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Canada's Security Role in Asia-Pacific

by Marius Grinius
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South Korea's President Park Geun-hye coined the phrase 'Asian paradox.' In her speech to the US Congress in May 2013, she said "Asia suffers from what I call 'Asia's paradox,' the disconnect between growing economic interdependence on the one hand, and backward political, security cooperation on the other.¹ While President Park was referring to the situation in northeast Asia, the same idea may be applied to the entire Asia-Pacific region.

In economic terms Asia-Pacific is on a roll. Already a significant economic player in the global economy, "the region over the long term is on track to becoming a global powerhouse."² Five of the top 20 global economies are Asian, six when you count Australia as part of Asia-Pacific.³ Globally China is #2 and rising.

Notwithstanding the positive indicators of economic success and high expectations in the Asia-Pacific region, both traditional and non-traditional security challenges remain. Territorial disputes exist in various places including the South China Sea and the East China Sea. Nuclear-armed India and Pakistan remain highly suspicious of each other. The Taiwan Strait remains a historic flashpoint. North Korea is an unpredictable failing state with nuclear weapons. China, as it continues to gain global stature, is deeply suspicious of the US rebalancing of military forces towards Asia. China's ongoing military reorganization and modernization is significant.⁴ China's military buildup has also spurred other countries in the region to modernize their own military forces.⁵ Five of the seven collective defence arrangements the United States has are with countries in the Asia-Pacific region.⁶

Non-traditional security challenges include climate change, transnational crime including narcotics trafficking and human smuggling, forced internal and trans-boundary migration, religious and ethnic strife, piracy, secessionist movements, terrorism, cyber attacks, human rights violations and economic disparities.

CANADA'S 'ASIAN PARADOX'

Canada's future prosperity and indeed its social fabric are very much interwoven with the Asia-Pacific region. China has long surpassed Japan as Canada's second largest trading partner in the world after the United States. While implementing its first Asian Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with South Korea, Canada has signed the 12-country Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement and now must decide whether to ratify it. Canada is negotiating a FTA with India and is considering one with China. The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum continues to thrive. The Philippines, India and China are Canada's top three source countries of immigrants.⁷ Canada's own 'Asian paradox' is how to maximize its considerable economic and social interests in the Asia-Pacific region while contributing to its long-term stability and security architecture.

CANADA'S MILITARY CONTRIBUTION TO ASIA'S SECURITY

A wise old Asia hand once said, "for Canada to be seen in Asia, it must be seen in Asia." Ministerial and senior military engagement is vital. Absences are noted by Asian counterparts and opportunities for high-level bilateral discussions are missed. The Minister of National Defence and the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) must commit to attend the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. In addition, the CDS must attend the annual meeting of the US Pacific Command Chiefs of Defence Conference.



Reuters

'Showing the flag' through participation in exercises and other deployments is equally vital. Modest resources notwithstanding, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have shown that they can be a serious player in the Asia-Pacific region. The elements listed below are already part of the Department of National Defence's (DND) operational plans. The issue now is not to cut back but modestly increase.

- Canada's regular participation in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) naval exercise;
- participate in annual exercises on the Korean Peninsula where Canada is a member of United Nations (UN) Command;
- conduct annual Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) ship visits under Westploy and regular Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) navigation exercises in the region. These should include sea and air 'freedom of navigation' exercises in both the South China Sea and the East China Sea;
- confirm that Canada is ready to deploy its Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) when needed, as it has in the past;
- regular military participation at the working level in selected Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) workshops;
- bolster the modest but effective Military Training and Cooperation Program (MTCP) for selected Asian countries;
- ensure that Canada's Military Attachés in the region are properly resourced;
- participate in other exercises with friendly militaries as the opportunity arises; and,
- beyond RIMPAC consider the longer-term deployment of a frigate with a US naval strike force.



WHAT ELSE CAN CANADA DO?

To generate the best possible results from showing the flag, CAF activities must be well-positioned within a broader and renewed Canada-Asia-Pacific context. Below are some recommendations.

Reiterate Asia's Importance within Canada's Foreign and Defence Policy

DND's 2016 Defence Policy Review Public Consultation Document states that "defence policy is guided by foreign policy."⁸ Yet the last comprehensive review of the importance of the Asia-Pacific region for Canada was submitted by the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1998.⁹ Reiteration of the importance of the Asia-Pacific region to Canada's national interests will provide the necessary guidance regarding the future scope and nature of Canada's defence and security involvement in the region. It will also guide Canada's official development assistance programs to designated countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

The China Card

A review is expected of the entire spectrum of Canada's relations with China, including the military relationship. A starting point for any future bilateral military relationship will be the non-binding Cooperation Plan Initiative signed in 2013.¹⁰

Canada and ASEAN: Need for a Roadmap to the Next Level

Outside of direct bilateral relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific region, Canada's collective relationship with ASEAN is perhaps the most important. Canada has long been an ASEAN Dialogue Partner, regular attendee at the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference and a participant in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) for confidence-building and preventative diplomacy. But ASEAN did not invite Canada to join the East Asia Summit (EAS), a forum for dialogue on "broad strategic, political and economic issues of common interest and concern with the aim of promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia."¹¹ Nor did it invite Canada to join the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+), its highest defence consultative and cooperative mechanism.

