

**The North Atlantic Anchor:
Canada and the Pacific Century**

Kim Richard Nossal
Queen's University

nossalk@queensu.ca

International Studies Association
University of Hong Kong
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If the centre of gravity of global politics during the twentieth century — the “American Century” — was the North Atlantic, the centre of gravity in the twenty-first century promises to be the Asia Pacific, with the “American Century” replaced by the “Pacific Century.”¹ But Canada’s place in the Pacific Century is both paradoxical and problematic. The purpose of this paper is to survey Canada’s ambivalence towards the Asia Pacific, and put that ambivalence into the broader context of the dominant strategic perspective in Canada that has privileged, and continues to privilege, a North Atlantic focus for Canadian foreign and defence policy. It argues that Canada’s laggardly approach to Asia Pacific diplomacy can be best explained by the widespread perception among Canadians — and their government — that the North Atlantic alliance should remain as the key driver of Canadian foreign and defence policy. Indeed, this geostrategic outlook has actually intensified with the election of Donald J. Trump and his unorthodox approach to the transatlantic alliance and the liberal international order. I show that that this North Atlantic outlook, so dominant for so much of Canada’s history, acts as an anchor, dragging on Canada’s engagement in the Asia Pacific.

Canada’s Engagement in the Asia Pacific: Missing in Action?

Contemporary Canadian policy towards the Asia Pacific is deeply paradoxical. On the one hand, for at least the last generation, governments in Ottawa have routinely proclaimed in official rhetoric that “Canada is a Pacific nation,”² part of a symbolic oceanic trifurcation that acknowledges the three oceans

¹ On the nomenclature of the “Pacific Century,” see Thomas Wilkins, “The New ‘Pacific Century’ and the Rise of China: An International Relations Perspective,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 64:4 (August 2010): 381–401. On the “American Century,” see the essays in Michael J. Hogan, *Ambiguous Legacy: U.S. Foreign Relations in the “American Century”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), which includes Henry R. Luce’s 1941 essay, “The American Century.” In 2011, Hillary Clinton, then the US secretary of state, proposed in an amalgam of the two: see Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2011.

² For example, this symbolic truism appeared the foreign policy review of 1970 during the Liberal government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and has regularly shown up in government pronouncements in the years since. See “Canada as a Pacific Power,” in Canada, Secretary of State for External Affairs, *Foreign Policy for Canadians* (Ottawa, 1970), Pacific booklet, 10–13; Canada, Secretary of State for External Affairs, *Competitiveness and Security: Directions for Canada’s International Relations* (Ottawa, 1985), 1; Maureen Appel Molot and Brian W. Tomlin, “The Conservative Agenda,” in Molot and Tomlin, eds., *Canada Among Nations, 1985: The Conservative Agenda* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1986), 17.); the Honourable Raymond Chan, “Canada and the Asia Pacific,” in Fen Osler

that border Canada — Atlantic, Arctic and Pacific — and plays on the country’s official motto, *Ad Mari usque ad Mare* (“From sea to sea”). This motto began to be used unofficially in the 1860s — before the newly formed self-governing dominion actually consisted of territory that stretched to either the Arctic or the Pacific. The assertion that Canada is a Pacific nation as well as an Atlantic nation, follows readily (as does the notion that Canada is an Arctic nation, and the related idea that the motto really should be “From sea to sea to sea”³).

While there are some for whom such transoceanic projections are “quaint and self-deluding,”⁴ the “Pacific nation” trope is not entirely symbolic. There have been, and are, numerous ties between Canada and the countries of the Asia Pacific. In the nineteenth century, the ties were in the main people-to-people: the links created by the large numbers of Canadian missionaries who served in countries of the Asia Pacific, and by the Indian and Chinese workers who were recruited to work in the gold rushes, in the forestry industry, and on the transcontinental railway. An important historical linkage was created by the contingent of 1,975 Canadian soldiers who were sent by the government of Prime Minister Mackenzie King to assist in the defence of Hong Kong in 1941, 550 of whom died during and after the Japanese attack on December 8 of that year.

