

Book Excerpt

Brave New Canada: Meeting the Challenge of a Changing World

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Turning Toward the Asia -Pacific, pages 85-96

Canada's security and defense policies have traditionally been wedded to a transatlantic vision of the world and anchored in NATO and NORAD, which have been the main instruments of our engagement in Europe, North America, and "out-of area," as in the cases of Afghanistan and Libya. We need a new vision for our security commitments and engagement with the rest of the world that goes beyond NATO-centrism. That does not mean abandoning NATO, especially as it deals with a new threat from Russia. But we must also recognize the clear limits to bending or trying to reshape NATO into an instrument of global security.

It is now a matter of official government policy that Canada sees itself as a nation of the Asia-Pacific in what is now commonly known as the Pacific Century – a century that will be increasingly dominated by China, China's rivalry with Japan and India, and the competing poles of other emerging economies of the Asia-Pacific region such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines. The policies of the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper are slowly being redirected at developing and strengthening our trading and investment ties with key countries in this region. Canada's Global Markets Action Plan, released in November 2014, targets the emerging economies of the Asia-Pacific. Canada is also conducting free trade talks with India, Singapore, Thailand, and Japan, which has long been an ally and close friend of Canada.

However, as it courts the different countries of the region, Canada is fast discovering that there is every expectation that our relations will also include a strong security dimension. The nascent security dialogue with Japan that began in 2010 should become more systematic and serious. In the Asia-Pacific, prosperity and regional security go hand in hand. Our new partners won't just let us "do" economics. They want a much broader and deeper set of engagements in our evolving partnerships.

In the past, Canada was an energetic and deeply committed security partner in the region. July 2013 marked the sixtieth anniversary of the armistice that ended the Korean War - a war in which Canada's navy and army were actively deployed in a military action against an aggressor nation and 516 servicemen gave their lives in combat.

In the 1980s, under the government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Canada's creative diplomacy in Northeast Asia laid the conceptual foundations for what eventually came to be known as the Six-Party Talks on North Korea, though we were not a party to that exercise. And, in the 1990s, Canada, with its Indonesian partners, conducted informal diplomacy for conflict prevention in the South China Sea by fostering dialogue among East and Southeast Asian nations on a wide range of issues that included putting some imaginative ideas for environmental protection and joint resource development on the table – ideas that were welcomed at the time by senior Chinese participants in those talks.

In the harsh fiscal climate of the late 1990s, our enthusiasm for innovative engagement in the Asia-Pacific region waned. Our security commitments today operate on a much narrower bandwidth that is essentially limited to those areas where we have compelling national interests, such as combatting the scourge of human smuggling, counterterrorism, and nuclear non-proliferation (through our membership in the Proliferation Security Initiative, which was launched under the administration of George W. Bush in an attempt to thwart North Korea's nuclear ambitions).

