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Nuclear Non-Proliferation Is Not a Partisan Issue

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NEWS STORY

By Douglas Roche

The Middle Powers Initiative (MPI) was in Ottawa last week, meeting with the Foreign and Defence Ministries and appearing before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. The message was nuclear weapons—as in getting rid of them in the name of sanity, let alone security. A lot of words were spoken, but the best by far were uttered by former prime minister Kim Campbell who said, "This is not a left-right issue, but a smart-dumb one."

That's the political issue in a nutshell, and it seemed to go down well at the dinner MPI offered for a range of parliamentarians, including members of the four main parties, Conservative, Liberal, NDP and Bloc Quebecois.

Kim Campbell, who is pretty zesty with incisive comments, led the MPI delegation and, judging by the demand for media interviews (Duffy and Newman went head-to-head), the Rt. Hon. Kim scored big in Ottawa. From getting the complete attention of Peter Harder (no easy task) to reassuring Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor that nuclear weapons have no security value, not to mention bringing Prime Minister Stephen Harper up to speed, Kim was a big hit in Ottawa.

Lawrence Martin, Jeff Sallot and Jennifer Ditchburn all tried to do a reprise on 1993 when they heard Kim was in town. But Kim, class all the way, told them to concentrate on the present nuclear crisis, not past politics. Of course, 1993 happened (Elsie Wayne and Jean Charest, you do remember?), but is that supposed to define Kim's life until 2050? Kim accepted what happened and then got on with her life (not a bad idea for the rest of us).

After serving as Canada's Consul General in Los Angeles, Kim moved on to the Club of Madrid, the association of former Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers dedicated to putting a global spotlight on the human security issues. One day in the late 1990s, Kim met the late Senator Alan Cranston of California, who was starting the Global Security Institute, dedicated to getting the United States government to accept its legal responsibilities to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Treaty. The Global Security Institute then combined forces with the Middle Powers Initiative, a consortium of eight prominent non-governmental organizations specializing in nuclear disarmament. Kim became a prominent spokesperson for MPI.

This does not mean that Kim just reads prepared scripts. Actually, we don't prepare speeches for Kim. As she showed, when she spoke to an MPI meeting of 21 states at The Hague in March 2006, Kim can captivate an audience with her own words about why nuclear weapons are so disastrous for humanity. Kim has got the facts down, and she cares. It's an unbeatable combination. So when she speaks, whether it's about "cognitive dissonance" or the simple fact that nuclear weapons are not a partisan issue but an issue for all of humanity, she has even the hard-boiled eating out of her hand. Deepak Obhrai sat mesmerized. Kevin Sorensen, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, said he was sorry to bring the meeting where Kim was testifying to a close. Martin and Sallot both fought me when I told them the time was up for their interviews.

Jim Creskey and Sarah McGregor of Embassy hung around for an hour after Kim moved on, hoping to get some residual pearls from the other members of the MPI delegation, Ambassador Tom Graham, a longstanding senior diplomat of the U.S., and Jonathan Granoff, President of the Global Security Institute and a protégé of Senator Cranston.

Graham and Granoff went through the MPI Brief, which was based on five practical proposals the MPI wants Canada to champion: A treaty to ban the production of fissile materials, verification of nuclear disarmament treaties, taking all nuclear weapons off alert status; legal guarantees that a non-nuclear state will never be attacked by a nuclear weapons state; a fully ratified Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which means bringing the U.S. on side. MPI will be back in Ottawa September 28-29 with a special forum of representatives of 25 like-minded countries who will conduct a dialogue with representatives of the nuclear weapons states.

All of this makes a great deal of sense and even the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, headed by the activists Bev DeLong and Debbie Grisdale (who legitimately want the end of nuclear weapons tomorrow), have bought into it.

The MPI told the Government of Canada to work harder on practical steps to cool down the present nuclear dangers. Kofi Annan says the world is "sleep walking" towards a nuclear catastrophe. The Swedish diplomat Hans Blix has just released a report calling for a World Summit to energize the nuclear disarmament machinery.

It's time for Canada to step up to the plate. The U.S. will listen to Canada (credit Stephen Harper with improving relations), but how can they react if Canada doesn't speak up?

Foreign Minister Peter MacKay came to personally hear the MPI delegation testify before the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. I like to think he came to absorb a well thought-out brief. But really, I think he was there to hear Kim. Like all the rest of us, when Kim Campbell talks about the safety of the human family in the years ahead, Stephen Harper and Peter MacKay listen. Well, I hope so.

Former Senator Douglas Roche is Chairman of the Middle Powers Initiative and author of "Beyond Hiroshima."