By contrast, in the contemporary era commercial ties have increased importance — the consequences of the significant uptick in Canadian trade and investment ties with the countries of the western Pacific since the 1990s. By 2016 Canada was exporting \$51.7 billion to the countries of the Asia Pacific and importing \$119.9. By 2016, foreign direct investment ties had grown significantly: inward FDI from Asia amounted to \$74.8 billion, a massive hundred-fold increase from 1980, when it was just \$730 million. Outward FDI in 2016 was \$66.4 billion, a substantial increase from 1980, when it had been just \$1.6 billion.⁵

People-to-people links remain important. These links have been created as a consequence of patterns of immigration and the fact that Canada remains a destination of choice for students from the countries of the western Pacific. By 2011 — the last census for which data are available — fully 4.5 million of the 33.5 million Canadians enumerated in the census had ethnic origins in the Asia Pacific, the majority from China and the Indian subcontinent.⁶ Other links have been created by foreign students: of

Hampson, Maureen Appel Molot and Martin Rudner, eds., *Canada Among Nations, 1997: Asia Pacific Face-Off* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1997), 105–18; Peter Van Loan, “Speech to Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce,” Speech 2010/40, Shanghai, 2 June 2010; Jason Fekete, “PM Harper Interview with State News Agency Xinhua about his Trip to China,” *Canada.com*, 7 February 2012; Pam Goldsmith-Jones in Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 42nd Parl., 1st sess., no. 157, 24 March 2017, 9999.

³ The motto was not officially adopted until 1906, and did not appear on Canada’s coat of arms until 1921. When he took over as leader of the Liberal party in 2009, Michael Ignatieff embraced the idea of amending the motto to “From sea to sea to sea,” a proposal first articulated by the three territorial premiers and a northern MP, Dennis Bevington (NDP: Western Arctic), in 2006, the centenary of the first official use of the motto. Ignatieff’s support for this was particularly apt since it had been his great-grandfather, George Monro Grant, who as principal of Queen’s University from 1877 until his death in 1902, had tirelessly advocated for the official adoption of *Ad Mari usque ad Mare* as Canada’s motto.

⁴ Michael Hart, “Canada Discovers Its Vocation as a Nation of the Americas,” in Fen Osler Hampson and Christopher J. Maule, eds., *Canada Among Nations, 1990–91: After the Cold War* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), 83–107, quotation at 83.

⁵ Trade and investment figures from Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada: <https://www.asiapacific.ca/statistics>.

⁶ Statistics Canada, “Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada,” *National Household Survey, 2011*, <http://www12.statcan.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.cfm>; Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, “Population by Ethnic Origin by Province,” <https://www.asiapacific.ca/statistics/population/population-2011-census/population-ethnic-origin-province>.

the 336,000 foreign students studying in Canada in 2014, 68 per cent came from the Asia Pacific — with 35 per cent of the total from China.⁷ Moreover, given that a majority of foreign students from the Asia Pacific say that they intend to remain in Canada following their studies,⁸ foreign student enrolments have longer term implications for trans-Pacific links.

On the other hand, however, the symbolic assertion that “Canada is a Pacific nation” seems as aspirational as Canada’s motto had been in the 1860s. For the Canadian government’s actual diplomatic and military engagement with the Asia Pacific has been quite limited in scope. During the decades of the Cold War, Canada was not deeply engaged in the region. While the Liberal government of Louis St Laurent committed combat troops to the Korean War between 1950 and 1953, Canadian military engagement in the Asia Pacific during the Cold War remained limited to the forces that were deployed to peace supervisory operations with the International Commission of Supervision and Control established to oversee the settlement in Indochina after 1954. In the 1960s, the Liberal government of Lester B. Pearson chose not to join Australia and New Zealand in committing combat forces to the American war in Vietnam. In the area of diplomacy, the selection of Pierre Elliott Trudeau as Liberal leader in April 1968 did transform Canada’s connection with China (and the “Canadian formula” on diplomatic recognition changed China’s connection with the world), but we did not see a dramatic shift in the attention that the Canadian government paid to the Asia Pacific. In the military domain, the commitment of the Canadian Armed Forces to peace supervision operations came to an end in 1973 with the Paris Peace accords. The only other substantial Canadian military commitment in the Asia Pacific during this period was regular and sustained participation in RIMPAC, the Rim of the Pacific exercise hosted and administered by the Pacific Fleet of the US Navy, headquartered at Pearl Harbor.

