Canada’s cross-Pacific relations: From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific

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Abstract
This essay proposes a periodization of Canada’s cross-Pacific relations: from the Asia-Pacific era beginning in the 1980s to the Indo-Pacific era beginning around 2018. In the era of the Asia-Pacific, Canada was relatively disengaged on matters other than economic relations, as Ottawa sought to capitalize on dynamic emerging markets. Canada’s non-confrontational approach enabled a constructive relationship with China. The conditions for this functional relationship changed as Xi Jinping’s China assumed a more overtly revisionist, risk-taking, and confrontational foreign policy. In light of this, like-minded players in Asian security have adopted the “Indo-Pacific” nomenclature and concept in order to facilitate more interaction with each other and maintain maritime security. Midway through the Trudeau government’s tenure, the “Indo-Pacific” is likewise being adopted, as relations between China have soured while relations with other Asian partners are increasingly prioritized, notably in the security domain.

Keywords
Indo-Pacific, international security, international institutions, Canadian foreign policy, governance

Canada has a Pacific coastline of 27,200 kilometres; in light of this fact, cross-Pacific relations are naturally in Canada’s geopolitical purview. Still, Canada’s prioritization of cross-Pacific relations has fluctuated over the years. Hitherto, Canada’s allies and...
partners have questioned Canada’s level of commitment to upholding the Asian security architecture.

This essay periodizes Canadian cross-Pacific relations into two respective framings: the Asia-Pacific framing (the 1980s until the Trudeau government), and the Indo-Pacific framing (2018 onward). More specifically, under the Trudeau government there has been an observable change in Ottawa’s official lexicon, moving from the use of the “Asia-Pacific” to the “Indo-Pacific.” This change is not merely one of terminology; it signals a fundamental shift vis-à-vis how Canada ontologically understands and approaches cross-Pacific relations. This essay puts forth the view that the Asia-Pacific framing was economic-centric, while the Indo-Pacific is more strategic since it enables Canada to finally assert itself on traditional security issues. The Asia-Pacific framing capitalizes on relations with commercial hubs like Hong Kong and Singapore, while the Indo-Pacific’s maritime centricity—a framing of confluence between two oceans—prioritizes the maintenance of maritime security. While Ottawa’s Indo-Pacific adoption is new, there is already evidence that Canada is prioritizing security relations in the Indo-Pacific. In correlation with the new framing, Canada has denounced China’s actions in the South China Sea, deployed hard power in order to contain North Korea, and enhanced its defence relations with key players in Asian security like Japan.

This essay is structured in four parts. Firstly, it provides some background on Canada’s non-confrontational, economic-oriented approach to cross-Pacific relations in the Asia-Pacific era; this approach was particularly salient when it came to relations with China. Next, it explores the Indo-Pacific historically and conceptually. Thirdly, in correlation with Canada’s adoption of the Indo-Pacific framing, it shows that Canada is more readily deploying hard power in order to contribute to maintaining Asian security. Lastly, the essay analyzes Canada’s possible and actual involvements in Indo-Pacific security governance, assessing that the Trudeau government has made incremental gains in terms of attaining institutional access.

1. See, for example, GAC’s 2020 press release that announced that Minister of Foreign Affairs François-Philippe Champagne will attend the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF): “These meetings will also be an opportunity to discuss ways to promote security, good governance, trade and investment, as well as development partnerships between Canada and the Indo-Pacific region.” Another example is the press release stating that Minister Harjit Sajjan attended the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM+): “In his remarks, Minister Sajjan highlighted Canada’s contributions to maritime security, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, and military training in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific”; Government of Canada, “Minister Champagne to attend ASEAN-Canada Post-Ministerial Conference and ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial,” 8 September 2020, https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2020/09/minister-champagne-to-attend-asean-canada-post-ministerial-conference-and-asean-regional-forum-ministerial.html (accessed 20 April 2022); Government of Canada, “Speaking notes for the Honourable Harjit S. Sajjan, Minister of National Defence,” 9 December 2020, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/proactive-disclosure/cacn-national-security-dimensions-canada-china-relations-12-april-2021/pa-products.html (accessed 7 February 2022).
Canada in the Asia-Pacific

What is (or was) the Asia-Pacific? The “Asia-Pacific” framing was mainly founded in finance and trade, epitomized by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). For many extra-regional states, the primacy of finance and trade vis-à-vis Asia-Pacific relations made a lot of sense, as the “Asian Tigers” were reaching economic heights in the 1980s. For illustration, South Korea’s annual GDP growth rate between 1977 and 1997 climbed 7.6%, and Taiwan’s grew 8.3% from 1975 to 1995. The Tokyo Stock Exchange went on an astronomical trajectory in the 1980s, becoming the world’s largest. Countries around the world rushed to engage with a remarkably reforming and industrializing China under Deng Xiaoping. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in China from 1979 to 1982 reached nearly $7 billion USD—a number absolutely dwarfed by today’s standards, but very significant in the context of 1979, since, under Mao Zedong, FDI was negligible. Broadly, Asia had nine high-growth economies from 1980 to 1990, which is more than any other continent. This is all to say that it was rational for economics to rule the day for Canadian interests in Asia-Pacific international relations.

Maintaining fruitful economic relationships across the Pacific was good for everyone, and both Liberal and Conservative governments from the 1980s onward understood this dynamic well. Canada’s economic interests in the Asia-Pacific were further institutionalized when the 1984 Asia-Pacific Foundation Act formed the still-prominent institution running by the same name. A telos of the foundation is to facilitate official trade relations with Asia-Pacific states and promote private sector business-business relations.

Diplomatically, in the Asia-Pacific, “Canada was made to feel very welcome: it was a founding member of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable in 1987; in 1989 it established the Canada-ASEAN Centre (CAC), providing Canada access to many of ASEAN [the Association of Southeast Asian Nations]’s significant emerging actors”; Canada funded arms of ASEAN like the Regional Development Program. This robust multilateralism sought to diversify relations with as many states and institutions as possible without encroaching on sensitive security issues. Canada’s facilitation and sponsorship of multilateral initiatives enabled a non-confrontational and functional relationship with the PRC. In the midst of a remarkable resurgence after years of Maoist oppression, Canada lent a hand to China’s economic transformation by extending a line of credit worth $2 billion in 1979. Furthermore, as Charles Burton describes:

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2. Justin Yifu Lin, “China and the global economy.” *China Economic Journal* 4, no. 11 (2011): 5.
3. Nicholas R. Lardy, “The role of foreign trade and investment in China’s economic transformation,” *The China Quarterly* 144 (1995): 1066.
4. V.V. Bhanoji Rao, “East Asian economies: Growth within an international context,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 6 (1998): 292.
5. David Welch and David B. Dewitt, “Canada and the South China Sea,” in Asif B. Farooq and Scott McKnight, eds., *Moving Forward: Issues in Canada-China Relations*, (Toronto: Asian Institute and China Open Research Network, 2016), 40.
A small development aid programme run out of the Canadian Embassy in Beijing began in 1981. A general agreement on development cooperation was signed in 1983, a major step forward as under Mao China had refused developmental assistance from Western nations. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) was to help China to ‘build international linkages and learn from foreign expertise by supporting people-to-people contacts and education programs in Canada and China.’ Twinning agreements between Canadian and Chinese provinces and municipalities also grew apace, with high levels of activity back and forth.6

