

The China Dimension

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China is not simply a country of major interest in the Review. Its emergence as a proactive global presence and assertive regional power has major geo-political and security implications in the context of a shifting balance of power.

Not since the Korean War have Canadian and Chinese forces faced each other directly. Since 1970 the main line of Canadian policy has been engagement: a combination of pursuing commercial opportunities; assisting China's entrance into international institutions; and attempting to either change China or, more modestly, influence Chinese behavior in particular niche areas.

The blend of opportunities and challenges that China poses for Canada has changed significantly since the International Policy Statement in 2005, the same year that the two countries redefined their relationship as a strategic partnership. In the Conservative decade that followed the tone of bilateral political relations was cooler even as economic interactions expanded considerably. But Ottawa did not develop or articulate a comprehensive China strategy. We maintained a steady level of consultation with the PLA and political leaders raised significant concerns about espionage and cyber intrusions. But there was no major statement or speech focused on the military and security dimensions of China's rising capacities and shifting intentions. Nor was there any significant public debate in what can be described as a decade of strategic silence.

The National Defence Review is one part of a broader re-think of Canada's role in global affairs. As Wendy Dobson and I argued in our November 2015 public white paper on "The Future of the Canadian Relationship with China," this review is essential to our credibility and the prospects of an expanded Canadian role in the Asia Pacific region. We can't meet our economic and political objectives in Asia without having a comprehensive approach. We can't get Asia right unless we get China right. And we can't get China right unless we have a clear perspective on the realm of security and defence in Asia in an era of significant regional tensions and a new phase of geo-strategic competition.

Strategic silence is no longer possible or prudent as developments in contested maritime waters prove more alarming in policy circles and in the broader public. There is rising awareness of China's increasing military capabilities and defense expenditures. Further, there is more uncertainty about China's immediate actions (especially in the East China and South China Seas) and its longer term strategic intentions than there is about its capabilities. And there is enormous debate about the institutional architecture and rules and norms Chinese leaders have in mind as they play a major role in building a regional and global order that supplements and in some areas supplants the international system created in the aftermath of World War II, largely under American leadership.

The new and unavoidable issue under President Xi Jinping is that China is contesting American primacy in Asia, economically, diplomatically and militarily. From my perspective, China is

neither revanchist nor expansionist and on global issues and stages it is proving to be a largely constructive player. But regionally it is seeking revisions to the rules and norms of the Asia Pacific order.

In responding to the China challenge, Asian and other countries, including the United States, are positioning in a variety of ways ranging from countering or containing through to hedging and engaging. In most instances, including the US and Australia, there are elements of all three. Some, like Japan and the Philippines, are positioning themselves on "countering" side of the spectrum.

The Defence Review will encounter a range of issues that have a significant China dimension, among them: ballistic missile defence; weaponization of space; naval procurement; contingency planning; mil-to-mil exchanges; allocation of defence attaches and analytic capabilities; infrastructure protection; Arctic sovereignty and safety; and the potential for arms control and disarmament.

All of these deserve very close attention. But the fundamental issues that the emergence of global China presents are much bigger:

In the Dobson-Evans report we introduce the argument that rather than join a coalition of countries to contain or counter China we revitalize with a range of like-minded countries (among them Korea and several members of ASEAN) a Middle Power role ; that our focus be on diplomatic and institutional arrangements for ratcheting down the action-reaction dynamic that is roiling Pacific waters and producing a major military build-up; that we look carefully at initiatives and roles for Canada in addressing some carefully chosen human security issues in the region where we have capacity and interest; that we be alert to specific domestic threats to Canada (cyber issues among them) posed by deeper interactions with China; and that we do a very careful review of precisely what kind of new security order in the region we prefer and what steps we can take with others to engineer it.

I'm very sorry that I can't be a part of the discussion. PME