too long.

FOREIGN MINISTER FREELAND: Okay, when it comes to the case of the detention of Ms. Meng, Canada is a rule of law country. We believe in honoring our international treaty commitments and in respecting the rule of law and due process in our own country. In the case of Ms. Meng, due process and rule of law in Canada has been scrupulously followed. There has been no political interference in this process. It's very important for Canada that Ms. Meng be treated with full respect and be given full access to due process in Canada, as she has been. She has currently been by the decision of a Canadian judge released on bail.

When it comes to the rule of law and due process in Canada, including in extradition matters, Canada understands that the rule of law and extradition issues ought not ever to be politicized or used as tools to resolve other issues, and that is the very clear position which Canada expresses to all of its partners. It's a position which I have explained particularly with regard to rule of law in Canada in a conversation with the Chinese ambassador to Canada earlier this week, and it's an issue which all of us discussed today.

And I do just finally want to say, because you've mentioned the two Canadians who are detained in China, it's really important to remember these are human beings. As foreign minister, I think for me and for the prime minister there are no issues that touch us more personally and immediately than the detention of Canadians outside our country. We're very, very seized of the issue. We're very concerned about these two Canadians, and that is a concern that we discussed in our meeting today.

MODERATOR: (Speaking in French.)

QUESTION: (Via interpreter, in progress) Minister Freeland can answer in French and English after. Madam Freeland, do you have the impression currently that Canada is paying a heavy price for having been involved in this Huawei case and having charged the CFO of Huawei? And some of our citizens have been arrested in China. Do you have the impression that you are being used currently and we are being stuck between the United States and China in this trade war against your will and you are being used politically currently by the United States?

FOREIGN MINISTER FREELAND: (Via interpreter) I'm not in complete agreement with the question, the way it was phrased, because for Canada it was not – the detention of Ms. Meng was not a political decision on Canada's part. It was a matter of following the rules. It's a matter of obligations on the part of Canada to follow through with its obligations under international agreements. Canada follows the rule of law; Canada follows rules. It is very important, especially when there's a lot of pressure on the very idea of democracy in the world, when there's a lot of pressure on international order. Canada will thus continue to follow the rules. This is a strong position of our governments. By the same token, it is also very important for Canada that extradition agreements are not used for political purposes.

Canada does not do it that way, and I believe that it is obvious that democratic countries such as our partner, the U.S., do the same.

Today we talked about our shared values, and one of them is the fact that both countries, the U.S. and Canada, are countries that follow the rule of law and follow rules in general.

(In English) I don't entirely agree with the framing of the question. Canada in detaining Ms. Meng was not making a political judgment. In Canada, there has been, to this point, no political interference in this issue at all. For Canada, this is a question of living up to our international treaty obligations and following the rule of law in Canada, and that is something which has happened scrupulously. Canada is a rule-of-law country.

We discussed a little bit in our opening remarks how Canada and the United States are countries with deeply shared democratic values. Those democratic values include the fact that in both countries, we have a deep regard for the rule of law and strong and independent judiciaries. I think that's one of the reasons that Canada and the United States, and both Canadians and Americans, feel comfortable with the existence of an extradition treaty between our two countries. And having said all of that, Canada is clearly of the view that extradition – the extradition process – is a criminal justice process. This is not a tool that should be used for politicized ends.

SECRETARY POMPEO: You didn't ask me, but – and if I may, I'm just going to answer in English.

QUESTION: *Oui, s'il* (inaudible).

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER FREELAND: I'd like to hear you try to do it in French.
(Laughter.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: I can't say much about the process because we have a U.S. judicial process that is underway, an extradition process that is underway. I can say this: The unlawful detention of two Canadian citizens is unacceptable. They ought to be returned. The United States has stood for that whether they're our citizens or citizens of other countries. We ask all nations of the world to treat other citizens properly, and the detention of these two Canadian citizens in China ought to end.

