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40 Years of ASEAN-Canada Partnership, and a Strategic Agenda for Tomorrow

by Venilla Rajaguru
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POLICY UPDATE

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In Canada's sesquicentennial anniversary year, the nation is also celebrating 40 years of diplomatic partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Since its inception in 1967, ASEAN has evolved into an intergovernmental organization with 10 Southeast Asian member states (Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam), establishing intraregional processes and interregional co-operation for socio-economic progress, security and peace.

By 2023, ASEAN's combined GDP is forecast to be \$6.2 trillion.¹ By 2050, ASEAN as one region is projected to rank as the fourth largest economy in the world.² Currently, ASEAN is Canada's sixth largest merchandise trading partner.³ Two-way trade has surged since the Canada-ASEAN Joint Declaration on Trade and Investment⁴ was adopted in October 2011, and with the subsequent opening of the Canada-ASEAN Business Council in 2012. In 2016, Canada-ASEAN merchandise trade is reported to have reached \$21.6 billion.⁵ But is this partnership only driven by trade and the marketplace? ASEAN is notably distinct from a market-driven institution such as Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC).⁶ What, then, is the impetus for these 40 years of diplomatic history between Canada and ASEAN? What strategic agenda drives, and will continue to drive, this partnership to make it stronger and closer in the 21st century?

Historical Overview

The history of this trans-Pacific partnership provides insights into a cooperative model that far exceeds the trade agenda. It is interesting that ASEAN's establishment in 1967 and the start of Canada's regional co-operation with it 10 years later both occurred during the Cold War. However, Cold War politics alone did not guide Canada's role in ASEAN regional co-operation. Former Canadian prime minister Joe Clark's concept of "cooperative security" laid the foundations for a newer order of international co-operation in the 1990s. This occurred with the recognition that the end of the Cold War years was the end of a straight-cut bipolar order. Such a bipolar framework of security had to be replaced with multilateral co-operation.⁷

Canada's approach to ASEAN multilateralism since the 1990s has featured distinct Track I and Track II initiatives. Under Track I, Canada became one of the founding members of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994, a formal multilateral dialogue and consultation process on confidence-building measures and preventive diplomacy. In March 1997, Canada hosted the nation's first ARF and since then has co-chaired and co-hosted a number of ARF activities. These include the inaugural ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group (ISG) on Confidence Building Measures (CBM) and Preventive Diplomacy (PD); the inaugural ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Peacekeeping Operations (PKO), a training course on modern peacekeeping; the third and the 10th ARF inter-sessional meetings (ISM) on counterterrorism and transnational crime (CTTC); the ARF CBM Seminar on UN Security Council Resolution 1540, and the ARF Workshop on



Countering Illicit Trafficking of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Materials (CBRN). Canada and the Philippines are co-chairing the ARF defence officials' dialogue (DOD) and the ARF ISG on CBMs and preventive diplomacy for 2016-2017. According to an ASEAN official, "Canada is committed to the promotion of defence dialogue in ARF."⁸

Under Track II initiatives, the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) partnership with the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN ISIS), has shaped regional security norms, engaging scholars, academic researchers and retired diplomatic officers throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Canadian scholars were directly involved in Track II efforts to establish the Council for Security and Co-operation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) in 1993. Yet, the most prominent Track II initiative engaged diplomats, scholars and researchers in the South China Sea workshops series, better known as the South China Sea informal working group, funded by CIDA, and with support throughout the 1990s from Canada's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁹

In 2013, former Foreign Affairs minister John Baird re-asserted that, "Our economic interests in Asia are inextricably tied to issues of security, governance, human rights and development."¹⁰ Four years earlier in 2009, Canada appointed an ambassador to ASEAN,¹¹ and adopted the Joint Declaration on the ASEAN-Canada Enhanced Partnership.¹² In 2010, Canada acceded to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Co-operation. A plan of action was also formulated (under the joint declaration) to advance Canada-ASEAN co-operation in three key areas: political and security issues, economic sectors and socio-cultural matters. Baird regarded such enhanced co-operation as a "comprehensive relationship."¹³ In 2014, at a post-ministerial conference in Singapore, Baird stated "Canada's relationship with ASEAN is one of our key foreign policy priorities," and then announced an additional \$14 million to be put towards ASEAN security-building projects.¹⁴ Foreign policy on ASEAN under the current Liberal government is stronger than ever. The Liberals are now implementing the ASEAN-Canada Plan-of-Action 2016-2020. Moreover, as Marie-Louise Hannan, Canada's ambassador to ASEAN, states, "Canada supports a series of development and security programs with a total value of more than \$235 million per year for ASEAN and its member states." ASEAN in Canadian diplomatic relations is "at the heart of Asia's regional security architecture."¹⁵