In the 1980s and the early 1990s, by contrast, the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney sought to play a more active role in region. Under the leadership of Mulroney’s secretary of state for external affairs, Joe Clark, there was a certain enthusiasm for engagement in the Asia Pacific, as Canada not only sought to join the emerging security and economic cooperation architecture of the region, but Clark was enthusiastic about ensuring that Canada was active in informal non-governmental “track two” processes in the Asia Pacific. Canadian academics and non-governmental organizations were involved in the North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue that Clark established,⁹ and other fora such as the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council and the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific. But the Canadian government was also active multilateral negotiations on the South China Sea, providing legal experts for the discussion. Ottawa was also active in the region’s emerging economic institutions, notably the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.¹⁰

Much of the enthusiasm was continued by the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien that came to power after the October 1993 elections. It reached its apogee in 1997, when the Chrétien government was preparing to host the APEC summit. Chrétien created a new sub-cabinet post — secretary of state (Asia-Pacific) — and appointed Raymond Chan, an MP from Richmond, BC, to it. The government declared 1997 to be “Canada’s Year of Asia Pacific,” which was, as Chan put it, designed to “demonstrate to our partners and friends in Asia Pacific the seriousness of our commitment to the region.”¹¹

⁷ Canadian Bureau for International Education, “A World of Learning, 2015,” <http://cbie.ca/media/facts-and-figures/>.

⁸ Canadian Bureau for International Education, *A World of Learning, 2014* (Ottawa, 2014), 36, figs. 33, 34.

⁹ See David Dewitt, “Common, Comprehensive, and Cooperative Security,” *The Pacific Review* 7:1 (1994); Pauline Kerr, “The Security Dialogue in the Asia-Pacific,” *The Pacific Review* 7:4 (1994): 397–409.

¹⁰ See Karen Minden, Nicole Gallant and Paul Irwin, “Canada’s Role in APEC,” in Hampson, Molot and Rudner, eds., *Canada Among Nations, 1997*, 119–44.

¹¹ Chan, “Canada and Asia Pacific,” 118.

However, much of the Chrétien government's ardor for Asia Pacific engagement cooled after the APEC summit, in part because the meetings in Vancouver were disrupted by protest, but most because of the Asian financial crisis. But for the next twenty years — James Boutilier has called it the “Rip Van Winkle era”¹² — the Canadian government in essence scaled back its involvement, lowering its visibility and cutting or eliminating budgets that had supported engagement.¹³ The key exception was the RIMPAC exercise, which had become a biennial exercise in 1974. The Canadian Armed Forces consistently participated in this exercise, contributing ships, aircraft and ground forces.

However, the decline of visibility in other areas — particularly the unwillingness of Canadian cabinet ministers to commit time participating in the complex architecture of the Asia Pacific — would have circular effects: the more invisible Canada was in Asia Pacific fora, the less inclined other governments in the region were to extend membership to Canadians. Thus Canada has been excluded from the East Asia Summit. And although Canada is an ASEAN Dialogue Partner and a member of the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference and the ASEAN Regional Forum, it is not invited to the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+),¹⁴ essentially shutting Canada out of regional defence discussions.

This marginalization — or, perhaps more correctly, self-marginalization — was of course occurring as global politics was undergoing a massive realignment, particularly focused on the rise of “global China,”¹⁵ the transformation of the United States, and the souring of relations between the US and the Russian Federation. Commenting on that “tectonic realignment” of global politics underway in the Asia Pacific, Daryl Copeland characterized Canada's approach to the countries and institutions of the region in 2015 in the following terms: Canada is “mainly watching from the sidelines, spurned by key players, sometimes clapping, often pouting... and always hectoring.”¹⁶ The chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Raynell Andreychuk (Conservative: Saskatchewan), had a similar concern. Introducing the committee's 2015 report, *Securing Canada's Place in Asia Pacific*, Andreychuk worried that “The Asia-Pacific region is of growing global importance, and Canada cannot afford to miss out.”¹⁷ She was reflecting the wider concerns of the Committee: its first recommendation was explicit:

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada lead a “whole of country” effort that recognizes the importance of the Asia-Pacific region for Canada's future prosperity and better prepares Canadians to seize regional opportunities, by developing and implementing a systematic, comprehensive, consistent, and sustained approach for strengthening relations within the Asia-

¹² James Boutilier, “Reflections on Canada's Engagement with Asia,” Asia Pacific Roundtable, Kuala Lumpur, 31 May 2016, 8, http://www.isis.org.my/attachments/apr30/Reflections_on_Canadas_Engagement_with_Asia_-_Dr_James_A_Boutilier.pdf.

