

EMBASSY

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A Nuclear House Call

A Key Treaty Is At Risk of Unraveling

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EDITORIAL

The new Conservative government of Canada received a house call this week from a delegation led by former Prime Minister Kim Campbell. The callers had that dignified air that comes from lengthy political and diplomatic experience about them. Collectively, they had decades of experience in cabinet, in the House, Senate and in doing the tough diplomatic jobs of hammering out international treaties--not trade treaties but nuclear weapons treaties.

There was nothing wild or radical about this calm, experienced group. But there was more than a hint of desperation about the reason for their visit.

The callers came to remind Canada's government that the world's only existing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament agreements were about to crash and burn. In particular, they came to warn that the actual Non-Proliferation Treaty, or "NPT", one of the most hopeful and life-saving agreements to emerge from the Cold War, was rapidly unraveling. Crippled by big hits the treaty has taken recently--including the recent U.S.-India nuclear agreements, a statement by French President Jacques Chirac of the use of nuclear weapons in response to a potential large-scale terrorist attack on France, and the floating of an idea from Washington that nuclear weapons could be used against Iran--the treaty is now in danger of evaporating altogether.

The people who came to Ottawa this week delivering a briefing paper on the NPT from the Middle Powers Initiative have been carefully following these trends over the past several years. Their conclusions are alarming.

What this means for the world, in the words of former U.S. Ambassador Thomas Graham, is the unchecked spread of nuclear weapons into the hands of failing states and extremists, and their regular occurring use against civilian populations in large cities. He says that unless the current trend is reversed, these early years of the 21st century will seem a golden age of peace and security in a bloody, darkened future.

That the group approaches these prospects with an enduring degree of calmness attests to their experience in helping to build a careful framework of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament in the first place. They understand how it so slowly and painfully came together in the first place, they can clearly see it coming apart and they know from experience that it can, with goodwill, be rebuilt.

The latter depends entirely on perseverance and hope.

To salvage the deal they must first get the support of people like Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper who can take Canada's credibility to the table in Washington. They want Canada to put its weight behind saving the non-proliferation treaty. And they know that only a friend of the United States can successfully do this.

If the world's largest nuclear power will revive nuclear verification, end production of weapon-grade plutonium and enriched uranium, turn down the nuclear "alert" button and restart a program of nuclear disarmament in the context of an international treaty, the world will follow.

The parent who smokes cigars can't, with any authority, tell his children to give up or forswear smoking. So it is with the U.S., Russia, the UK, France and the other nuclear powers. They must first step up to the plate. Only they have the authority, through their own actions, to stop the unraveling of a treaty that was created to save the world from a nuclear blight.

This week the group of Kim Campbell, Thomas Graham Jr., former Canadian Ambassador for Disarmament Doug Roche and Global Security Institute President Jonathan Granoff asked Canada to do four specific things:

- Instruct Canada's diplomats in upholding and implementing the Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- Start up a treaty to cut-off productions of weapons-grade material and lend Canada's help in verification.
- Work at convincing holdout states to ratify the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.
- Convince all nuclear states to take their weapons off high-alert status and begin verified weapons reductions.

They deserve support and encouragement.