21st Century Trans-Pacific Agenda

Despite an economic boom in the ASEAN region, a number of critical security agendas require cooperative strategies to mitigate intraregional and interregional risks. These risks include: i) The protracted disputes among several ASEAN coastal states and China over the South China Sea's maritime boundaries, and their increased militarization of the region; ii) the prevailing vulnerability to cyber-crime; and iii) the persistence of extremist groups and their movements across the Pacific,¹⁶ which demand a strategic approach. As a Pacific nation, Canada has a significant role in conceptualizing and implementing a tangible regional strategy, in



collaboration with ASEAN, on instituting peace and order for the benefit of international trade traffic, trans-frontier crime prevention and the elimination of terror.

Of the three trans-Pacific security issues, Canadian co-operation with ASEAN has recently focused predominantly on the last two, i.e., combating transnational cyber-crime and countering terrorism. On Aug. 3, 2017 (a few days before ASEAN's 50th anniversary on Aug. 8), Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland announced in Manila that "Canada is in 'a strong position' to help the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) against terrorism."¹⁷ She was attending the interregional foreign ministerial meeting whose agenda focused on "Islamist extremism, along with nuclear tension in the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea dispute."¹⁸ During that meeting, she unveiled "nearly \$13 million in funding" for the ASEAN region through Canadian anti-crime capacity-building and counterterrorism capacity-building programs.¹⁹ This is not the first time Canada has funded anti-terrorism initiatives.

Since 2005, Canada has contributed more than \$11 million towards counterterrorism co-operation. This includes the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosives (CBRNE) Project, which involved the participation of 4,000 officials from ASEAN member states. This non-traditional security partnership is aligned with the ASEAN-Canada Joint Declaration for Co-operation to Combat International Terrorism, signed in Kuala Lumpur in July 2006. Since 2007, a senior Canadian police trainer from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has also been stationed at the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Co-operation (JCLEC) to help co-ordinate regional capacity-building programs. Liaison officers from the RCMP and the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) are stationed at Canadian diplomatic missions throughout Southeast Asia, and a Canadian heads Interpol's capacity-building team (CBT) for ASEAN, based in Singapore. Furthermore, in 2014, Canada confirmed its support for a three-year project to improve counterterrorism investigation and international collaboration in ASEAN under the framework of the senior officials' meeting on transnational crime (SOMTC). This is currently being implemented by Interpol. The last session of the SOMTC and Canadian consultation was held in May 2017 in Vientiane, Laos.

Another core item on the agenda of Canada-ASEAN co-operation is cyber-security. ASEAN infrastructure has borne decade-long cyber-attacks, of which the most prominent is APT30, thought to have originated in China.²⁰ The reported estimate of ASEAN member countries' losses due to cyber-security breaches was \$240 million in 2014.²¹ In November 2014, Canada pledged its support for the Singapore-proposed project, a Framework for Capacity Building against Cybercrime in ASEAN: Setup of Cybercrime Forensic Capability. This project began in March 2015 and is being implemented by Interpol. Notably, Canadian development co-operation on security matters has been and is focused on capacity building for ASEAN. Canadian commitment on these anti-crime and counterterrorism agendas is indeed aligned with ASEAN political and security community priorities and ASEAN's Vision Blueprint 2025, i.e., to be a rules-based, resilient community in a peaceful and secure region with strengthened institutional capacity to play a responsible and constructive role in regional and global issues.



Regional Role: What More?

