

'UAE deserves an apology from Canadian PM'

Relations with Canada at all-time low as Harper launches vitriolic attack

- By Mick O'Reilly, Deputy Managing Editor
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Ottawa: Relations between the UAE and Canada are strained to the point where a strong diplomatic rebuke has been issued to Ottawa earlier this week, *Gulf News* has learnt.

The UAE deserves an apology from Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper after he launched a vitriolic attack on the emirates, a senior UAE official said.

The move is the latest in an escalating fight over landing rights at Toronto and other destinations for both Etihad and Emirates.

The UAE government is furious that Prime Minister Harper lashed out at the emirates, suggesting it was soft on terrorism and resorted to blackmail in forcing Canadian forces out of Camp Mirage near Dubai in October.

Gulf News has learnt, however, that Ottawa was given at least four months notice on the end to the free arrangement. And particularly infuriating for the UAE is that Canada is choosing to forget that hundreds of injured Canadian troops were treated for free at military medical facilities, before being airlifted home.

"Very few Canadians know about this extreme act of kindness towards our national heroes given by the UAE — even me," Dan McTeague, the opposition Liberal party's critic on foreign and consular affairs, told *Gulf News*. It is all the more surprising, given that McTeague's own cousin was badly injured in Afghanistan. It's in his name that Canada's Wounded Warrior Fund was created: Sapper Mike McTeague Wounded Warrior Fund.

"It's clear that the Prime Minister's intemperate and incendiary comments have dismissed and discounted these kind of acts which represent the fulfilment of a relationship that has grown in the past 40 years from a spirit of deep friendship and mutual respect," McTeague said.

A spokesperson for Canada's department of foreign affairs told *Gulf News* that Canada's position on landing rights was clear. Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister, Lawrence Cannon "will always act in the interests of Canadians to protect jobs and what the UAE is proposing [in respect to more landing slots] is not in the best interests of Canadians," the spokesperson added.

The request for more landing slots has been met with complete derision. Canadian officials did offer to increase the number of flights from three to four, but that increase was tied to restricting the size of plane, meaning, in effect, an overall reduction in the number of seats available. With cargo demand and seat loads at levels reaching 100 per cent capacity, the need for more flights is pressing.

In two years since arriving in Ottawa, the UAE's Ambassador, Mohammad Abdullah Al Ghafli, has yet to meet with Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister, Lawrence Cannon.

"Cannon only meets with a select group of ambassadors," a senior official told *Gulf News*.

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