

“Canada, key allies storm out of UN nuclear meeting in protest of Iran’s ‘Israeli genocide’ remarks”

The National Post

March 7, 2013

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OTTAWA — Canada and key allies stormed out of a meeting of the United Nations nuclear agency Wednesday to protest the Iranian representative referring to an Israeli “genocide.”

Envoys from the United States, Australia and New Zealand joined John Barrett, Canada’s ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, in unceremoniously exiting the room.

Barrett was chairing a meeting of the 35-nation IAEA board at its Vienna headquarters when Iran’s representative, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, went on a lengthy tirade about Israel that included an accusation that it had “a dark record of genocide,” sources said.

“That’s just a red line for us. We stood up and walked out,” said a Canadian official who was not authorized to talk on the record about the incident.

As the diplomatic fireworks erupted in Vienna, Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird was convening a far more orderly meeting in Ottawa of ambassadors from the so-called “P5 plus one” club of countries — the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Russia, France, U.S., China, and the United Kingdom, plus Germany.

The Canadian Press has learned that Baird urged the diplomats to press Iran to allow access to international inspectors of its nuclear facilities or face tougher international sanctions.

Joseph Macmanus, the U.S. envoy to the IAEA, suggested that the U.S. might push for tougher sanctions against Iran.

“We are deeply concerned with what appears to be Iran’s unwavering commitment to deception, defiance and delay,” he said Wednesday.

Baird’s aides said Canada was showing its support for the P5 plus one by calling Wednesday’s meeting in the minister’s Centre Block office on Parliament Hill.

The group is next set to meet in Istanbul, Turkey, in two weeks after a round of talks last week in Kazakhstan.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has characterized the most recent Kazakhstan talks as “heading in the right direction.”

Canada holds the rotating chair of the IAEA board of governors for 2012-13, a job that falls to Barrett.

Though Canada isn't a part of P5 plus one, Baird wanted to press the group to prevent Iran from using the continuing discussions as a stalling tactic, officials said.

"We have a stake in it. We have a seat at the table. This gives the minister an opportunity to reiterate our view as the current chair," said another official who was not authorized to go on the record.

"The minister and the prime minister have been clear on how they view Iran's nuclear program."

Baird and Prime Minister Stephen Harper have said that Iran's nuclear ambitions are the greatest threat to global security.

Iran denies the West's accusations that it is pursuing a nuclear bomb and says it is simply trying to develop a peaceful energy program.

The Harper government is also an unabashed friend of Israel, and an unrelenting critic of Iran. Canada expelled Iranian diplomats last year and closed its embassy in Tehran.

A source who had access to the notes taken at Wednesday's closed-door IAEA meeting attributed the following remarks to Soltanieh:

"The Israeli regime, with its Zionist mentality and dark record of genocide and attacks on military installations, disregarded once again all international norms and attacked a site in Syria; the U.S. endorsed the aggression and continued to protect Israel."

Soltanieh blamed IAEA head Yukiya Amano for escalating the tensions against Iran. "The source of the problem is not Iran," he said.

In Washington this past weekend, Baird said the current round of sanctions on Iran was taking a toll on its economy.

"Diplomacy matters. It's important. Talk is one way of accomplishing things. But actions are important as well," Baird told the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

"We will not back down on sanctions and political pressure just for Iran showing up to the negotiating table."

Baird also held a series of meeting with U.S. politicians about Iran in Washington with Monday.

He met with Republican Sen. John McCain, Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez, chair of the Senate foreign relations committee, and Democratic congressman Eric Cantor, the U.S. House majority leader.

Baird also spoke by telephone on Monday with his European Union counterpart, Catherine Ashton, about the upcoming talks in Istanbul.