An ASEAN official has confirmed that the previous consultative workshop at the ASEAN Secretariat in April 2016 clarified the evolving Canadian approach: it is “now shifting from a multi-country approach to regional programming in Southeast Asia, to better reflect ASEAN centrality and to align future projects with ASEAN’s processes.” Canada’s investments in development co-operation, according to the ASEAN official, are implemented mostly through its regional partners, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Interpol, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and federal departments such as the RCMP and National Defence. But as the official explains, what is required at this stage of regional programming (rather than the earlier multi-country approach), is an advancement towards a more “collaborative programming approach” with the ASEAN Secretariat, while engaging the Secretariat to play a much wider role in the design, development and implementation of the institutional and regional capacity-building projects.

Yet another trans-Pacific security matter of global significance that remains to be effectively addressed within the current enhanced partnership with ASEAN is the regional and international nuclear in/securities in the South China Sea (SCS) region. SCS disputes have re-emerged in the new millennium not just as a regional problem, but also as a global security concern. SCS is not just an international domain for annual traffic of more than \$5 trillion²² worth of trade goods and oil, but is also one of the most dangerous maritime theatres of our world for a show of nuclear might.²³ Admittedly, intraregional boundary disputes are best resolved on a bilateral basis. But interregional conflicts such as China’s expansive maritime claims (in contravention of international law), increased militarization and the prevalent arms race in the region are matters of global security, requiring trans-Pacific consultations and Pacific peace initiatives.

The dangers emerging from missile programs and nuclear-powered submarines in the Pacific are not (and should not be) disconnected from Arctic security.²⁴ Nuclear-powered submarines cruise under waterways and weaponized aircrafts fly in airspace across the western Pacific, stretching from SCS to the Yellow Sea of the Korean peninsula, the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan, northward along the Russian Pacific borders and into the Arctic region. These movements of military vessels and the nuclear-armed artillery of several of the most powerful maritime nations across the Pacific (into the Arctic) defy neat categories of action, such as deterrence vs. threats or freedom of navigation operations vs. military activities. Such strategic ambivalence at sea and in the air intensifies into a complex matrix of conflicts across the Pacific due to drugs and weapons trafficking in the Yellow Sea and trafficking, piracy and terrorism southward in and around SCS. It is also important to explicitly discuss how and why North Korea’s nuclear missile program is thriving, and to recognize the networks of state and non-state actors active and complicit in North Korea’s missile threats.

The current state of turmoil in the Pacific region calls for a Canadian trans-Pacific interregional security policy, which seeks to diffuse Pacific tensions and balance regional and international powers through consultative programs on peace norms and harmonious resolutions. Indeed,



Canadian policy is that “ASEAN is at the heart of Asia’s regional security architecture.”²⁵ However, the question now is on the apparent lack of clarity of Canada’s regional policy on East Asian security, at a time when SCS disputes and North Korean threats have emerged as global security issues. A multitude of ASEAN forums and sectoral bodies are available for developing a trans-Pacific peace strategy and security programs, and to win multilateral co-operation at the regional level in the Asia Pacific. The ARF provides the regional channel for multilateral discussions. However, the East Asia Summit (EAS) of ASEAN is a more pragmatic platform for engaging in strategic and cooperative security dialogues at the regional, multilateral and multipolar levels. Though Canada’s membership in the EAS is pending, this can be accomplished with a clear regional policy on East Asia, and through interregional trans-Pacific security programs.

Policy Futures

The Canada-ASEAN partnership is an enduring success, with a rising economic edge to it. Yet, security concerns require a boost in Canadian policies for interregional co-operation. The following five points are policy perspectives in brief:

- **Trans-Pacific regional security policy:** A Canadian Pacific peace policy focusing on East Asia’s stability and security would be helpful for i) multilateral co-operation over regional regulation/management of the nuclear arms race in SCS; ii) mitigating and eliminating North Korean nuclear threats, and iii) combating interregional cyber-attacks. A tangible trans-Pacific peace policy and East Asia security policy will work toward Canada’s participation in EAS, and effectively contribute to both peaceful community building in the Pacific states and international trade.
- **Cyber-security:** Strengthening regional cyber-security and combating transnational security breaches require a trans-Pacific policy on establishing a regional consortium for instituting regulatory norms and governance best practices in cyber-secure emergency response, disaster prevention, crisis management and knowledge-sharing activities.
- **Canada-ASEAN Anti-Terrorism Co-operation:** This could be strengthened further by Canada joining the regional group of countries in ASEAN and other ASEAN dialogue partners such as Australia and New Zealand, to jointly create a consortium/platform to manage interregional terrorist threats.²⁶
- **Interregional Capacity-Building Initiatives:** These require a more collaborative approach with the ASEAN Secretariat in regional programming, development and implementation of projects, in addition to Interpol and UN agencies.
- **Canada-ASEAN Institutes of Strategic Studies and Southeast Asian Studies:** Reinvigorating Track II collaboration among scholars and professionals through national and regional institutes of research excellence would help address pertinent trans-Pacific



matters. This could complement Canada's recent decision to provide \$10 million over five years to post-secondary students and mid-career professionals from Southeast Asia to study and/or pursue research programs in Canadian educational institutions.²⁷