MR PALLADINO: CNN, Elise Labott.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I'd like to follow up on your remarks just now. It does seem as if China is using these two – the detention of these two Canadian citizens – as kind of a bargaining chip on the trade talks between the U.S. and China. And I think the minister alluded to that when she suggested that these type of detentions are so concerning and shouldn't be politicized. Do you think that's what China's doing here? And are you concerned that with President Trump's suggestion that he might be willing to get involved in this other case of Ms. Meng in Canada, that that further puts Canada in a difficult situation and kind of puts Canada in the middle of your

trade dispute with China? Thank you very much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I think that's just the same question that was asked previously. I don't see it that way. The United States is engaged in an extradition process. Ms. Meng travelled to Canada. The Canadians have taken her into custody, now released her on bail pending extradition, an extradition hearing. We'll continue to engage through legal processes to get the just outcome that's connected to that. We have a set of trade discussions that are ongoing with the Chinese. As the Chinese have said, we're working on that while all the other issues – not just this particular issue, we have lots of complicated issues going on with China today all around the world. And we work on each of those to get good outcomes for the people of the United States of America and respecting the rule of law each step along the way. We'll do that here as well.

MODERATOR: Next question. Adrian Morrow, *Globe and Mail*.

QUESTION: Thank you. Minister, it's clear, it seems – sorry, Minister Freeland, it's clear that these two Canadians were – appear to have been detained as a Chinese retaliation against the Huawei situation. Why won't you sort of acknowledge that directly? And then as well, what is the – how was Michael Kovrig doing when our ambassador met with him in Beijing?

And Secretary Pompeo, is there anything that the U.S. is going to do to sort of lean on China to get them to release these people who have been detained, given that President Trump appears to have quite a good relationship with President Xi? Is there anything that you guys will do to sort of help Canada get these guys back?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Let me go first. Yeah, we're going to work to get every citizen unlawfully detained all around the world returned to the country to which they have the very right to go back to. We do this in cases for our own people all the time. It's something, as Chrystia said, weighs on those of us who serve to try and make sure that our citizens do have the opportunity to be returned home to their families. We always believe in that, we'll always work on it, and we'll do it in this case as well.

FOREIGN MINISTER FREELAND: Thank you for that, Mike. So Adrian, I have spoken this week with the Chinese ambassador to Canada and we've had many contacts with Chinese authorities. Chinese officials in their contact with Canada have not drawn a connection between these different issues.

From Canada's perspective, these kinds of issues ought never to be confused with one another. In the detention of Ms. Meng, Canada was, as I've said, acting scrupulously in line with our treaty commitments and in line with the rule of law. And as Mike has said, the next step while Ms. Meng is on bail in Vancouver is for a Canadian court and Canadian judges to rule on whether the extradition is warranted or not.

Of course, Canadian citizen – we will always advocate strongly and fiercely for Canadian citizens when they are detained abroad. In the cases of Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor, our immediate concern has been to gain consular access

to them and to understand what the charges are being put on them by the Chinese authorities, and we are seeking that – we're advocating for them very, very aggressively.

Ambassador McCallum was able now to see and speak with and meet with Mr. Kovrig and we're glad that that could happen. I've spoken also to family members of both men, and I just want to say and reassure all Canadians, but especially the family and friends of Mr. Kovrig, Mr. Spavor, this is a huge priority for our government. We are extremely seized of this issue. We care for, we fight for all Canadians detained abroad, and actually, as Mike said, all people unfairly detained abroad, but specifically we have a specific duty of care to Canadians, and we fight for everybody. Mr. Kovrig is also an employee of my department, he's well known to many Canadian diplomats, and that makes it especially personal for us.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

FOREIGN MINISTER FREELAND: You know what? I'm going to let – I'm going to respect his privacy and the privacy of his family. We've shared with his family details of the meeting.

MR PALLADINO: Thank you all for attending today. That concludes our press conference.

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