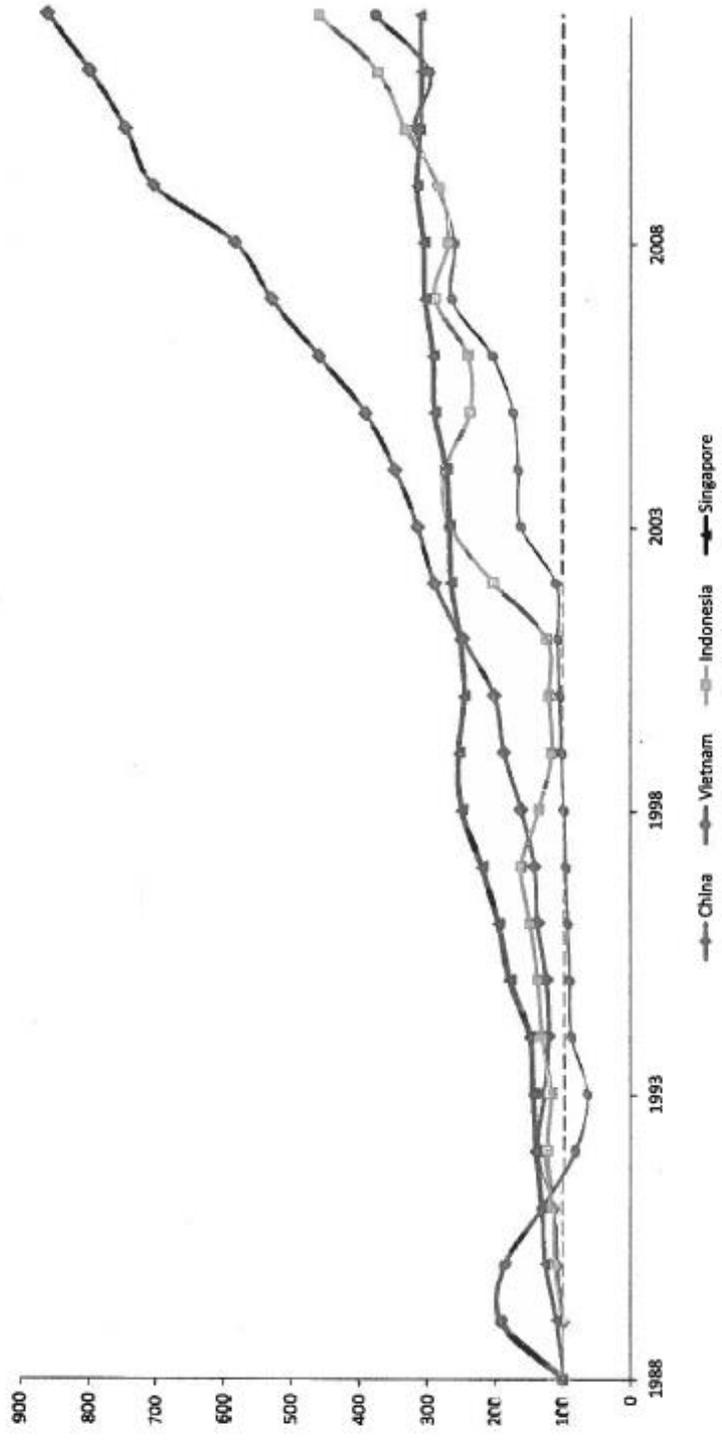
The major challenge today is that the security dynamics of the Asia-Pacific region are changing dramatically, with uncertain consequences that create their own dilemmas for our future engagement.

In the period 1945-75, the Asia-Pacific region, primarily because of the wars in Korea and Indochina, was the most violent and conflict-ridden on the globe. It has since become one of the most peaceful as the countries of the region have embraced capitalism and economic growth with a vengeance. But will the region's peace and prosperity last? This is an open question. Numerous forces – internal and external- have been set in motion by the region's rapid economic development and its political systems, which are struggling to adapt and accommodate to economic and social change.

The rapid growth of Asia's middle class – to which one billion more will be added over the next five to ten years – will not be satisfied by store shelves filled with goods, but will increasingly seek to participate in political systems where institutionalized avenues for political participation are weak.

Rising nationalism in key countries of the region, like China, Japan, and Vietnam, is playing out as territorial and resource disputes. Many of these disputes are infused by deep-rooted cultural and historical animosities and political opportunism by those in power. It would be a mistake to think that these disputes are simply about sovereignty. The region is also experiencing the political mobilization and, in some instances, the radicalization of ethnic and religious minorities, such as China's perennial tensions with its Tibetan, Uyghur, and Mongol minorities. This too is destabilizing the internal politics of countries in the region.