Canada-China relations wavered under the Mulroney government, with the prime minister himself, his foreign minister, Joe Clark, and Canadian civil society expressing dismay at the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. In the immediate aftermath, Canada imposed sanctions on the PRC, and used other policy instruments to eschew normal bilateral relations with the CCP. In the end, however, faltering relations turned out to be temporary; the event was not a critical juncture that caused path dependency for Canada-China relations. The former Canadian ambassador to the PRC, Fred Bild, writes:

The brakes that had been put on economic reform in the immediate aftermath of Tiananmen were suddenly loosened. By the end of 1992 bilateral trade was at a high of 4.6 billion dollars, with capital goods accounting for more than half the total. Canadian investments had doubled over the previous year.7

Canadian-Chinese relations eventually stabilized with face-to-face diplomatic meetings between cabinet-level officials and Chinese counterparts resuming.8

Jean Chrétien’s government led three trade missions to China—the 2001 iteration was the most robust trade mission in Canadian history. Beijing appreciated that Chrétien comprehended the value of face-to-face diplomacy with Chinese officials, with the frequency of diplomatic meetings reaching heights during Mr. Chrétien’s government. Crystallizing the development of Chinese-Canadian relations, at a meeting in Toronto in 2005, Prime Minister Paul Martin and Chinese President Hu Jintao signed a strategic partnership, with a special focus on investment and trade between the two countries. It is important to highlight the major role that semi-independent Hong Kong played in shaping Canada’s official and unofficial economic relations across the Pacific. Speaking in 2006, Perrin Beatty highlights the conditions that enabled Hong Kong to flourish in a speech to the Hong Kong–Canada Business Association at a meeting in Ottawa: “Hong Kong advocates and practises free trade—a

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6. Charles Burton, “The Canadian policy context of Canada’s China policy since 1970,” in Huhua Cao and Vivienne Poy, eds., The China Challenge: Sino-Canadian Relations in the 21st Century (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2011), 37.
7. Fred Bild, “Canada’s staying power: A diplomat’s view,” in Cao and Poy, The China Challenge, 26.
8. Burton, “The Canadian policy context of Canada’s China policy since 1970,” 40.
free and liberal investment regime, the absence of trade barriers, no discrimination against over-seas investors, freedom of capital movements, a well-established rule of law, transparent regulations, and low and predictable taxation."9

In the early years of the Harper government, Mr. Harper lacked communication with top Chinese officials and downgraded China as a priority for his diplomatic travel circuit. The prime minister made a stinging statement that Canadians “don’t want us to sell out to the almighty dollar,” a reference to Canada “selling out” liberal democratic values as the country simultaneously engages with an authoritarian China. While China specialists in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) expressed the need for pragmatic engagement with China, the Harper government repeatedly drew attention to China’s human rights violations on various occasions, which jeopardized a functioning Canada-China relationship.

The early years of the Harper government can be bracketed from its later years. To quote the conclusion of Wenran Jiang’s 2009 essay on Canada’s “strategic vision” for China relations:

The Conservative government’s China policy is clearly undergoing a period of change. It is making the transition from a more ideological to a more pragmatic approach, from grand statements on human rights to a greater focus on improving bilateral economic relations, from refusing to engage China at the highest level to resuming summit diplomacy, and from being virtually ignorant about China to being enthusiastic promoters of a closer bilateral relationship.10

While Mr. Harper continued to unapologetically draw attention to the PRC’s human rights violations, in the later years of his tenure, he began respecting the Chinese-Canadian strategic partnership beyond the economic domain. Notably, Chinese-Canadian military-military relations were on the uptick. For instance, there was a 2012 visit by then Canadian chief of the defence staff General Walt Natynczyk to meet with his Chinese counterpart General Guo Boxiong.11 In 2013, the Harper government and China initiated a partnership for winter warfare training. Speaking on a meeting between defence minister Peter Mackay and his Chinese counterpart, General Chang Wanquan, Mackay stated that “[t]his visit helped set the stage for an enhanced military-to-military relationship between the Canadian Armed Forces and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Our security ties are an important component of building

9. Perrin Beatty, “Hong Kong: Canada’s partner in prosperity,” in Cao and Poy, The China Challenge, 133.
10. Wenran Jiang, “Seeking a strategic vision for Canada-China relations,” International Journal 64, no. 4 (2009): 909.
11. Hugh Stephens, “Strengthening the China-Canada military relationship: Will Canada follow through?,” China-US Focus, 16 September 2013, https://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/strengthening-the-china-canada-military-relationship-will-canada-follow-through (accessed 11 February 2022).
understanding with China in a range of areas.”

Allies took note of the Harper government’s late and watered-down response to China’s 2013 declaration of an expansive Area Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea, which was particularly unnerving to Japan and South Korea. American and Australian protests to the declared ADIZ were much more assertive, thereby drawing scrutiny to Canada. Throughout the Harper government, defence affairs were justifiably centred on ongoing wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Ukraine. Under Hu Jintao, China’s foreign policy was not as forcefully revisionist as it is under Xi, with Hu focused on continuing China’s path of development without exogenous impediments. As a result, China did not elicit the same cause for security concerns, and China’s neighbours, particularly those in Southeast Asia, accommodated rather than confronted China. While the Harper government undoubtedly did tackle security problems stemming from China, these concerns were limited to cybersecurity. Government agencies such as the Department of National Defence (DND) and the Department of Finance were targeted by Chinese hackers. Canada’s security agencies warned of Chinese firms engaging in cyber espionage as they upped their investments in Canadian markets, such as when CNOOC Limited purchased oil and gas company Nexen. Despite cybersecurity concerns, the Harper government’s defence policy left little room for a tangible Canadian presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

The early months of the Trudeau government reflected continuity with this “hands-off” approach to cross-Pacific relations. In fact, Mr. Trudeau’s 2015 campaign paid little attention to cross-Pacific relations as a distinct area of Canadian foreign policy, and all potential leaders were minimally concerned with Asia-Pacific relations in the single foreign policy debate of the election period. After the Trudeau government earned an electoral victory in November 2015, it became clear that its foreign policy agenda sought to further enhance bilateral relations with China. Learning from the diplomatic rifts of the Harper government’s early years, Mr. Trudeau made face-to-face contact between upper-echelon Chinese officials a priority. In 2016, his government decided to purchase a share of the Beijing-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

12. Government of Canada, “Minister MacKay in China meets his counterpart, General Chang Wanquan,” 3 June 2013, https://www.canada.ca/en/news/archive/2013/06/minister-mackay-china-meets-counterpart-general-chang-wanquan.html (accessed 11 February 2022).

13. James Manicom, “When China seized control of airspace, why was Canada quiet?” The Globe and Mail, 4 December 2013, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/world-insider/when-china-seized-control-of-airspace-why-was-canada-quiet/article15758365/ (accessed 9 February 2022).

14. Charles Burton, “Canada’s China policy under the Harper government,” Canadian Foreign Policy Journal 21, no. 1 (2015): 53.

15. Welch and Dewitt, “Canada and the South China Sea,” 40; Benjamin David Baker, “3 Ways Justin Trudeau will affect Canada’s Asia-Pacific policies,” The Diplomat, 28 October 2015, https://thediplomat.com/2015/10/3-ways-justin-trudeau-will-affect-canadas-asia-pacific-policies/ (accessed 16 February 2022).