¹³ Marius Grinius, “Canada's Security Role in Asia-Pacific,” *2016 Policy Review Series*, Canadian Global Affairs Institute (July 2016).

¹⁴ The members of ADMM+ include the ten ASEAN states, plus Australia, the People's Republic of China, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and the United States.

¹⁵ See Paul Evans, “Canada, Meet Global China,” *International Journal* 61:2 (Spring 2006): 283–97.

¹⁶ Daryl Copeland, “Canada and the Asia Pacific: Unsteady Interest and Opportunities Lost,” *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, 8 July 2015, <http://www.guerrilladiplomacy.com/2015/07/canada-and-the-asia-pacific-unsteady-interest-and-opportunities-lost/>.

¹⁷ Canada, Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Securing Canada's Place in Asia-Pacific: A Focus on Southeast Asia* (Ottawa, June 2015), iv.

Pacific region, and ensuring that this engagement is supported by effective, adequately resourced high-level commercial diplomacy.¹⁸

The criticism that Canada had not developed “a systematic, comprehensive, consistent and sustained approach” has been particularly pronounced in the case of the Canada-China relations. There is a common thread among practitioners and students of Canada-China relations that focuses on the lack of a systematic and strategic approach to China.¹⁹

For example, in 2009, Derek H. Burney, who had served as Canadian ambassador to South Korea in the 1980s and had been Canada’s ambassador to the United States from 1989 to 1993, worried about where Canada saw itself in the changing patterns of politics in the Asia Pacific:

Standing aloof may give us the privilege of neutrality but would more likely confirm a position of continuing irrelevance. In order to make prudent choices, we need, first, a clear formulation of how our national and global interests can best be served and of the extent to which we are prepared to contribute responsibly in the region that is likely to dominate in the decades ahead.²⁰

Writing five years later, Burney and Fen Osler Hampson, the director of global security at the Centre for International Governance Innovation, noted that Canadian relations with China “seemed to be running on idle,” and that “given the global power re-alignment underway, there are both pragmatic and strategic reasons why China should command a clearer and more urgent priority.”²¹

In a similar vein, Wenran Jiang has been persistent in his view that the Harper government needed to fashion a “comprehensive and nonpartisan China strategy.”²² In 2012, he was still complaining that “We have no plan, no strategy, there is really nothing in place in terms of dialogue with China...”²³ For his part, Paul Evans worried that the Canadian government was embracing “a strategic partnership without a strategic dimension.”²⁴ In his 2014 book, *Engaging China*, Evans argued that the “long-term success [of the Canada–China relationship] depends on devising and articulating an overarching strategy that defines priorities and makes a compelling case why Canadians should support it.”²⁵

¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁹ For a discussion, see Kim Richard Nossal, “An ‘Astrategic’ Power” Canada, China, and Great Power Transitions,” in James Fergusson and Francis Furtado, eds., *Beyond Afghanistan: An International Security Agenda for Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), 151–61.

²⁰ Derek Burney, “Canada Must Outgrow its Juvenile Relationship with China,” *Globe and Mail*, 11 April 2009, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/canada-must-outgrow-its-juvenile-relationship-with-china/article783871/>.

²¹ Derek H. Burney and Fen Osler Hampson, “As China’s Ascent Continues, Canada Is Missing in Action,” *Globe and Mail*, 4 May 2014.

²² Wenran Jiang, “Seeking a Strategic Vision for Canada-China Relations,” *International Journal* 64:4 (Autumn 2009): 891–909, quotation at 908.

²³ Quoted in Sneh Duggal, “Measuring Harper in the Middle Kingdom,” *Hill Times*, 12 September 2012, <http://www.hilltimes.com/global/2012/09/16/measuring-harper-in-the-middle-kingdom/31176>.

²⁴ Paul Evans, “Engagement with Conservative Characteristics: Policy and Public Attitudes, 2006–2011,” in Pitman B. Potter and Thomas Adams, eds., *Issues in Canada-China Relations* (Toronto: Canadian International Council, 2011), 19–30, quotation at 27.

²⁵ Paul Evans, *Engaging China: Myth, Aspiration, and Strategy in Canadian Foreign Policy from Trudeau to Harper* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 83.