The regional balance of power in the Asia-Pacific is also shifting with the rise of its new regional powers. India, Indonesia, Vietnam, and South Korea are challenging the traditional regional power hierarchy, and two of the region's great powers, Russia and Japan, worry about the loss of their power and influence to China. This shift is being accompanied by a major modernization of armed forces in the region (see figure 4) which creates its own competitive dynamic. Most experts say that this is not an arms race yet, but it could become one if political tensions in the region worsen. However, a growing number of incidents at sea involving fishing boats and military and coast guard vessels from rival nations are exacerbating tensions as regional balances shift.



Spending in 1988 = 100, except China where 1989 is base year
 Hashed line = 100

Figure 4
 Real military spending growth in selected Asian countries measured in constant 2011 US dollars

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Military Expenditure Database.

In recent years, relations between China and the United States have been clumsily managed, especially during the Obama and Bush administrations where the so-called pivot (now downgraded to a “rebalancing”) is worrying to the Chinese, who see the vestiges of Cold-War style containment in US policy. China’s own ham-fisted management of relations with its smaller neighbours is also a source of the region’s increasing insecurity. As a recent, CIGI-ASPI (Australian Strategic Policy Institute) report, “Facing West, Facing North,” notes, “Years of emphasizing China’s ‘peaceful rise’ in the region have given way to a confidence since 2009 that makes China more willing to use its economic weight, military and paramilitary power to assert its interests. Methods include, but are not limited to, the deployment of its coast guard vessels to police its claimed but disputed maritime jurisdiction, the application of informal economic sanctions, the encouragement of consumer boycotts and, in November 2013, the unilateral declaration of an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea.” The ADIZ has no validity or precedent in international law.

However, the most serious potential for catastrophe involves China-US relations. There are clearly many complex factors and dynamics affecting relations between the two countries. They are summarized in the text box on the next three pages.

FIVE REASONS WHY THERE WILL BE AND THERE WON’T BE WAR BETWEEN THE US AND CHINA

WHY THERE WILL BE WAR

1 The historical curse of great power transitions

Since the time of ancient Greece and the war between Athens and Sparta, great power transitions in world politics have had deeply unsettling consequences, as Thucydides’ account of the origins of Peloponnesian wars attest. The American strategic pivot toward Asia reflects some of the same fears about China’s rise that Sparta felt about Athens. Athens bullied its smaller Aegean Sea neighbours; China is doing the same in its own maritime neighbourhood.

2 Public opinion

The overwhelming majority of Americans (66 per cent) see the rise of China as competition for the United States and they don’t like it, and another 68 per cent believe that China cannot be trusted. Never mind that China, as an investor, is underwriting much of the US fiscal deficit (including the US defence budget) and debt. America’s elites, who really ought to know better, feel that competition even more acutely.

3 Blame China

The prospect off a tit-for-tat trade war may become more likely and more ominous – especially if the US economy stays in the doldrums and unemployment stays high. “Blame China” sentiments, especially in the US congress, could grow.

4 A return to containment

The United States is working actively to encircle, if not contain, China by reinvigorating its alliances in the region- notably with Japan and Australia, but also with other Southeast Asian nations, including former adversaries like Myanmar and Vietnam. The much-touted TPP is also part of this containment strategy. Korea is always a tinderbox and an additional potential flashpoint where both China and the US have interests.

5 Blame the US

China has taken to blaming America for inflaming regional tensions and creating problems with its neighbours that are largely of its own making. China's claims in the China Sea are legally dubious, but its actions or a crisis could draw in the US in defense of its allies, such as Japan or the Philippines.

WHY THERE WON'T BE A WAR

1 Economic interdependence

China and the US are two of the most economically interdependent economies in the world. China is heavily invested in the US economy and US Treasury Bills. The US in turn is heavily invested in China. Any kind of major disruption in relations or escalations of tensions would cost both countries dearly. Unlike the US and Russia during the Cold War, or even the relationship between Germany and Britain before the First World War, China and the United States are joined at the hip by mutual trade and investment. They may be strategic rivals, but any kind of surgical separation would almost certainly kill off both of these Siamese twins.