16. Jeremy Paltiel, “Facing China: Canada between fear and hope,” International Journal 73, no. 3 (2018): 352.

17. Ibid., 349.
despite admonition from Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and Washington. Building upon groundwork laid hitherto, in 2017, the Trudeau government made a concerted effort to establish a comprehensive trade agreement with China; in light of this, Trudeau himself visited Beijing along with Trade Minister François-Philippe Champagne. Nothing concrete would come of the visit. Instead, it accentuated the divergences between Canada and China on human rights, as China refused to accept gender and labour rights as part of the deal. After 4 years, in 2020, the Trudeau government acknowledged that it had abandoned Canada-China free trade talks—a by-product of China’s geopolitical brinkmanship and retaliatory detention of Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig (“the two Michaels”) in the year prior. Thus, the Trudeau government’s effort to establish this free trade agreement serves as a microcosm for Ottawa-Beijing relations throughout decades of Asia-Pacific-era foreign policy: a contrived relationship, with a world of economic potential, that is recurrently jeopardized by the CCP’s foreign and domestic violations of international law and custom. Explaining the abandonment to The Globe and Mail, then foreign minister Champagne said that he does not “see the conditions being present now for these discussions to continue at this time. ... The China of 2020 is not the China of 2016.”

Throughout Liberal and Conservative governments during the Asia-Pacific era, Canada performed a non-confrontational approach to the Asia-Pacific. This meant not signalling Canadian interests in highly contentious Asian security issues, since security issues only served to obfuscate. In a thorough review of Canada’s Asia-Pacific security activities from 1990 to 2015, David Dewitt et al. appraise that Canada’s deployments were fragmented in the aggregate. The period from 1990 to 1998 saw Canada’s defence engagements “modest yet relatively consistent year-to-year,” but from 1998 to 2014, Canada’s Asia-Pacific deployments became intermittent due to exogenous commitments (e.g., Afghanistan). The deployments undertaken were “sporadic in geospatial reach with relatively low political impact”; crucially, they were “clearly beholden to larger political and economic incentives that are often detrimental to Ottawa’s goal of sustained engagement.”

Canada played a consistent, constructive role in combatting non-traditional security problems, such as with the Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART); but on traditional security matters, the DND mainly focused on other parts of the world. The Foreign Ministry concertedly focused on economic engagements with East Asia, paying comparatively less attention to India, which was rising adjacent to China.

18. Jolson Lim, “Global Affairs warned Trudeau govt about Chinese development bank Canada has joined,” IPolitics, 26 February 2020, https://ipolitics.ca/2020/02/26/global-affairs-warned-trudeau-govt-about-chinese-development-bank-canada-has-joined/ (accessed 8 February 2022).
19. Nathan Vanderklippe, “Canada abandons free-trade talks with China in shift for Trudeau government,” The Globe and Mail, 18 September 2020, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-canada-abandons-free-trade-talks-with-china-in-shift-for-trudeau/ (accessed 14 February 2022).
20. David Dewitt, Mary Young, Alex Brouse, and Jinelle Piereder, “AWOL: Canada’s defence policy and presence in the Asia Pacific,” International Journal 73, no. 1 (2018): 12, 13.
21. Ibid., 11.
In summary, Canada’s Asia-Pacific-era relations were centred on economic capitalization and non-confrontation. This description is particularly true in respect to relations with China. With some exceptions, Canada was relatively disinterested in traditional security issues facing the Asian security architecture.

What is the Indo-Pacific?

While the “Indo-Pacific” denotes a region, this region should not be misconstrued as an objective geographic space. There is a lack of intersubjectivity on the Indo-Pacific’s demarcations and boundaries, and while this was true of the Asia-Pacific as well, the demarcations of the Indo-Pacific are even more contentious. The meaning of the Indo-Pacific is understood differently from London, to Canberra, to Jakarta, to Beijing.

Although the Indo-Pacific redraws the Asia-Pacific’s physical boundaries, the new adoption of the Indo-Pacific is primarily an eclipsing of the Asia-Pacific concept. As with “Eastern Europe” or the “Middle East,” the Indo-Pacific is a concept that innately entails a worldview. Historically and contemporarily, the adoption of the “Indo-Pacific” concept has been tied to geopolitical strategy.\(^2\) The term’s meaning and connotations are often contingent on the respective security strategies of states; for example, Chinese policymakers and many prominent Chinese scholars refute the Indo-Pacific as being a construct driven by Cold-War-like containment, while Japan views the Indo-Pacific as “free and open.”\(^3\) Thus, in juxtaposition, Japan perceives the Indo-Pacific as free while China perceives it as constraining. The PRC’s strategic calculation is not without credence, as this “openness” effectively works to balance the power in Asia by including India’s newfound capabilities and economic growth into the geographical frame. With that being said, it is misapprehensive to construe the Indo-Pacific as solely a political fabrication—that is, created with a strategic telos in mind. In scientific literature, specifically in the domains of marine biology and geology, authors have circulated the term “Indo-Pacific” for over a century. Thus, the Indo-Pacific is far from a new invention that is contingent on contemporary geopolitical state of affairs. Cartographers depicted the Indo-Pacific many centuries prior; Abraham Ortelius did so in the late 16th century, as did Willem Janszoon Blaeu almost a century after Ortelius. In contemporary history, it was in 2007 that Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe gave the

\(^2\) For more on the origins of the Indo-Pacific, geopolitical strategy, and the intellectual history of the regional framing, see Hansong Li, “The ‘Indo-Pacific’: Intellectual origins and international visions in global contexts,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 2021, 1–27, [https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000214](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000214) (accessed 5 July 2022); Dan Curiak, “The contested framing of the Indo-Pacific,” *Centre for International Governance Innovation*, 4 December 2020, [https://www.cigionline.org/articles/contested-framing-indo-pacific/](https://www.cigionline.org/articles/contested-framing-indo-pacific/) (accessed 16 February 2022); Rory Medcalf, “Indo-Pacific visions: Giving solidarity a chance,” *Asia Policy* 14, no. 3 (2019): 79–96.

\(^3\) Dingding Chen, “What China thinks of the Indo-Pacific strategy,” *The Diplomat*, 27 April 2018, [https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/what-china-thinks-of-the-indo-pacific-strategy/](https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/what-china-thinks-of-the-indo-pacific-strategy/) (accessed 10 February 2022); Igor Denisov, Oleg Paramonov, Ekaterina Arapova, and Ivan Safranchuk, “Russia, China, and the concept of Indo-Pacific,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 12, no. 1 (2021): 72–85.
“Confluence of the Two Seas” speech to India’s parliament; it should not be forgotten that, in many ways, the Indo-Pacific concept as it is now known is rooted in Indian and Japanese philosophizing. The novelty surrounding the Indo-Pacific is the momentum in which various states adopted the Indo-Pacific as part of official lexicons in the mid to late 2010s. Canada was late to this adoption, only using the term from roughly 2018 onwards. Ottawa is smart to adopt this nomenclature, as virtually every one of its likeminded partners in the region—from Australia, to South Korea, to France, to the US—have likewise adopted it. What is new is not the Indo-Pacific concept, only the official adoption of this framing by states. Institutions adjust themselves to reflect these new geographic contours, such as when Washington renamed its command structure from United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) to United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM). Furthermore, institutional adaptation is observed in the maturation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD).