Former Canadian ambassadors to China — who more than most know whereof they speak — have been particularly critical of the absence of strategic thought in Canada’s approach to China. Fred Bild, who was Canada’s ambassador in Beijing from 1990 to 1994, concluded his survey of Canadian policy towards China by noting that “I trust that this narrative of Canada’s evolving approach to foreign policy conundrums will have demonstrated that an absence of overriding strategic objectives was generally the rule.”²⁶ In a wide-ranging critique published in 2015, Canada’s ambassador to China between 2009 and 2012, David Mulroney, argued forcefully that Canada’s China policy was marked by “muddle” and a lack of careful strategic thought.²⁷

The victory of the Liberals under Justin Trudeau in the October 2015 elections brought a modest change in China policy. The new government signalled that it was intent on resetting the Canada-China relationship. Trudeau made sure to establish a personal relationship with Xi Jinping at pull-asides at APEC and the G20. Some of the key Conservative policies²⁸ — such as the Harper government’s refusal to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, headquartered in Beijing — were abandoned. A new tone was set, perhaps best reflected in the institutionalization of an annual summit of the heads of government. In the meantime, the two governments announced their intention to start the process of exploring a free trade agreement.

The desire to undertake yet another “reset” in the relationship with China was mirrored by the beginnings of a different trajectory for Canada’s approach to the Asia Pacific more broadly. In February 2016, the Trudeau government signed the Trans-Pacific Partnership — and signalled that it would ratify it in due course. In part the embrace of the TPP was driven by a recognition that this free trade agreement would produce significant benefits for the Canadian economy — and in particular the “middle class” on which the Liberals had focussed their 2015 election campaign. But there was another purpose in the embrace of TPP: to signal that Canada was interested in beginning to move away from the “Rip Van Winkle” era, and begin to engage more fully and more enthusiastically in the Asia Pacific region.

The Trump Effect

And then Donald J. Trump was elected president of the United States in November 2016. For the Canadian government, the Trump administration posed a significant threat. As a candidate, Trump had run on an “America First” platform that targeted two cornerstones of Canadian foreign and defence policy: the North American Free Trade Agreement and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Trump consistently denigrated free trade agreements, claiming that Americans were being “raped” by other countries, particularly China and Mexico. He promised to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. He consistently denounced NAFTA, calling it the “single worst trade deal ever approved in this country” (as he put it in the presidential debate of 27 September 2016). And deeply intertwined with his threat to renegotiate NAFTA so that it worked in American interests was his promise to build a wall across the southern border of the United States — and force the Mexican government to pay for it.

Trump’s anti-NATO position was evident early in the campaign. As early as March 2016, in a meeting with the editorial board of the *Washington Post*, Trump dismissed NATO as an “anachronism,”

²⁶ Fred Bild, “Canada’s Staying Power: A Diplomat’s View,” in Huhua Cao and Vivienne Poy, eds., *The China Challenge: Sino-Canadian Relations in the 21st Century* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2011), 11–31, quotation at 29.

²⁷ David Mulroney, *Middle Power, Middle Kingdom: What Canadians Need to Know about China in the 21st Century* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2015), 266–71.

²⁸ On the Harper government’s approach to China, see Jeremy Paltiel, “Canada’s China Re-set: Strategic Realignment or Tactical Repositioning? Re-energizing the Strategic Partnership,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 18:3 (2012): 267–72; Kim Richard Nossal and Leah Sarson, “About Face: Explaining Changes in Canada’s China Policy, 2006-2012,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 20:2 (2014), 146–62.

claiming that since the US was “not a rich country anymore,” “protecting” other NATO countries was “costing us a fortune.”²⁹ Closely related to his denigration of NATO as “obsolete” was his attitude towards the Russian Federation and in particular the Russian president, Vladimir Putin. In July 2016, Trump explicitly refused to criticize the Russian seizure of Crimea from Ukraine and its incorporation into the Russian Federation; instead, he acknowledged that if he were elected president he would look at accepting the seizure as permanent.³⁰ The combination of Trump’s refusal to criticize Putin and Russia, his denigration of NATO, and his threat in July to only protect those countries that were paying “what they’re supposed to be paying for defence,” was particularly worrisome, since it had considerable implications for the security of the small NATO countries on the marches of the Russian Federation.