Canada has long desired EAS membership and has officially expressed its interest to join the ADMM+ forum. ASEAN, however, is still not quite convinced of Canada's commitment to Southeast Asia, or to Asia, and continues politely to stall on Canadian membership until such time as Canada can demonstrate a serious, long-term track record of participation in ASEAN strategic and security priorities. While designating a separate Canadian Ambassador to ASEAN and now having a diplomatic presence in each ASEAN capital are important steps, clearly that is not enough.

Canada must seek the advice of ASEAN members and key Dialogue Partners to establish a concrete roadmap to the EAS and ADMM+. A key element of this roadmap will be regular Canadian diplomatic and military participation in various workshops and meetings where Canada has relevant expertise.¹²

Strategic Dialogue

Canada's situational awareness of security developments in the Asia-Pacific region, especially with respect to North Korea and the South China Sea, can be enhanced through regular high-



level bilateral political and military dialogue with friends in the region beginning with the United States.¹³ Other high-level political/military talks already take place with Japan, Australia, New Zealand and, more recently, with South Korea. Such bilateral talks should expand to include India, Indonesia and Singapore.¹⁴

Track Two Contributions

From the late 1980s to 2006, Canadian Asian experts from academia were closely involved in all relevant Asian fora, including the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and the North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue (NPCSD).¹⁵ The Canadian Consortium on Asia Pacific Security (CANCAPS), a group of some 100 researchers in institutions across Canada was highly active in Track Two diplomacy (informal, non-governmental and unofficial) on Asian security issues. This included Canadian experts in the Law of the Sea who addressed challenges in the South China Sea. Just when China has taken an aggressive stance in the South China Sea, Canada is no longer present.¹⁶ Nor is Canada involved in President Park's Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI). Canada should consider re-establishing core funding for Asia-Pacific Track Two projects.

CANADA'S ROLE: THE BOTTOM LINE

Canada is already a strong economic player in the Asia-Pacific region with deep social and cultural roots there. It must now demonstrate a stronger and more consistent commitment to Asia-Pacific's long-term stability and security. It is in Canada's interest to do so.



US Navy



¹ President Park Guen-Hye, Speech to US Congress, 8 May 2013, available on Yonhap News.

² Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, "Building Blocks for a Canada-Asia Strategy," 28 January 2016.

³ G-20 Research Group.

⁴ A good overview has been produced by the Congressional Research Service, "The Chinese Military: Overview and Issues for Congress," 24 March 2016.

⁵ SIPRI Fact Sheet, "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2015," April 2016, notes that China is second only to the United States in military expenditures and that military spending in Asia and Oceania rose by 5.4% in 2015 and by 64% between 2006 and 2015.

⁶ The five include defence arrangements with Australia and New Zealand, the Philippines, Southeast Asia (parties: United States, Australia, France, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, UK), Japan, Republic of Korea. The other two are NATO and NORAD (Canada).

⁷ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "Facts and figures – Immigration Overview: Permanent Residents and Temporary Residents," latest figures cover to the end of 2014, available at www.cic.gc.ca.

⁸ "Defence Policy Review: Public Consultation Document – 2016" has one brief reference to "geopolitical rivalries and disputes in the Asia-Pacific region" and also names North Korea.

⁹ The initial Senate study, "The Importance of the Asia Pacific Region for Canada" was published in June 1997, available at <http://parl.gc.ca/Content/SEN/Committee/361>.

¹⁰ In this context the first public Chinese Military Strategy White Paper released on 26 May 2015 is a must read.

¹¹ ASEAN, "Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the East Asia Summit," Kuala Lumpur, 14 December, 2005, available at <http://www.asean.org>. EAS participants are ASEAN plus Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, the United States and Russia.

¹² Subject matter would include disaster preparedness and emergency response, preventative diplomacy, space security, sea lines of communication, counter-piracy, counter-radicalization, maritime security, counter-terrorism, non-proliferation and disarmament, cyber security, and nuclear forensics.

¹³ The aim of the "Asia Pacific Defence Cooperation Policy Framework," signed in 2013, is "to enhance the coordination of Canadian and American engagement activities in the Asia-Pacific region, build capability and capacity amongst Asian partners by coordinating training activities and exercises, and support regional forums to strengthen dialogue and cooperation" according to the American Forces Press Service, 22 November 2013.

¹⁴ A special case for eventual military-to-military dialogue with Myanmar could be made as the country emerges from some 50 years of military dictatorship, where the military still wields considerable power and will need help to submit to a democratic governance structure.

¹⁵ DFAIT Policy Planning Staff Paper No. 92/3, "Canada and Asia Pacific Security: The North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue, Recent Trends," 18 March 1992. Two-track governmental and non-governmental approach with focus on China, North Korea, Japan, Russia, South Korea, United States and Canada.

¹⁶ For an overview of Canadian Track Two diplomacy in Asia see Paul Evans, "Canada and Asia Pacific's Track-two Diplomacy," *International Journal*, Autumn 2009; and Paul Evans, "Canadian and Asia Pacific Experiences," in Abraham F. Lowenthal and Mariano E. Bertucci (eds), *Scholars, Policymakers and International Affairs*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

► **About the Author**

Marius Grinius is the former Canadian Ambassador to Vietnam (1997-99), South Korea (2004-07) and concurrently to North Korea (2005-07), to the United Nations and Conference on Disarmament in Geneva (2007-11). Before retiring in 2012 he spent a year in DND as Director-General International Security Policy. He is also a Fellow with the Canadian Global Affairs Institute.



► **Canadian Global Affairs Institute**

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