In official Indo-Pacific policy documents of various states, it is commonplace for traditional security issues to take centre stage. The topography and tense geopolitical climate that the Indo-Pacific denotes starkly differs from the Asia-Pacific, which was “toned down” in respect to great power competition and the threat perceptions of smaller states. Security dilemmas in the South China Sea, skirmishes in the Galwan Valley between two nuclear powers, and the beating of war drums directed at Taiwan have all elevated the stakes in international security. Meanwhile, longstanding concerns over the volatility of the Korean Peninsula and the geopolitical rivalry between India and Pakistan seem no nearer to resolution. The newly adopted framing of the Indo-Pacific lays the conceptual groundwork for Canada to get more involved in traditional regional security issues. Canada should choose wisely with regard to the security issues in which it will play a role, calculating what advantages Canada can provide to Asian peace and security.

Canadian security relations in an Indo-Pacific framing

At the time of this essay’s publication, GAC and the DND are in the process of crafting an Indo-Pacific strategy. Ottawa is following in the footsteps of Brussels, London, Tokyo, Paris, and of course Washington, which all have their own articulated strategies or Indo-Pacific policy documents in varying forms. Ottawa is therefore lagging behind likeminded powers in assuming a more active role in the Indo-Pacific. Encouragingly, after Prime Minister Trudeau’s third electoral victory, it was mandated to Foreign Affairs Minister M´elanie Joly to “develop and launch a comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy to deepen diplomatic, economic and defence partnerships and international assistance in the region.”

Canada has no security-treaty obligations to the Indo-

24. Office of the Prime Minister, “Minister of Foreign Affairs Mandate Letter,” 16 December 2021, https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2021/12/16/minister-foreign-affairs-mandate-letter (accessed 10 February 2022)
Pacific, which means Canadian decision-making is made ad hoc and on the fly.\textsuperscript{25}
Lacking strategic structure, an explicated Indo-Pacific document provides reassurance
to likeminded partners and allies that Canada shares concern over regional issues. For
instance, Canada is willing to play a role in enforcing the 1982 United Nations
Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNLCOS), and on promoting the integration of
UNCLOS into any future Code of Conduct (COC) in the Indo-Pacific’s maritimes (a
crucial proviso for some Southeast Asian states like Vietnam).

An assessment of China’s future intentions and Canada’s position vis-à-vis Beijing’s
increasingly revisionist agenda is at the forefront of Ottawa’s deliberation process.\textsuperscript{26}
China’s retaliatory detention of the two Michaels in December 2018 and arbitrary death
sentence of a Canadian trafficker in January 2019 served as crucial learning experiences
and gave credence to the notion that Ottawa desperately needed a rethink of its relations
with Beijing. In a more macro sense, these actions indicated that Xi’s China will
approach its foreign relations with more coercion and risk-taking compared to the
economically booming China of the “Asia-Pacific” era. While the Party’s power
consolidation is a constancy, the leader and adjunct ring of technocrats at the helm of
the Politburo dictate the direction of Chinese foreign policy. If Xi’s China is indeed
adamant on a more overtly revisionist foreign policy—for which the two Michaels were
unfortunately collateral—then the conditions that allowed for a constructive Chinese-
Canadian relationship in the era of the Asia-Pacific are no longer present in the Indo-
Pacific. This is a conventional view amongst Canadian security circles and institutions.
In a May 2018 report, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) asserted that
“President Xi Jinping is driving a multi-dimensional strategy to lift China to global
dominance. This strategy integrates aggressive diplomacy, asymmetrical economic
agreements, technological innovation, as well as escalating military expenditures.”\textsuperscript{27}

Unlike in the Asia-Pacific framing, where economic interests eclipsed all other
issues, in the Indo-Pacific, traditional security issues will play a larger role in shaping
Canada’s cross-Pacific strategic calculus. Tellingly, throughout the course of the
Trudeau government, bilateral Canada-China military relations have become virtually
non-existent. In 2019, Ottawa cancelled the aforementioned Canada-China partnership
on winter warfare training that the Harper government signed in 2013. It is noteworthy
that there was pushback from GAC surrounding the cancellation, yet Ottawa still went
ahead (contrast this with Trudeau’s decision to go ahead with involvement in the AIIB).
In the Asia-Pacific era, port visits from the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)
were semi-regular, but the last PLAN port visit to Canada was in December 2016, and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Canada’s only defence treaty duties are to the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD)
and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
\item The language within the Indo-Pacific strategy will be intricately careful and ambiguous in certain
sections, in order to avoid antagonizing China. From “outlooks,” to “guidelines,” to “free and open,” to
“strategies,” the language surrounding the “Indo-Pacific” is highly pedantic in many official policy
documents.
\item Kenneth Holland, “Canada and the Indo-Pacific Strategy,” \textit{Canadian Foreign Policy Journal} 27, no. 2
(2021): 230.
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there is an extremely slim likelihood that the federal government would sign off on another PLAN port visit to Canada anytime soon, all things considered. In 2020, Canada obstructed forty-three would-be military hardware sales to China.\textsuperscript{28} Canada exports virtually no military weapons and technology to China as part of a lasting moratorium imposed after the Tiananmen Square massacre. Exports of military goods and technology to Taiwan, on the other hand, have seen sharp increases in 2019 and 2020. The Export Controls Division under GAC in consultation with the DND signed off on the issuance of 19 permits to Taiwan for military goods and technology. Canadian companies exported $19,849,731.40 to Taiwan in 2020; contrast this with $429,415 in the year 2015, and $173,083.59 in the year 2016. To represent the stark jump, Figure 1 depicts the increase in value throughout the Trudeau years in Canadian dollars. The data is published by GAC.\textsuperscript{29}

In the Indo-Pacific era, there are signs that Ottawa is getting more assertive in traditional security issues of Asia. Consider the case of South China Sea maritime disputes. In July 2016, GAC released a statement on the Arbitral Tribunal ruling which came down in favour of the Philippines. Despite China being the defendant of the case, Canada’s 2016 statement never named China, and instead portrayed all parties as engaging in equivalent dredging, military buildups, and escalatory behaviour in the South China Sea.\textsuperscript{30} Five years on, in July 2021, GAC released another statement

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\caption{Exports of military goods and technology to Taiwan in CAD.}
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\textsuperscript{28} Steven Chase and Robert Fife, “Canada says it blocked 43 attempts to sell military goods to China last year,” The Globe and Mail, 2 June 2021, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-canada-says-it-blocked-43-attempts-to-sell-military-goods-to-china/ (accessed 9 December 2021).
\textsuperscript{29} Global Affairs Canada, “Publications and reports,” https://www.international.gc.ca/controls-controles/report-rapports/index.aspx?lang=eng (accessed 15 February 2022).
\textsuperscript{30} Government of Canada, “Canadian statement on South China Sea Arbitration,” 21 July 2016, https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2016/07/canadian-statement-on-south-china-sea-arbitration.html (accessed 11 October 2021).
reaffirming the Arbitral Tribunal ruling. This time, however, the statement did not shy away from explicit condemnation. It reads:

Canada is particularly concerned by China’s escalatory and destabilizing actions in the East and South China Seas, including, recently, off the Philippine coast, and by the militarization of disputed features and the use of naval, coast guard and maritime militia vessels to intimidate and threaten the ships of other states.31

The juxtaposition between the 2016 and the 2021 statements epitomizes how Canada has become less averse to calling out China when it destabilizes international security. In March 2021, when China deployed approximately 220 ships to Whitsun Reef, a feature in the Spratly Islands that is within the Philippines’ 220-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ), Canada’s ambassador to the Philippines, Peter MacArthur, tweeted:

Canada opposes recent Chinese actions in the South China Sea, including off the coast of the Philippines, that escalate tensions and undermine regional stability and the rules-based international order.32

