

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2011*

## **The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada**

*February 4, 2011*

*President Obama.* Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

I am very pleased to be welcoming my great friend and partner, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, back to the White House to reaffirm our extraordinary friendship and cooperation between the United States and Canada. I'd like to talk a bit about what we accomplished today and then address the situation unfolding in Egypt.

The United States and Canada are not simply allies, not simply neighbors; we are woven together like perhaps no other two countries in the world. We're bound together by our societies, by our economies, by our families—which reminds me, my brother-in-law's birthday is today, and I have to call him. [*Laughter*]

And in our many meetings together, I've come to value Stephen's candor and his focus on getting results, both when it comes to our two countries and to meeting global challenges. Although I, unfortunately, have not yet had the pleasure of seeing him and his band jam to the Rolling Stones, but I'm told the videos have become a sensation on YouTube. So I'll be checking those out after this bilateral. [*Laughter*]

We've had a very successful day. Our focus has been on how we increase jobs and economic growth on both sides of the border. Canada is our largest trading partner and the top destination for American exports, supporting some 1.7 million jobs here. So today we've agreed to several important steps to increase trade, improve our competitiveness, and create jobs for both our people.

First, we agreed to a new vision for managing our shared responsibilities, not just at the border, but beyond the border. That means working more closely to improve border security with better screening, new technologies, and information sharing among law enforcement, as well as identifying threats early. It also means finding new ways to improve the free flow of goods and people. Because with over a billion dollars in trade crossing the border every single day, smarter border management is key to our competitiveness, our job creation, and my goal of doubling U.S. exports.

And, Mr. Prime Minister, I thank you for your leadership and commitment to reaching this agreement.

We've directed our teams to develop an action plan to move forward quickly, and I'm confident that we're going to get this done so that our shared border enhances our shared prosperity.

Second, we're launching a new effort to get rid of outdated regulations that stifle trade and job creation. Like the Government-wide review that I ordered last month, we need to obviously strike the right balance, protecting our public health and safety and making it easier and less expensive for Americans and Canadians to trade and do business, for example, in the auto industry. And a new council that we're creating today will help make that happen.

Third, we discussed a wide range of ways to promote trade and investment, from clean energy partnerships to the steps Canada can take to strengthen intellectual property rights.

And we discussed a range of common security challenges, including Afghanistan, where our forces serve and sacrifice together. Today I want to thank Prime Minister Harper for Canada's decision to shift its commitment to focus on training Afghan forces. As we agreed with our Lisbon—or our NATO and coalition allies in Lisbon, the transition to Afghan lead for security will begin this year, and Canada's contribution will be critical to achieving that mission and keeping both our countries safe.

Finally, we discussed our shared commitment to progress with our partners in the Americas, including greater security cooperation. And I especially appreciated the Prime Minister's perspective on the region as I prepare for my trip to Central and South America next month.

Let me close by saying a few words about the situation in Egypt. This is obviously still a fluid situation, and we're monitoring it closely. So I'll make just a few points.

First, we continue to be crystal clear that we oppose violence as a response to this crisis. In recent days, we've seen violence and harassment erupt on the streets of Egypt that violates human rights, universal values, and international norms. So we are sending a strong and unequivocal message: Attacks on reporters are unacceptable, attacks on human rights activists are unacceptable, attacks on peaceful protesters are unacceptable.

The Egyptian Government has a responsibility to protect the rights of its people. Those demonstrating also have a responsibility to do so peacefully. But everybody should recognize a simple truth: The issues at stake in Egypt will not be resolved through violence or suppression. And we are encouraged by the restraint that was shown today. We hope that it continues.

Second, the future of Egypt will be determined by its people. It's also clear that there needs to be a transition process that begins now. That transition must initiate a process that respects the universal rights of the Egyptian people and that leads to free and fair elections.

The details of this transition will be worked out by Egyptians. And my understanding is that some discussions have begun. But we are consulting widely within Egypt and with the international community to communicate our strong belief that a successful and orderly transition must be meaningful. Negotiations should include a broad representation of the Egyptian opposition, and this transition must address the legitimate grievances of those who seek a better future.

Third, we want to see this moment of turmoil turn into a moment of opportunity. The entire world is watching. What we hope for and what we will work for is a future where all of Egyptian society seizes that opportunity. Right now a great and ancient civilization is going through a time of tumult and transformation. And even as there are grave challenges and great uncertainty, I am confident that the Egyptian people can shape the future that they deserve. And as they do, they will continue to have a strong friend and partner in the United States of America.