2 China is militarily in no position to challenge the US

China's military power and projection capabilities pale in comparison to those of the US, notwithstanding recent increases in Chinese defence spending and China's acquisition of a blue-water navy (an open ocean navy). Nor is it at all clear that China wants to go head to head with the US by challenging its global military supremacy.

3 Uncertain regional allies

Most countries of the Asia-Pacific, including ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), won't join the US in a formal American-led anti-China coalition. Incidentally, this is one of the reasons why some countries are ambivalent about the security thrust of the TPP and go out of their way to pitch it as a trade deal.

4 War weariness

Americans have no stomach for opening up another military front. Beset by vast domestic challenges and still recovering from their bloody and inconclusive experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, Americans will be disinclined to look for fresh conflicts. The Chinese have their own domestic worries to distract them; if hostilities open, expect to see them limited to trade disputes, or to bloodless (and publicly deniable) strikes in cyberspace.

5 Shared interests and a history of cooperation

The record of Sino-American relations since the Kissinger-Nixon opening in the early 1970s has largely been one of cooperation. China and America cooperated on the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in the Paris Peace Accords of 1992. America was a strong supporter of China's entry into the WTO. American companies have invested hugely in China and now Chinese companies are trying to do the same in the US (and Canada). Although China and the US have their differences when it comes to the Middle East and Persian Gulf (Iran and Syria), they have shared interests in promoting greater stability in the Middle East and securing safe passage for the 20 per cent of the world's oil supplies that pass through the straits of the Persian Gulf, much of it to China.

On the balance, it is our belief that the US and China simply have too much at stake to replay the war between Athens and Sparta or between any other great powers from previous eras. Nevertheless, however much major war has been devalued and delegitimized as an instrument of national policy, it is unwise to discount the chance that major state rivalry, military tests of strength, or sheer miscalculation could trigger outbreaks of inter-state war, including the Asia-Pacific. Tensions will be a constant and containment will require astute diplomatic footwork.

We also cannot take continued domestic political stability in the region or in China for granted. It is apparent that the Arab Spring movement is part of a general global phenomenon that is being experienced in places as diverse as the post-Soviet states and other autocracies, including China. The behaviour of authoritarian leaders around the globe suggests that – whatever we may think of the likely scenarios – they consider themselves to be much more vulnerable than previously to spontaneous pressures from the general populace and may therefore seek to divert popular discontent by manufacturing foreign policy crises with neighbours, especially on territorial issues, about which public sentiment is most intense.

A careful examination of scenarios that could draw the US and China (or China and various combinations of neighbours, such as Japan, the Philippines, India, or Pakistan) into armed hostilities leads to the conclusion that peaceful coexistence is not assured. And it likewise leads to a heightened appreciation of the importance of managing and deflecting these risks through imaginative diplomacy and regional confidence-building measures of the kind that reduced tensions between East and West during the Cold war and allowed for a peaceful transition when the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended.

Beyond the great power and regional rivalries, there is a wide range of new security challenges, such as terrorism, cybercrime, and espionage, natural disaster management, transnational crime, and drug trafficking that will command policymakers' attention. There is no shortage of things Canada can do with the myriad new challenges of this fast-changing security environment in the Asia-Pacific. But we can't do everything and we are going to have to make some tough choices about where we engage, with whom we work, and, more fundamentally, what we do.

Canada has important security interests in the region, which are defined by the following considerations: as our own economic fortunes and future are increasingly tied to the region we will have a specific and not simply a generalized stake in the region's continuing prosperity and stability. Our economic partners in the region, notably Japan and Korea, but also our new trading partners in Southeast Asia, have signalled that if we want to do business with them and sign new

investment and trade deals we have to be more reliable and engaged security partners. We can't simply be carpetbaggers.