That the Trump campaign was marked by nativism, xenophobia, Islamophobia — and was drawing the support of white nationalists and white supremacists without any rejection by the candidate himself — added to the concerns of the government in Ottawa, since it was becoming increasingly clear over the course of the campaign that Trump’s radical policies were drawing considerable support. And indeed Trump’s inaugural address, in which he repeated his “America First” approach, demonstrated clearly that there would be no moderation once Trump was in office.

The response of the Trudeau government to the election of Donald Trump was multifaceted. First, and most importantly, the prime minister made clear from the outset that whatever their differences, he would seek to work with Trump. Two days after the election, he put it this way to reporters: “One of the important things about my job is that Canadians expect me to work with whomever Americans elect to be their president.... It is important that the prime minister and the president have a constructive working relationship.”³¹ It was a formula that he used on a number of occasions. It is also evident that he made clear to his backbench that whatever anti-Trump proclivities they might have were to be kept to themselves; for the Liberal backbench has not indulged in the kind of criticism of the president that both Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin tolerated — indeed, in some instances encouraged — from their backbenchers against George W. Bush between 2001 and 2006.

Second, shortly before Trump’s inauguration, Trudeau shuffled his cabinet. He replaced Stéphane Dion, his first minister of foreign affairs, with Chrystia Freeland, who had served as the minister of international trade. Dion was seen as an awkward fit with the new administration in Washington: he had voted against Canadian participation in the Afghanistan mission in 2007, he was an enthusiastic supporter of global efforts to combat climate change. Freeland, by contrast, had numerous contacts in the US as a result of her earlier career as a journalist; her management of the international trade portfolio provided her with preparation to supervise the renegotiation of NAFTA that was expected from the new administration.

Third, and most importantly, the Trudeau government embraced a significant pivot in Canadian foreign and defence policy. The government had initiated a defence policy review in the spring of 2016; the original intention was to release the review by the end of the year. When Trump emerged as the Republican candidate, the pace of the review was slowed, and then after the election brought to a halt. It was not until June 2017 that it was ready to be released. However, the government had not initiated a foreign policy review, but it was felt that the new defence policy needed to be placed within the broader context of foreign policy.

So two days before the defence policy review was released on 8 June 2017, the government released a broad statement on foreign policy. Delivered by the minister of foreign affairs in the House of

²⁹ For a handy survey of Trump’s comments about NATO, see Shayna Freisleben, “A Guide to Trump’s Past Comments about NATO,” *CBS News*, 12 April 2017, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-nato-past-comments/>.

³⁰ Krishnadev Calamur, “Donald Trump’s Crimean Gambit,” *The Atlantic*, 27 July 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2016/07/trump-crimea/493280/>.

³¹ Andrew Russell, “Here’s How Justin Trudeau Is Explaining Donald Trump’s Presidency to Children,” *Global News*, 10 November 2016, <http://globalnews.ca/news/3059605/>.

Commons, the speech sought to offer a broader frame for international policy. While many of the elements of Freeland's speech were standard Canadian foreign policy boilerplate — for example, the embrace of NATO and NORAD as the cornerstone alliances, the importance of other multilateral institutions central for effective global governance — there were some significant, albeit symbolic, changes embraced in the speech.

First, Freeland offered a powerful defence of the liberal international order, and the speech cannot be read as anything but a criticism of Trump's efforts to undermine that order with the embrace of unilateralism and a return to an earlier way of conducting international relations. But she then did something that is, as far as can be determined, unprecedented for a Canadian minister, particularly a Liberal, and particularly in Parliament: Freeland paid tribute to the United States, and Americans, for all that they had done to create and maintain that order over seventy years:

Yet even as we celebrate our own part in that project, it's only fair for us to acknowledge the larger contribution of the United States. For in blood, in treasure, in strategic vision, in leadership, America has paid the lion's share.

The United States has truly been the indispensable nation, Mr. Speaker. For their unique, seven-decades-long contribution to our shared peace and prosperity, and on behalf of all Canadians, I would like to profoundly thank our American friends.³²

It was thus with regret that Freeland acknowledged that there were many in the United States who, as she put it, “cast their ballots, animated in part by a desire to shrug off the burden of world leadership,” and promised that “we seek and will continue to seek to persuade our friends that their continued international leadership is very much in their national interest—as well as that of the rest of the free world.”

But Freeland also noted that the fact that the United States had come to question its global leadership “puts into sharper focus the need for the rest of us to set our own clear and sovereign course.” That would involve, Freeland asserted, a continued Canadian commitment to the maintenance and strengthening of the post-1945 multilateral order and attention to the international institutions that are crucial for that rules-based order.