Mr. Prime Minister.

*Prime Minister Harper.* Well, first of all, thank you, Barack. Both thank you for your friendship—both personal and national. And thank you for all the work you've done and all of your people have done to bring us to our announcement today.

[*At this point, Prime Minister Harper made remarks in French. He then provided an English translation of his remarks, as follows.*]

And I will just repeat that.

Today President Obama and I are issuing a declaration on our border, but it is, of course, much more than that. It is a declaration on our relationship. Over the past nearly 200 years, our two countries have progressively developed the closest, warmest, most integrated, and most successful relationship in the world. We are partners, neighbors, allies, and, most of all, we are true friends.

In an age of expanding opportunities but also of grave dangers, we share fundamental interests and values just as we face common challenges and threats.

At the core of this friendship is the largest bilateral trading relationship in history. And since the signing of the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement, a milestone in the development of the modern era of globalization, that partnership has grown spectacularly.

Not only is the U.S. Canada's major export market, Canada is also America's largest export market: larger than China, larger than Mexico, larger than Japan, larger than all the countries of the European Union combined. Eight million jobs in the United States are supported by your trade with Canada. And Canada is the largest, the most secure, the most stable, and the friendliest supplier of that most vital of all America's purchases: energy.

It is in both our interests to ensure that our common border remains open and efficient, but it is just as critical that it remains secure and in the hands of the vigilant and the dedicated. Just as we must continually work to ensure that inertia and bureaucratic sclerosis do not impair the legitimate flow of people, goods and services across our border, so, too, we must up our game to counter those seeking new ways to harm us.

And I say "us" because as I have said before, a threat to the United States is a threat to Canada: to our trade, to our interests, to our values, to our common civilization. Canada has no friends among America's enemies, and America has no better friend than Canada.

The declaration President Obama and I are issuing today commits our Governments to find new ways to exclude terrorists and criminals who pose a threat to our peoples. It also commits us to finding ways to eliminate regulatory barriers to cross-border trade and travel, because simpler rules lead to lower costs for business and consumers and ultimately to more jobs.

Shared information, joint planning, compatible procedures, and inspection technology will all be key tools. They make possible the effective risk management that will allow us to accelerate legitimate flows of people and goods between our countries while strengthening our physical security and economic competitiveness.

So we commit to expanding our management of the border to the concept of a North American perimeter, not to replace or eliminate the border but, where possible, to streamline and decongest it.

There is much work to do. The declaration marks the start of this endeavor, not the end; an ambitious agenda between two countries, sovereign and able to act independently when we so choose, according to our own laws and aspirations, but always understanding this, that while a border defines two peoples, it need not divide them. That is the fundamental truth to which Canadians and Americans have borne witness for almost two centuries. And through our mutual devotion to freedom, democracy, and justice at home and abroad, it is the example we seek to demonstrate for all others.

*President Obama.* All right, we've got time for a couple of questions. I'm going to start with Alister Bull [Reuters].

### *Egypt/Energy*

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. President. Is it conceivable to you that a genuine process of democratic reform can begin in Egypt while President Mubarak remains in power, or do you think his stepping aside is needed for reform even to begin?

And to Prime Minister Harper, on the energy issue, did you discuss Canada's role as a secure source of oil for the United States, and in particular, did you receive any assurances the U.S. administration looks favorably on TransCanada's proposed Keystone Pipeline to the Gulf Coast? Thank you.

*President Obama.* I have had two conversations with President Mubarak since this crisis in Egypt began, and each time I've emphasized the fact that the future of Egypt is going to be in the hands of Egyptians. It is not us who will determine that future. But I have also said that in light of what's happened over the last 2 weeks, going back to the old ways is not going to work. Suppression is not going to work. Engaging in violence is not going to work. Attempting to shut down information flows is not going to work.

In order for Egypt to have a bright future—which I believe it can have—the only thing that will work is moving a orderly transition process that begins right now, that engages all the parties, that leads to democratic practices, fair and free elections, a representative government that is responsive to the grievances of the Egyptian people.

Now, I believe that President Mubarak cares about his country. He is proud, but he's also a patriot. And what I've suggested to him is, is that he needs to consult with those who are around him in his Government. He needs to listen to what's being voiced by the Egyptian people and make a judgment about a pathway forward that is orderly, but that is meaningful and serious.