Canada is strengthening relationships with Indo-Pacific resident powers. The QUAD members are particularly embracing Canada’s shift to the Indo-Pacific. In fact, one of the first mentions of the “Indo-Pacific” in official government language came in a press release dedicated to a 28 April 2019 meeting between Prime Minister Trudeau and then Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe:

The two leaders also discussed their shared vision for maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region based on the rule of law—something Canada and Japan will continue to advance through a range of initiatives. Prime Minister Trudeau announced that Canada will continue periodic deployments, over a two-year period, of Canadian Armed Forces aircraft, ships, and personnel under Operation NEON—a multinational surveillance initiative to counter North Korea’s maritime sanctions evasion.33

This April 2019 press release made no mention of security problems posed by China. In February 2022, Prime Minister Trudeau and the Japanese prime minister, now Fumio Kishida, spoke again. This time they discussed three concerns on traditional

31. Government of Canada, “Statement by Global Affairs Canada on South China Sea ruling,” 11 July 2021, https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2021/07/statement-by-global-affairs-canada-on-south-china-sea-ruling.html (accessed 11 October 2021).
32. Peter MacArthur, Twitter post, 24 March 2021, 7:09 pm, https://twitter.com/AmbMacArthur/status/1374861064848875523 (accessed 10 December 2021).
33. Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau, “Prime Minister of Canada announces closer collaboration with Japan,” 28 April 2019, https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2019/04/28/prime-minister-canada-announces-closer-collaboration-japan (accessed 11 February 2022).
security issues; according to Prime Minister Trudeau’s press release, these issues were: (1) North Korean missile launches, (2) “China’s actions in the region, including in the South China Sea and Taiwan,” and (3) Russian mobilizations on the border of Ukraine. 34 Japan is of special strategic importance given the potential for Canadian-Japanese ties, which is well-illustrated by David Welch, who convincingly advocates for a formal bilateral alliance that could reaffirm “solidarity, like-mindedness, and mutual concern.” 35 Australian policymakers have likewise sought to get Canada further engaged in regional security. One sign that that is already happening came in January 2021, when Canada participated alongside the QUAD in the Sea Dragon exercise off the coast of Guam’s Andersen Air Base. The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) allocated a CP-140 Aurora to take part in this anti-submarine warfare exercise.

Canada is seeking to build a comprehensive network of Indo-Pacific powers. To that effect, the Trudeau government has made good inroads with Vietnam. Canada is rightly concerned over Hanoi’s human rights abuses, but shares interests with Vietnam on international maritime security. In May 2019, for the first time in history, a Vietnamese defence minister visited Canada. The minister, Ngo Xuan Lich, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on defence cooperation with Minister Harjit Sajjan. Lich met with the foreign and defence policy advisor to Prime Minister Trudeau.36 The following month, the frigate HMCS Halifax and supply ship MV Asterix conducted a port visit to Vietnam’s Cam Ranh International Port. Moreover, HMCS Calgary and MV Asterix conducted a port visit to Da Nang in September 2018—an initiative spearheaded by Canada. Vietnam’s and Canada’s deputy defence ministers met virtually in 2020. In 2021, Canada opened up a resident defence attaché in Vietnam (as well as in Malaysia). In November 2020, Defence Minister Sajjan gave a speech to the 12th Annual Conference on the South China Sea hosted by Hanoi, and reminded its attendees—rather diplomatically—of Canada’s hard power presence:

HMCS Winnipeg sailed to the East China Sea, through the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Canada fully respects and supports international law, including the rights of navigation, and the rights and jurisdiction of coastal states.37

34. Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau, “Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks with Prime Minister of Japan Kishida Fumio,” 9 February 2022, https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/readouts/2022/02/09/prime-minister-justin-trudeau-speaks-prime-minister-japan-kishida-fumio (accessed 11 February 2022).
35. Japan and Canada also signed the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) in April 2018, which facilitates “for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) to provide each other with logistical support”; David A. Welch, “It’s time to think boldly about Canada–Japan security cooperation,” International Journal 74, no. 3 (2019): 448, 451.
36. “VN, Canada sign MoU on defense cooperation,” Vietnam Times, 7 May 2019, https://vietnamtimes.org.vn/vn-canada-sign-mou-on-defense-cooperation-1779.html (accessed 11 February 2022).
37. Government of Canada, “12th Annual Conference on the South China Sea: Welcome dinner keynote,” 9 December 2020, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/proactive-disclosure/cacn-national-security-dimensions-canada-china-relations-12-april-2021/pa-products.html (accessed 30 November 2021).
Hanoi uses international laws, notably UNCLOS, as security guaranteeing mechanisms; thus, Sajjan’s talking points have been well-received by Hanoi’s political elite that resent the loss of fishing and extraction rights due to Chinese revisionism in the South China Sea.\(^\text{38}\) Perhaps more relevantly to Canada, apart from the geopolitical situation, Vietnam is “a vital economic player in the Indo-Pacific.”\(^\text{39}\) This was noted by GAC’s press release following the 2021 establishment of the Canada-Vietnam Joint Economic Committee. The country is emerging as a vital component of the world’s global supply chains.

A further case of Canada improving ties with Indo-Pacific resident powers is vis-à-vis Taiwan. The Trudeau government has advocated for including Taiwan in global governance and international institutions. In domestic Canadian legislatures, government officials advocated for Taiwanese observer status in the World Health Organization (WHO). They also advocated for this inclusion to the WHO’s Geneva offices, in a coordinated effort with diplomats from Indo-Pacific allies and partners, namely the US, France, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, and Germany. The Halifax International Security Forum (HFX), held annually in Halifax and financed partly by the Canadian government, announced in July 2021 that it would hold a forum in Taiwan’s capital.\(^\text{40}\) The HFX awarded Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen the John McCain Prize for Leadership in Public Service; after reports that the Trudeau government was cautious about awarding Tsai Ing-wen the award, the House of Commons supported the final decision unanimously.\(^\text{41}\) In January 2022, Canada and Taiwan initiated exploratory discussions on a Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Arrangement. During these discussions, the international trade minister Mary Ng highlighted that “Taiwan is a key trade and investment partner as Canada broadens its trade links and deepens its economic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region.”\(^\text{42}\)

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\(^{38}\) Taylor M. Fravel, “China’s strategy in the South China Sea,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 33, no. 3 (2011): 292–319; Bill Hayton, “China’s pressure costs Vietnam $1 billion in the South China Sea,” *The Diplomat*, 22 July 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/chinas-pressure-costs-vietnam-1-billion-in-the-south-china-sea/ (accessed 11 February 2022); Carlyle A. Thayer, “Vietnam’s Strategy of ‘Cooperating and Struggling’ with China over maritime disputes in the South China Sea,” *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2016): 200–220; Hong Kong To Nguyen, Manh Tung Ho, and Quan-Hoang Vuong, “Probing Vietnam’s legal prospects in the South China Sea dispute,” *Asia Policy* 28, no. 3 (2021): 105–131.

\(^{39}\) Government of Canada, “Minister Ng establishes Canada-Vietnam Joint Economic Committee,” 10 January 2022, https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2022/01/minister-ng-establishes-canada-vietnam-joint-economic-committee.html (accessed 9 February 2022).

\(^{40}\) Steven Chase, “Halifax security forum organizers to stage January conference in Taiwan, just weeks before controversial Beijing Olympics,” *The Globe and Mail*, 21 July 2021.