We are also going to have to decide what kind of role and defence capabilities are required for a bigger Canadian presence and role in the Asia-Pacific. In the US, the increased focus on Asia implies a very different kind of fighting force than has been produced in the last ten years. No matter how the relationship with China is worked out over the next decade, from a military point of view the focus will probably turn from an emphasis on large land-based forces toward highly mobile naval, air and special forces and technologically sophisticated cyber-attack capabilities, space-based intelligence and communications systems, and perhaps new anti-satellite capabilities.

Canada will have to decide whether it wishes to follow the US security pivot and rebalance toward Asia, recognizing that as we engage China economically, our own national interests are not necessarily in complete alignment with the US on all security and economic matters. Those countries in the region that are in transition may also need a variety of responses, including help countering violent extremism, talking to unpalatable opponents, strengthening regional organizations and their capacity to manage conflict, and training local police and security forces.

In early June 2013, Canada's former defence minister, Peter MacKay, told delegates at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, a key annual gathering of defence ministers and other officials, that Canada is keen to join the two key defence and security forums in the region – the ASEAN Defence Ministerial Meeting-Plus (ADM M-Plus) and the East Asian Summit. But what he heard back was that we have to show that we are serious about playing a constructive role in Asia before we are allowed into these organizations. When former ASEAN secretary general Surin Pitsuwan stepped down from his post at the end of 2012, he made it clear that it will be years before Canada gets another chance to join the East Asian Summit, and that, frankly, "Canada knows that it has been rather absent from the region."

Canada is now in the process of increasing its visibility and engagement in the region through, for example, a growing number of ministerial visits, visits to local ports of call by our navy, and participation in joint military exercises such as the Rim of the Pacific Exercise, the annual Cobra Gold exercise in Thailand, and in exercises on the Korean peninsula.

However, there is clearly a lot more we could do to engage and demonstrate that the region is central to our interests. There are relatively easy and non-controversial avenues for deeper engagement such as military medicine, disaster relief assistance and management, and counter-piracy operations. Canada can also help with peacekeeping, police training, and improved civil-military relations. Beyond that, our navy also has an important role to play helping secure sea lines of communication in an ocean that accounts for one-half of the world's cargo tonnage and through which two-thirds of the Asia-Pacific's oil imports pass.

Cybersecurity is also a point of engagement and figures prominently in the agenda of the "5 Eyes," which is one of the cornerstones of our intelligence relationship with Australia, the US, the UK and New Zealand.

As we deepen our engagement in the Asia-Pacific our first priority must be to listen to what those in the region see as their main security concerns. Second, before we offer military assistance we need to find out what our security partners want from us, rather than telling them what we think they should do. That approach will gain their respect and trust. Third, in a part of the world where appearances matter, we need to keep a regular pace of diplomatic activity and regularly and

actively participate in the region's various forums. But we are going to have to go beyond that, with concrete actions and meaningful activities and forms of engagement.

Finally, Canada must strengthen its bilateral military and security ties with those key countries in the region with which we have had strong historical ties and which are key focal points of our new economic engagement. Korea sees Canada as a kindred middle power and remembers well the vital legacy of our engagement in the Korean War. Japan is also an important friend with whom we have major economic ties that should also deepen in the realm of security. At one time we were Indonesia's major development assistance donor and we continue to do major business in that country's mining sector. As the world's largest Muslim country and the most influential ASEAN member, Indonesia is a natural partner for us.

In particular, we need to deepen security and defence ties with Australia, which increasingly feels exposed in the region and does not simply want to depend on the US as its principal strategic ally. As a recent CIGI-ASPI report put it, "with Britain and the United States taking a more constrained role in security affairs, Canadian and Australian officials are finding themselves the more vocal of the traditional English-speaking security partners. Finding themselves agreeing on a number of issues has caught some by surprise. Yet they have long had much in common, and the shared understanding and altered circumstances are pointing to a renewed interest in collaboration and cross-pollination to enhance regional security and stability." Areas for potential collaboration include cooperation on procuring military hardware, increasing the number of exchanges of military personnel and joint exercises, and, potentially, a formal defence arrangement.

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