These policy perspectives are intended to be useful pointers for further discussions on enhancing the partnership in regional and international peace governance. The strategic agenda in Canada-ASEAN's future is both traditional and non-traditional security.

End Notes

¹ Head, BMI Research on Asia, Cedric Chehab. See:

<https://humanrightsinasean.info/article/aec-dream%E2%80%99s-failure-%E2%80%98still-success%E2%80%99.html>

² McKinsey Report: <http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/understanding-asean-seven-things-you-need-to-know>

³ Global Affairs Canada: *Canada's Relations with ASEAN*:

<http://www.international.gc.ca/asean/relations.aspx?lang=eng>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For further distinctions between ASEAN and APEC see:

Shaun Narine, *Explaining ASEAN: Regionalism in Southeast Asia*, Lynne Reinner: U.K.: 2002; 123-124.

⁷ For further details see:

i) David Dewitt, "Common, Comprehensive and Cooperative Security," *Pacific Review* 7: Issue 1, 1994; 1-16.

ii) David Capie and Evans, Paul, *The Asia-Pacific Security Lexicon*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore: 2002; 99.

⁸ Source: an official who does not wish to be identified.

⁹ For more details see:

Yann Huei Song, *Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea: Taiwan's Perspective*, World Scientific Publishing-Singapore University Press: 1999; 22-24.

¹⁰ <http://www.vancouversun.com/opinion/oped/opinion+ties+asean+countries+Canadian+prosperity/9027917/story.html>

¹¹ <http://www.international.gc.ca/asean/relations.aspx?lang=eng>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <http://www.vancouversun.com/business/Opinion+Ties+ASEAN+countries+Canadian+prosperity/9027917/story.html>

¹⁴ Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2014-08-11. This news excerpt is from the digital file on a third-party website: <https://www.pcb.ca/news.cfm?ID=4795>

¹⁵ http://www.international.gc.ca/asean/ambassadors_message-message_ambassadrice.aspx?lang=eng

¹⁶ The extremist groups include non-state actors such as terrorist clusters in Indonesia and the Philippines, and socio-ethnic violent factions prevailing in Myanmar.

¹⁷ <http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/08/06/17/canada-backs-asean-vs-terrorism>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/08/new_canadian_assistanceinsoutheastasia.html

²⁰ For further details, see:

<https://jsis.washington.edu/news/five-essential-facts-asean-cybersecurity/>

<https://jsis.washington.edu/news/asean-cybersecurity-profile-finding-path-resilient-regime/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker#!/conflict/territorial-disputes-in-the-south-china-sea>



²³ <https://www.dur.ac.uk/ibru/publications/download/?id=39>

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/08/26/china-is-fueling-a-submarine-arms-race-in-the-asia-pacific/>

²⁴ For more details, see:

Rob Huebert, “NATO, NORAD and the Arctic: A Renewed Concern,” in *North of 60: Toward a Renewed Canadian Arctic Agenda. Special Report*, eds. John Higginbotham & Jennifer Spence; Centre for International Governance Innovation: 2016; 92-95.

²⁵ <http://www.international.gc.ca/asean/relations.aspx?lang=eng>

²⁶ This particular call is from the former foreign minister and current Home Minister, Singapore:

<https://publichouse.sg/shanmugam-calls-on-us-and-world-to-pay-attention-to-radicalism-in-sea/>

²⁷ <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/08/canada-announcesnewscholarshipprogramforasean.html>

► **About the Author**

***Venilla Rajaguru** is a doctoral candidate at York University, Toronto, Canada, and the chair of a working group on ocean frontiers under Science for Peace. She is the former head of an ASEAN foundation for women and children.*

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