\(^{41}\) “House of Commons backs security forum award for Taiwan after report of funding threat,” *Global News*, 14 April 2021.

\(^{42}\) “Readout: Minister Ng speaks with Taiwan’s Minister Deng,” Global Affairs Canada, 10 January 2022, https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2022/01/readout-minister-ng-speaks-with-taiwans-minister-deng.html (accessed 6 July 2022).
Indo-Pacific strategy, a key feature—or non-feature—will be Taiwan. Will the state be named? If so, in what context(s)?

**Canada’s hard security activities in the Indo-Pacific**

Canada has taken an active role in the surveillance of North Korea, helping to ensure the integrity of UN sanctions. In January 2018, in conjunction with the US, Canada co-hosted the Vancouver Foreign Ministers’ Meeting on Security and Stability on Korean Peninsula in Vancouver. The attendees were a roster of conventional Indo-Pacific powers such as India, Japan, and South Korea; additionally, some uncommon participants in Asian regional governance took part, namely Greece. Unwilling to contradict its alliance commitments to North Korea, China did not participate and denounced the meeting. There is uncertainty surrounding whether China was invited. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang articulated Beijing’s perceptions of the gathering:

> We all know that the so-called UN Command, as a product of the Cold War era, has long lost its relevance. As initiators of the meeting, the US and Canada co-hosted the meeting under the banner of the so-called UN Command sending states. That is Cold War mentality pure and simple, and will only drive a wedge among the international community and undermine the concerted efforts to seek proper settlement of the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue.43

In May 2018, in recognition of Canada’s role in maintaining international security on the Korean Peninsula, a Canadian was appointed to Deputy Commander Designate of United Nations Command (UNC) Korea.

If Canada is to be taken seriously in the Indo-Pacific, hard power deployments will be necessary. To this effect, a meaningful Canadian contribution to Indo-Pacific security is Operation NEON. Per the Government’s official description, Operation NEON is:

> Canada’s contribution to a coordinated multinational effort to support the implementation of United Nations Security Council sanctions imposed against North Korea. The series of UN sanctions, imposed between 2006 and 2017, aim to pressure North Korea to abandon its weapons of mass destruction programs and respond to North Korean nuclear weapon tests and ballistic missile launches. This operation demonstrates the importance that Canada places on security in the Asia-Pacific region, international security and the importance of upholding the UN Security Council sanctions regime. It further demonstrates

43. Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's Regular Press Conference on January 17, 2018," 17 January 2018, mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceus/eng/fyrth/t1526532.htm (accessed 20 July 2022)
Canada’s resolve in standing with allies and partners in accordance with Canadian values. This is in line with Canada’s defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged.*44

Operation NEON builds “on previous ad hoc sanctions enforcement operations conducted in 2018,” although it was formally established in April 2019. In April 2021, the Trudeau government renewed its commitment to Operation NEON until at least April 2023.45 Operation NEON is precisely the kind of concerted and consistent military operation that was missing in the Asia-Pacific era of Canadian foreign policy.

The surveillance of North Korean arms proliferation and economic sanctions requires a fusion of sea and air power. HMCS *Chicoutimi*—an archaic submarine compared to allied equivalents, and a possible liability in a combat scenario—contributed meaningfully to Operation NEON as its role was limited to surveillance. In 2018, the Royal Canadian Navy deployed HMCS *Chicoutimi* to Asia for 197 days and conducted a port visit to Japan. This port visit was a first in almost 50 years.46 On air power, Canada deploys its maritime patrol aircraft, the CP-140 Auroras. Kadena Air Base on Okinawa logistically facilitates CP-140 Aurora operations.

When Canada allocates warships and aircraft to Operation NEON, the deployments are to the *Indo-Pacific region generally.* In order for the operation to be logistically possible, resident powers must station and refuel Canadian aircraft and vessels. By virtue of Canadian material presence in the Indo-Pacific, the Canadian military can multitask. For example, when in 2018 HMCS *Calgary* deployed to the Indo-Pacific, the vessel participated in anti-submarine warfare exercises alongside elements of the US, Japanese, South Korean, and Kiwi navies. Thereafter, it was dispatched to the surveillance of North Korea. Canadian commitment to the international initiative of containing North Korea often intersects with other security issues, notably China’s expansionism in the South China Sea and nationalist sensitivities to controlling the Taiwan Strait. *Table 1* is a chronology of Canadian naval activity in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait since the start of the Trudeau government, and shows an uptick of transits through the Trudeau years; later sailings have piqued Beijing’s anxiety (Chinese warships often shadow Canadian warships in these waters). Note the stark

44. Government of Canada, “Operation NEON,” 3 June 2019, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-neon.html (accessed 29 November 2021).

45. It is noteworthy that the government’s official webpages on Operation NEON have seen a change. The page in service prior to March 2020 denotes Operation NEON as an “Asia-Pacific” initiative with no mention of the “Indo-Pacific” at all, while the page in service at the time of writing now makes a reference to the “Indo-Pacific.” If nothing else, this is reflective of the fact that Ottawa recognizes the importance using the nomenclature of the “Indo-Pacific.”

46. David Common, “Canadian sub on mission to bolster North Korea surveillance,” CBC, 6 February 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hmcs-chicoutimi-submarine-canada-pacific-north-korea-1.4511238 (accessed 12 February 2022).
contrast from Canadian naval vessels conducting a port visit in Shanghai in May 2017 to a transit of the Taiwan Strait alongside a US destroyer in October 2021.

With regard to the respective 2017 HMCS *Winnipeg* and 2018 HMCS *Calgary* sailings, Canadian military and political officials stressed that the transits of the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait entailed no political significance. When HMCS *Winnipeg* transited the South China Sea in July 2017, the captain of the ship emphasized that “[t]here was more than enough room to stay well clear of the Paracels and the Spratlys.”47 Canadian vessels do not travel within the 12 nautical miles of any Chinese holdings, and therefore do not implicitly call into question Chinese claims. In the Indo-Pacific, maritime “transits” have connotations attributed to upholding the 1982 UNCLOS and the American conception of the freedom of navigation. The US has long conducted freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) all over the world, including contra Canada in the Northwest Passage. However, nowhere in the world are US FONOPs more contentious than in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. The US conducted a record number of FONOPs in the South China Sea in 2019 and 2020, with eight and nine respectively. Canada will likely (and smartly) steer clear of these US-led FONOPs since Ottawa is wary of undermining its position in the Northwest Passage.

Even if Canada will not participate in official US FONOPs, in the Indo-Pacific era, Canada has signalled its interests in countering Beijing’s ambition for a restrictive order in the maritimes of East and Southeast Asia. Saliently, upper-level government

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47. Matthew Fisher, “Matthew Fisher: Canadian warships shadowed by Chinese navy in South China Sea,” *National Post*, 14 July 2017, https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/matthew-fisher-canadian-warships-shadowed-by-chinese-navy-in-south-china-sea (accessed 11 February 2022).

| Date       | Vessel(s)       | Location                                                                 |
|------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| October 2021 | HMCS *Winnipeg* | Transit through Taiwan Strait (alongside US destroyer)                     |
| March 2021  | HMCS *Calgary*  | Through South China Sea (passed near the Spratlys)                        |
| September 2019 | HCMS *Ottawa* | Transit through Taiwan Strait                                              |
| June 2019   | HMCS *Regina*   | Transit through Taiwan Strait (passed near the Paracels and Spratlys)     |
| November 2018 | HMCS *Calgary* | Transit through Taiwan Strait                                              |
| July 2017   | HMCS *Winnipeg* | Only in South China Sea (declared not within 100 miles of Spratlys or Paracels) |
| May 2017    | HMCS *Ottawa*   | Through South China Sea (conducted port visit to Shanghai)                |
documents described a September 2019 HMCS Ottawa transit as having “demonstrated Canadian support for our closest partners and allies, regional security and the rules-based international order.”

