

The Brooks Bulletin

Getting rid of nukes a concrete strike against terrorists: Kim Campbell

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OTTAWA (CP) - Countries might not be able to predict a terrorist attack, but they can ensure dangerous groups can't get their hands on nuclear weapons, says former prime minister Kim Campbell.

Campbell is part of the Middle Powers Initiative, an international group of politicians and thinkers that is pressing the world's nuclear powers to reduce and eventually eliminate their arsenals. Although 180 countries, including Russia and the United States, are signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, there are still tens of thousands of warheads around the world, some of them in facilities that are not secure.

"The nuclear proliferation issue is one that we can actually deal with," she said in an interview. "Nuclear materials are traceable and verifiable. We could actually get a hold of this and know that, whatever else terrorist groups got a hold of ...we could keep nukes out of their hands,."

"We can actually do it if there's a will to do it. It's not a hopeless situation."

The group, which is speaking this week to Canadian parliamentarians, encourages countries to remove warheads from their delivery systems, since many of them still operate on hair triggers. And they want to see a ban on the production of fissile materials that can be used for the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

Campbell wouldn't comment on the new Conservative government shirking its commitments on another international treaty, the Kyoto Accord, but she did tip her hat at its decision to extend the military mission in Afghanistan.

"It's important to finish the task there," she said. "One of the reasons I did not support the American war in Iraq was because I felt it diverted resources and attention from where the problem really was, and where there was an opportunity to try and establish a reasonably stable government."

Campbell, whose short-lived Conservative government was erased in a 1993 Liberal landslide, also said it was a wise move for the Stephen Harper government to recruit former Liberal David Emerson for the cabinet, in spite of all the criticism.

"It was done for the best of reasons, the reason being the competence of the government and I think Canadians deserve that," she said.

"Partisanship is great, but it's not a religion, it's a way of giving voters choice, but at the end of the day what's important is delivering competent public policy."

Campbell, whose government lasted just over four months, cautioned the Tories that delving into socially conservative policies will hurt them electorally. While she didn't comment directly on the government's decision to axe a national child-care program, she made this point:

"If you look at the countries that have the highest birth rates among the industrial countries, the ones that have the most generous child care have the highest birth rates."

Campbell, 59, now lives part-time in Spain, where she is secretary-general of the international pro-democracy group Club de Madrid. She also travels widely with her composer-musician partner Hershey Felder.