Freeland also promised that Canada would increase its investment in the Canadian military, making an argument in favour of hard power rarely heard from a Liberal cabinet minister, but clearly laying the groundwork for the defence policy announcement that was due to be made in two days.

The defence policy review, announced on 8 June, reflected the priorities laid out by Freeland. A considerable increase in spending was promised, increasing from \$18.9 billion in 2016–17 to \$32.7 billion in 2026–27. The government committed to increase the Regular Force by 3500 to 71,500 and the Reserves by 1500. It set aside some \$60 billion for the fifteen warships that had been started by the Conservative government of Stephen Harper, and committed to purchase a fleet of 88 “advanced fighter aircraft” to replace the CF-18 Hornets, and a recapitalization of the land combat capabilities of the Canadian Army.³³

In short, the government's foreign and defence announcements of June 2017 recast Canadian policy to adapt to the challenges posed by the Trump administration. However, there was one element that was notable in both announcements: neither of them addressed the Asia Pacific.

³² House of Commons, *Debates*, 42nd Parl., 1st sess., no. 188, 6 June 2017, 1025h; also available at Government of Canada, “Address by Minister Freeland on Canada's Foreign Policy Priorities,” 6 June 2017, https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/address_by_ministerfreelandoncanadasforeignpolicypriorities.html

³³ Minister of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa, 2017), <http://dgpapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>.

It is notable that in a forty-minute speech of some 4200 words that was intended to lay out the broad priorities of Canadian foreign policy, Freeland mentioned the word China precisely once and Asia just three times — though Freeland did dutifully invoke Canada's tri-oceanic existence. The silence about China was of course immediately noticed by a number of observers, including David Mulroney, who suggested that the absence of mention of China was deeply "rooted in classic Liberal foreign policy." Invoking the Chapters bookstore slogan that Paul Martin liked to use when he was prime minister in 2004–2006 — "The World Needs More Canada" — Mulroney suggested that the Trudeau government "blithely assumes that the world needs more Canada. It's actually going to get more China." The concern, for Mulroney, went back to strategic thinking: "It's not evident we've done the hard thinking about the priorities and trade-offs required of us to survive and thrive in a world in which China's reach and influence are expanding."³⁴

The defence policy paper, 113 pages long, mentioned China just twice, though it dwelt at a little more length about the Asia Pacific. It too invoked the oceanic truism that "Canada is a Pacific nation" (p. 90), and acknowledged that the Asia Pacific will be of increasing importance to Canadian security and prosperity. The policy review claimed that "Canada is committed to being a reliable player in the region, through consistent engagement and strong partnerships" (pp. 90, 92). The review promised "a continued presence" in the region, with high-level visits and participation in regional exercises. It promised that Canada would seek to develop stronger relationships with China. It promised to continue seeking to be admitted to the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus. Finally, the policy paper promised that Canada would enhance its participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum.

While the defence paper went a little further than the foreign policy statement by Freeland, neither of the policy statements really addressed the persistent complaint of observers that Canadian policy-makers have been unwilling to make strategic decisions about engagement with the Asia Pacific.

Conclusion: The North Atlantic Anchor

Why have the Canadian government's regular assertions that "Canada is a Pacific nation" been — and continue to be — so aspirational? Why do governments in Ottawa seem to be persistently unwilling and unable to think strategically about the Asia Pacific? I suggest that there are two interrelated reasons for the failure to match aspiration with reality.

The first reason is that although Atlanticism in Canada is regularly declared to be pining for the fjords,³⁵ in fact the North Atlantic connection serves as a powerful inertial drag on rethinking Canada's strategic relationships. Atlanticism in Canada — the broad set of strategic ideas that conceived of Canada's vital interests being deeply connected to the North Atlantic triangle linking Canada, the United States and the western European powers — was fervently embraced by Canadian governments throughout the Cold War era. Part of the attraction for a North Atlantic approach to security in the Cold War was the fear that the alliance between the United States and the Europeans would take the form of "two pillars" or a "dumbbell," with the European "bell" or "pillar" at one end, and a "North American" bell or pillar at the other. Ottawa was consistently concerned that Canada's voice would be considerably diminished by twin-pillared architecture.³⁶ As long as the centre of gravity in global politics was in the Atlantic — focused on

³⁴ Susan Lunn, "What about China? Observers Surprised Asia Doesn't Play More Prominently in Freeland Speech," *CBC News*, 7 June 2017.