When HMCS Winnipeg transited the Taiwan Strait alongside the US Arleigh Burke class destroyer USS Dewey in October 2021, the US Seventh Fleet stated that this transit “demonstrates the commitment of the United States and our allies and partners to a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

Recall that part of Canada’s stated goals for Operation NEON is “focused on Canada’s commitment to global peace and security and building ties and interoperability with partner nations.” To that effect, in November 2021, Canada and the US established a Strategic Dialogue on the Indo-Pacific; a stated goal in the White House press release is “to align our approaches on China and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK).” On this US-Canada meeting, it is telling that the prime minister’s press release only stated that the US and Canada established “an Indo-Pacific strategic dialogue to coordinate shared priorities.” There was no mention of China. The discrepancy between the two statements is a pertinent reminder not to misconstrue Canada and the US as having matching alignments on Indo-Pacific security. Even if Canada is a coastal-Pacific power, Canada is not a resident power in the Indo-Pacific like the US or France. That Canada is situated in the Indo-Pacific’s periphery, not in the Indo-Pacific, is a consequential geopolitical distinction. Analysts should gauge Canada’s involvement in the Indo-Pacific contextually vis-à-vis this geographical fact. Whether Canadian foreign policy is framed through the “Indo-Pacific” or the “Asia-Pacific,” geographical realities remain. Financial realities remain as well. Logistically, deploying hard power overseas costs a lot of capital—capital that many Canadian policymakers would rather allocate proximately to Arctic defence. China is a vital lifeline for the Canadian economy; thus, confronting China carries macro-economic

48. “Canadian warship transits South China Sea amid heightened diplomatic tensions,” Toronto Star, 31 March 2021, https://www.thestar.com/politics/2021/03/31/canadian-warship-transits-south-china-sea-amid-heightened-diplomatic-tensions.html (accessed 8 December 2021).

49. Keoni Everington, “US, Canadian warships pass through Taiwan Strait, China cries foul,” Taiwan News, 18 October 2021, https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4317948 (accessed 8 December 2021).

50. Government of Canada, “Operation NEON.”

51. The White House, “Readout of President Biden’s meeting with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada,” 19 November 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/11/19/readout-of-president-bidens-meeting-with-prime-minister-justin-trudeau-of-canada/ (accessed 8 December 2021).

52. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, “Prime Minister concludes productive North American Leaders’ Summit,” 18 November 2021, https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2021/11/18/prime-minister-concludes-productive-north-american-leaders-summit (accessed December 9 2021).

53. In a myriad of ways, the Trump years accentuated the divergences of US politics from Canada. The Trump years inflicted lasting damage on US alliance relationships and Washington’s standing in the world.

54. France has almost 2 million citizens and 8000 soldiers in its Indo-Pacific territories such as French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Réunion. The Indo-Pacific contains 93% of France’s enormous EEZ. The US resides within the Indo-Pacific through Hawaii and its respective Pacific territories, Guam, Mariana Islands, and American Samoa.
risk. As a middle power, Canada will have to tread carefully when it comes to tangling with the rivalries of great powers—this is the reality of international politics.

In the final assessment of Canada’s hard power and the Indo-Pacific, Canada has clearly become less averse to using hard power as an instrument of containment (on North Korean arms proliferation) and as an instrument of political signification (aligning with likeminded partners and allies). Canada has also upped participation in high-action military exercises in the Indo-Pacific, such as in the US- and Australian-led Exercise Talisman Sabre. Since 2017, Canada has participated in Exercise Talisman Sabre in three consecutive iterations, having been conspicuously absent prior to 2017.55 As aforementioned, Canada participated in the QUAD-led Sea Dragon exercise off the coast of Guam’s Andersen Air Base. Canadian officials have acknowledged the importance of enhancing hard power presence in the Indo-Pacific. In 2020, when Canada finally achieved access to the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM+), Defence Minister Sajjan emphasized to the meeting’s high-ranking participants that:

We are building new warships, supply ships, and investing in surveillance aircraft to ensure Canada remains a consistent presence in the Indo-Pacific. And we will expand our Navy, our Air Force, Army, and Special Operations Forces ties with ASEAN countries, through high-level bilateral engagements, staff talks, and participation in military exercises.56

Hard power matters in the Indo-Pacific. Diplomatically, it is a verifiable assurance that Canada is not aloof to the security concerns of respective Indo-Pacific resident states. Furthermore, hard power paves avenues for diplomatic engagement and can function as an “admission fee” for institutional access in regional security governance. The scale of Canada’s institutional access will serve as a marker for its place in Indo-Pacific security and diplomacy—on this note, the next section examines Canadian involvement in the Indo-Pacific security architecture.

**Canada’s soft involvements in the Indo-Pacific security architecture**

Dewitt et al. appraise that, regarding Canada’s involvement in Asia-Pacific security architecture from 1990–2015:

> [a]lthough DND participation in military-to-military symposiums and American-led defence forums has provided important t1 platforms, Canada has not engaged with

55. Government of Canada, “HMCS Calgary sails with Indo-Pacific partners Australia, America, Japan, and South Korea on Exercise Talisman Sabre 21,” 18 August 2021, http://www.navy-marine.forces.gc.ca/en/news-operations/news-view.page?doc=hmcs-calgary-sails-with-indo-pacific-partners-australia-america-japan-and-south-korea-on-exercise-talisman-sabre-21/koejco0h (accessed 10 February 2022).

56. Government of Canada, “Speaking notes for the Honourable Harjit S. Sajjan” 9 December 2020.
any other significant security organizations or forums in the region, including the ADMM-
Plus[.]57

In the Indo-Pacific era, there are signs that Canada is prioritizing Indo-Pacific security governance. After years of trying, with Vietnam as chair of ASEAN, in 2020 Canada was invited to participate in the ADMM+.

Canada’s existing role in Indo-Pacific security governance is grounded in its participation at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), for which Canada is a founding member. As of 2021, the ARF consists of 27 members spanning the Asian security architecture. GAC is primarily responsible for representing Canada at meetings rather than the DND, which reflects the ethos of the forum. Historically, Canada has made contributions valued by the ARF and ASEAN broadly, such as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction, otherwise known as the Ottawa Treaty. The treaty came into effect in 2009 and introduced an international law to ban anti-personnel mines, which are weaponry that continue to haunt Indochina 50 years on.

The ARF is big on non-traditional security issues. The inefficacy of the ARF on traditional security issues is strongly conditioned by its massive constituency. More agents mean more contestations that can negate real negotiations. As a result of this shortcoming, Sang Tan rightly argues that “the ARF has unwittingly discredited itself as the region’s primary platform for security matters.”58 Rationally, Canada’s interest in the East Asia Summit (EAS) and especially the ADMM+ is conditioned by a lacklustre and unsatisfactory ARF when it comes to traditional state-state security issues. Membership in the ARF grants a country no real “status-points,” given how extensive the in-group is. In 2016, when Ottawa finally appointed an ambassador to ASEAN, Marie-Louise Hannan, the ambassador turned attention toward Canada’s interest in participating the ADMM+ and the EAS. For years, ASEAN has respectfully denied Canada access to the ADMM+; however, as aforementioned, Canada in 2020 made headway when Defence Minister Sajjan delivered a speech at the meeting (in this speech, Sajjan referred to the Indo-Pacific, and never the Asia-Pacific). While Canada is still not a proper member of the ADMM+, Sajjan’s speaking role reflects real progress, albeit incremental.