And I believe that—he's already said that he's not going to run for reelection. This is somebody who's been in power for a very long time in Egypt. Having made that psychological break, that decision that he will not be running again, I think the most important for him to ask himself, for the Egyptian Government to ask itself, as well as the opposition to ask itself, is how do we make that transition effective and lasting and legitimate.

And as I said before, that's not a decision ultimately the United States makes or any country outside of Egypt makes. What we can do, though, is affirm the core principles that are going to be involved in that transition. If you end up having just gestures towards the opposition, but it leads to a continuing suppression of the opposition, that's not going to work. If you have the pretense of reform, but not real reform, that's not going to be effective.

And as I said before, once the President himself announced that he was not going to be running again, and since his term is up relatively shortly, the key question he should be asking himself is: How do I leave a legacy behind in which Egypt is able to get through this transformative period? And my hope is, is that he will end up making the right decision.

*Prime Minister Harper.* You asked me about the question of energy, and, yes, we did discuss the matter you raised. And let me just say this in that context. I think it is clear to anyone who understands this issue that the need of the United States for fossil fuels far in excess of its ability to produce such energy will be the reality for some time to come. And the choice that the United States faces in all of these matters is whether to increase its capacity, to

accept such energy from the most secure, most stable, and friendliest location it can possibly get that energy, which is Canada, or from other places that are not as secure, stable, or friendly to the interests and values of the United States.

*President Obama.* I think we've got a Canadian reporter.

### *Canada-U.S. Relations and the Border/Egypt*

*Q.* Prime Minister, can you answer this in English and French? Canadians will be asking how much of our sovereignty and our privacy rights will be given up to have more open borders and an integrated economy. And while I have you on your feet, I want to ask you about Egypt, as well, whether you feel that Mr. Mubarak should be stepping down sooner, it would help the transition?

And, Mr. President, on the sovereignty issue, you're welcome to answer it—you don't have to speak in French, though. [*Laughter*]

*President Obama.* Thank you. [*Laughter*] Now, I love French, but I'm just not very capable of speaking it. [*Laughter*]

*Prime Minister Harper.* On the question of sovereignty, this declaration is not about sovereignty. We are sovereign countries who have the capacity to act as we choose to act. The question that faces us is to make sure we act in a sovereign way that serves Canada's interests. It is in Canada's interests to work with our partners in the United States to ensure that our borders are secure and ensure that we can trade and travel across them as safely and as openly as possible within the context of our different laws.

And that is what we're trying to achieve here. We share security threats that are very similar on both sides of the border. We share an integrated economic space where it doesn't make sense to constantly check the same cargo over and over again—if we can do that at a perimeter, if we can decongest the border, that's what we should be doing. If we can harmonize regulations in ways that avoid unnecessary duplication and redtape for business, these are things that we need to do.

So that's what this is all about. This is about the safety of Canadians, and it is about creating jobs and economic growth for the Canadian economy.

Let me maybe—I'll do French and then I'll come to Egypt.

[*Prime Minister Harper provided a French translation of his remarks. He then continued in English, as follows.*]

On the question of Egypt, let me just agree fully with what President Obama has said. I don't think there is any doubt from anyone who is watching the situation that transition is occurring and will occur in Egypt. The question is what kind of transition this will be and how it will lead. It is ultimately up to the Egyptian people to decide who will govern them.

What we want to be sure is that we lead towards a future that is not simply more democratic, but a future where that democracy is guided by such values as nonviolence, as the rule of law, as respect and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities, including the rights of religious minorities.

[*Prime Minister Harper provided a French translation of his remarks.*]

*President Obama.* With respect to security issues and sovereignty issues, obviously, Canada and the United States are not going to match up perfectly on every measure with

respect to how we balance security issues, privacy issues, openness issues. But we match up more than probably any country on Earth.

We have this border that benefits when it is open. The free flow of goods and services results in huge economic benefits for both sides. And so the goal here is to make sure that we are coordinating closely and that as we are taking steps and measures to ensure both openness and security, that we're doing so in ways that enhances the relationship as opposed to creates tensions in the relationship. And we are confident that we're going to be able to achieve that.

We've already made great progress just over the last several years on various specific issues. What we're trying to do now is to look at this in a more comprehensive fashion, so that it's not just border security issues, but it's a broader set of issues involved. And I have great confidence that Prime Minister Harper is going to be very protective of certain core values of Canada, just as I would be very protective of the core values of the United States, and those won't always match up perfectly.

And I thought—I agree even more with his answer in French. [*Laughter*]

All right. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 3:21 p.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, the President referred to his brother-in-law Konrad Ng.

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