³⁵ Kim Richard Nossal, "A European Nation? The Life and Times of Atlanticism in Canada," in John English and Norman Hillmer, eds., *Making a Difference? Canada's Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order* (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1992), 79–102.

³⁶ For an elaboration, see John W. Holmes, "The Dumbbell Won't Do," *Foreign Policy* 50 (1983), 3–4; Joseph T. Jockel, "Canada in a Twin-Pillared Alliance: The Dumbbell May Just Have to Do," *International Journal* 46:1 (Winter 1990–1): 8–26; "Succumbing to the Dumbbell: Canadian Perspectives on NATO in the 1990s," in Barbara McDougall, Kim Richard Nossal, Alex Morrison and Joseph T. Jockel, *Canada and NATO: The Forgotten Ally?* (Cambridge: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1992), 17–32.

the global rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union — Canadian attention was inexorably fixed on the Atlantic.

However, as that centre of gravity has slowly shifted after the end of the Cold War, we have not seen a comparable shift in Canadian policy. Policy makers in Ottawa know that there are tectonic changes occurring in great power relations, but the continuing demands of the North Atlantic alliance have ensured that Canadians keep looking across the Atlantic. This clearly was the case during the NATO intervention in the Balkan wars of the 1990s, and particularly the war against Serbia in 1999. NATO's Afghanistan mission from 2001 to 2014 drew Canada in, as did the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011. When the Russian Federation seized Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and sought to destabilize the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine, Canada joined the United States and the United Kingdom in creating a Multinational Joint Commission to support the Ukrainian armed forces. And when the Russian Federation threatened NATO members in central and eastern Europe, the government in Ottawa contributed to NATO reassurance and deterrence measures, including commanding a battle group deployed to Latvia in the summer of 2017.

The weight of the North Atlantic anchor is most clearly evident in Canada's responses to the rise of Donald Trump. To be sure, Canada was willing to challenge the Trump administration's rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership by hosting an exploratory meeting to see if the TPP minus the US could be still salvaged. Likewise, the Trudeau government was willing to express disappointment at the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Paris Accord (though Trudeau was unwilling to be more bolshie than that, refusing, for example, to be part of an attempt to rally other G20 countries in order to present Trump with a 19–1 opposing coalition).

But while the government in Ottawa sought to embrace a balanced and pragmatic approach, there is little doubt that Trump's rise aroused deep concerns in Ottawa. Trump's openly expressed scepticism towards the Atlantic alliance was interpreted as a major threat by the Trudeau government (as well as most other NATO members in Europe). Canada's response to this crisis was to concentrate on protecting the Atlantic alliance. Thus it is not surprising that the foreign policy and defence statements were both heavily focused on shaping the North Atlantic sphere rather than the Asia Pacific sphere.

The Atlanticist focus that we see persist in the contemporary Canadian approach to the Asia Pacific is partly an inertial function of the enduring attachment to an idea that was central to how Canadian policy-makers saw the country's foreign and defence policy during the Cold War era. But there is a second reason why it is so hard to overcome the North Atlantic anchor. Because Canada devotes so little of its wealth to defence and international affairs, turning Canada into a real "Pacific nation" would require a set of broad strategic decisions that would see Canada's limited resources reallocated to the more much more expensive proposition of creating and maintaining a significant presence in the Asia Pacific, both military and diplomatic. The Canadian government could avoid having to make that choice by retaining both an Atlanticist presence and adding a significant Pacific presence, but securing buy-in from the electorate for what would have to be a dramatic increase in spending on both soft and hard power would be exceedingly difficult. (It is not by coincidence that the dramatic increase in defence spending announced by the minister of national defence, Harjit Sajjan, is virtually all back-loaded well into the 2020s, long past the next election, and into an era when it is unlikely that the present government will have to deal with the budgetary reality of these promises that look so robust on paper.)

For these two reasons, Canadian politicians will continue to embrace the sea-to-sea-to-sea platitudes and declare Canada to be a Pacific (or an Arctic) nation. But the unchanging behaviour of governments in Ottawa, most recently over the rise of Donald Trump, reveal clearly that Canada remains first and foremost an Atlantic nation.