Canada has enhanced involvement in the Shangri-La Dialogue. The Shangri-La Dialogue is a Track One meeting of prestigious government officials that has included over two dozen countries. Jonathan Berkshire Miller argues that the Shangri-La Dialogue would be a suitable stage to articulate a more coherent Indo-Pacific strategy.59 Throughout the 2000s, Canada’s delegation at the Shangri-La was low ranking. This

57. Dewitt et al., “AWOL: Canada’s defence policy and presence in the Asia Pacific,” 25.
58. See Sang Tan, “A tale of two institutions: The ARF, ADMM-Plus and security regionalism in the Asia Pacific,” Contemporary Southeast Asia 39, no. 2 (2017): 261–262.
59. Jonathan Berkshire Miller, “Canada and the Indo-Pacific: A need for a strategic course,” Canadian Global Affairs Institute, March 2021.
changed in the later years of the Harper government, when Canadian defence minister Peter Mackay began attending summits. In recognition of Canada’s place in Asian security, Mackay had keynote speeches. Canadian attendance at the Shangri-La meetings is twofold: Canadian involvement here helps make the case for Canadian involvement in the ADMM+. When Mr. Trudeau assumed office, his government maintained Canada’s valuation of the Shangri-La Dialogue, dispatching Defence Minister Sajjan. Sajjan gave keynote speeches to the Shangri-La in consecutive years from 2016 to 2019. (The 2020 and 2021 iterations were cancelled due to COVID-19.) The content of Sajjan’s Shangri-La speeches indicates that Canada’s security concerns are transforming. While Sajjan’s keynote speech in 2016 strongly focused on terrorism, Sajjan’s 2018 speech only made one reference to “terror,” and it was in reference to nuclear weapons proliferation. Sajjan’s 2018 speech was decidedly focused on stunning North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic-missile development program; the speech was unequivocal in signalling Canada’s commitment to enforcing UN sanctions. This is a small indication that Canada’s concern over non-traditional security threats—notably terrorism—is slowly being eclipsed by concerns over state-state geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific.

The next case is the EAS. Formed in 2005, the EAS’ grandiose raison d’être is to promote “peace, stability, and prosperity in East Asia.” The EAS is leader-centric and more exclusive insofar as Indo-Pacific security governance goes. Since its formation, questions over which states ought to be included are recurrent:

Malaysia, under Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, led the case for the narrower conception, while a number of other ASEAN members and Japan argued for the inclusion of India, New Zealand and Australia. The main concern that this latter group had about the narrower membership was the risk that ultimately it would become dominated by China.60

The inclusion of US allies—namely Japan, New Zealand, and Australia—was rendered to be sufficient to balance power within the EAS.

The EAS got off to an uncertain start, with the US and China not taking it very seriously.61 But when the Obama administration implemented its “pivot to Asia,” President Obama attended every EAS but the 2013 iteration, only because the government shutdown did not allow it. President Trump, on the other hand, clumsily missed the 2019 and 2020 summits with no good excuse. Adding insult to injury, the 2020 iteration was held via video conferencing yet no American cabinet-level official was in (virtual) attendance. In all, the EAS is only as resourceful as the great powers will it to be, and the summit suffers from some of the same “talk shop” problems as the

60. Nick Bisley, “The East Asia Summit and ASEAN: Potential and problems,” Contemporary Southeast Asia 39, no. 2 (2017): 267.
61. The US and Russia were included as members in 2011 (de facto in 2010 when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov were in attendance). China was displeased with what it perceived as foreign powers infringing on its geopolitical neighbourhood, a similar misgiving the CCP has with the Indo-Pacific framing.
ARF. Still, the EAS is more exclusive and centred on state-state relations than the ARF. The former is of higher status, and Canada ought to prioritize its own involvement in the Summit in the new era of its Indo-Pacific foreign policy.

While Canada is not a member of the EAS, in 2017, for the first time ever, a sitting Canadian prime minister attended a summit. It should be noted that, unfortunately, Prime Minister Trudeau flew directly from a rocky APEC summit, where he pulled out of a Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement meeting, in order to attend the 2017 EAS. Regardless, then foreign affairs minister Chrystia Freeland self-congratulated Canada’s participation as “a really big deal,” since, “our government is acting on our pledge that ‘Canada is back,’ and the world is recognizing that.” The minister’s claim is exaggeratory, but the logic of the claim is sound: institutional access to security governance institutions is a benchmark of international recognition of Indo-Pacific power and influence.

During the tenure of the Trudeau government, Canada has indeed made incremental gains in terms of institutional access to regional security institutions and fora. The Canadian defence minister’s 2016–2019 keynote roles at the Shangri-La Dialogue are certainly an encouraging sign of consistency. But there is still a long way to go. In order for Canada to achieve more institutional access to Indo-Pacific security governance institutions, Canadian hard power resources must be more active in the Indo-Pacific. Regional members will not grant Canada the benefits of access to regional institutions without paying dues. When it comes to diplomatic talking points, Ottawa should emphasize its particular expertise, such as GAC’s experience in facilitating dialogue amongst South China Sea claimants in the 1990s. Ottawa should also emphasize to resident powers in the Indo-Pacific that Canadian inclusion is beneficial to them. For resident powers to sponsor Canadian inclusion is not merely a favour to Canada—rather, it is in Australian and Japanese self-interest to have Canada as an involved regional security player. This appeal to national self-interest would bolster Ottawa’s claim and help it gain access to the EAS and ADMM+.

**Conclusion**

This essay has periodized Canada’s cross-Pacific relations into the respective eras of the “Asia-Pacific” and “Indo-Pacific” framings. Each framing has its respective advantages and shortcomings. It is argued that Canada’s approach to cross-Pacific relations was non-confrontational, semi-detached, and economic-oriented in the former; while in the latter, Canada’s approach is more in concerted alignment with friendly states, diplomatically “hands on,” and more concerned with issues in Asian security. A key variable that accounts for the shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific is the correlative shift in Chinese foreign policy which has been more actively revisionist since Xi consolidated power.

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62. John Paul Tasker, “Trudeau’s invite to East Asia summit proof ‘Canada’s back,’ Freeland says,” CBC, 12 November 2017, [https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-east-asian-summit-asean-philippines-1.4399356](https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-east-asian-summit-asean-philippines-1.4399356) (accessed 14 February 2022).
Canada has made headway on affirming itself as an Indo-Pacific security player. But Canada’s primary security interests and obligations will not be across the Pacific; this is especially true since Russia’s February 2022 war of aggression on Ukraine shocked the international security architecture and catalyzed a massive humanitarian crisis. On Canada’s cross-Pacific security posture, a fundamental question remains: Should Canada take on a more assertive position in cross-Pacific relations, particularly on traditional security issues? An adequate answer involves too many variables to be responsibly dealt with here. All the same, as power dynamics shift in and toward Asia, this subject is one that Canadians will find themselves recurrently discussing in the country’s newspapers, academic forums, and government boardrooms.

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