



A production of H-Diplo with the journals *Security Studies*, *International Security*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, and the International Studies Association's Security Studies Section (ISSS).

<http://issforum.org>

H-Diplo/ISSF Editors: **Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse**

H-Diplo/ISSF Web and Production Editor: **George Fujii**

Commissioned for H-Diplo/ISSF by **Thomas Maddux**

Tsuyoshi Kawasaki. "Where Does Canada Fit in the US-China Strategic Competition across the Pacific?" *International Journal* 71:2 (June 2016): 214-230. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702016643344>.

Review by **David Dewitt**, York University

Published by ISSF on 6 January 2017

tiny.cc/ISSF-AR65

<https://issforum.org/articlereviews/65-canada>

<https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-AR65.pdf>

Tsuyoshi Kawasaki's article contributes to a modest literature on Canada's diplomatic, security, and defence relations with the Asia Pacific countries. It provides the reader with a succinct and useful review of emergent China in the larger international community with particular reference to U.S.-China relations. Derivatively, Kawasaki explores his thesis concerning its implications for Canada.

As the title of this essay indicates, Kawasaki's focus is embedded in the view of a U. S. -China strategic competition. It is informed by a particular reading of China's increasingly assertive role in pursuing its national interests, though concerned not with economic or diplomatic matters but very much the clash of 'strategic interests' between the United States and China, in particular in East Asia. The author properly notes the increasing prevalence of China's advancements in cyber threats, its ability and seeming willingness to breach the economic, intellectual property and hard security concerns of targeted countries, along with China's sustained commitment to invest in enhanced military technology and capabilities. In this he draws from U.S. government reports and sources to highlight the rising concerns about Chinese intrusions and U.S. perceptions of threat. Kawasaki also notes the more conventional areas of threats and insecurity, in particular those in the maritime arena, most notably activities on, above, and below the South China Sea.

This overview of the strategic context is not wrong but it is incomplete. While drawing from a number of important U.S. government and think tank sources and analyses, it takes the worst-case position, presuming from the outset that recent policy statements and acts by the Chinese government are nefarious in intent and necessarily imperil the strategic environment and in particular the interests of the United States and its allies. Areas of opportunity for strategic cooperation and the use of diplomacy - whether bilateral, regional, or multilateral – to manage what likely will continue to be the assertion of China's regional and global interests are not considered and hence there is a suggestion by omission that this simply might not even be possible. There is no acknowledgement that China may well have 'national interests' and that given its growing capabilities, it now is better able to assert and to pursue them. Whether China is a revisionist power or one that is seeking to pursue goals within the existing set of global norms and principles, the assumption in this essay seems to be not only that the United States has to plan for the worst, but to presume that both Chinese intent and actions necessarily pose a profound strategic challenge to the United States and its allies. This then informs the second part of the essay that explores what this means for Canadian policy options in East Asia.

Kawasaki's informed and particular overview of U.S.-China strategic relations provides the context for the principal purpose of his essay. His research and article were completed in the last few years of the Harper government. Prime Minister Stephen Harper's decade marked a considerable and substantive shift from the previous years where Canada's international interests were pursued by a strong mix of commitments to international as well as regional institutions (the United Nations system, NATO, the Commonwealth, and *La Francophonie*), an open and rules based international system for the movement of goods, services, and people, an assumption that conflicts could be averted or better managed and ultimately resolved through responsible global participation, whether that meant the interposition of military force or intensive diplomatic activity, all of which was based on a set of strong bilateral diplomatic relations with 'likeminded' countries, in particular the United States.¹ In the immediate post-cold war world, this policy was pursued through a mix of law and diplomacy (e.g., Responsibility to Protect, human security, Millenium Development Goals, G8 and G20, coalitions of the willing, NATO out of area).²

While a small number of scholars have addressed various issues concerning Canada-Asia Pacific relations before and during the Harper decade, all of those have located their work in a context somewhat different from Kawasaki's.³ Whether focusing on Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, or specific countries in one or another

¹ For a useful introduction covering a range of relevant literature, see Duane Brett & Christopher J. Kukucha, eds., *Readings in Canadian Foreign Policy: Classic Debates & New Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, third edition); an older study is David B. Dewitt and John J. Kirton, *Canada as a Principal Power* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983) and, more recently, Derek H. Burney and Fen Osler Hampson, *Brave New Canada: Meeting the Challenge of a Changing World* (Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

² See James Fergusson and Francis Furtado, eds., *Beyond Afghanistan: An International Security Agenda for Canada* (Victoria: UBC Press, 2016), Fen Osler Hampson and Stephen M. Saideman, eds., *Elusive Pursuits: Lessons from Canada's Interventions Abroad* (Centre for International Governance Innovation and Carleton University, 2015), and Patrick James, *Canada and Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and for earlier collections focusing on the post-Cold War security environment and Canada, see David B. Dewitt and David Leyton-Brown, eds., *Canada's International Security Policy* (Prentice-Hall, 1995).

³ See, for example, Paul Evans, *Engaging China: Myth, Aspiration, and Strategy in Canadian Policy from Trudeau to Harper* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); Asif B. Farooq and Scott McKnight, eds., *Moving Forward: Issues in Canada-China Relations* (Toronto: Asian Institute & China Open Research Network, University of

of those vast regions, these other scholars usually have acknowledged the balance between emergent capabilities and interests within the region, the growth of China's presence, and the purported re-engagement of the Asia Pacific by the United States. While the complex U.S.-China relationship has cast a shadow of the future over these analyses, the direction of engagement slant has been more towards seeking opportunities for some mix of mutually beneficial cooperation and, minimally, conflict avoidance and management.

So what about Canada? Most scholars on Canadian security and defence policy begin by acknowledging that the most intimate and critical relationship for Canada is with the United States. The reasons for this are obvious, from geographic to economic to political, highlighted by more than 75 years of bilateral cooperation along shared perimeters as well as in overseas engagements. Even at times of policy disagreements – e.g., Canada's decision not to go into the U.S. led 2003 invasion of Iraq – the deep and positive connections between the two militaries remained. In strategic terms as well as on the more operational planes of pursuing security and defence, almost everything for Canada is a residual of its relationship with the United States. Some might well argue that for Canada, the United States is an over-determinant factor. For the United States, Canada is a useful ally and partner, marginal in global affairs terms but significant in bilateral relations, within the corridors of multilateral and regional institutions, and in terms of political and diplomatic symbolism and coherence among liberal democratic states.

Canada's high quality but low-to-modest military and security capabilities are necessarily focused on inter-operability with those of their U.S. counterparts. And as part of the 'Five Eyes intelligence network,' Canada collaborates with the other four, the U.S., UK, Australia, and New Zealand, but none is equal to the United States, thereby reinforcing an already deep relationship. There have been times that the intensity of this bilateral situation has created serious tensions, as with the 1983 Ottawa-Washington agreement to permit U.S. cruise-missile testing out of Cold Lake, Alberta; and even decades earlier around nuclear weapons. All this to note that the complex Canada-U.S. relationship has weathered numerous challenges, yet Ottawa has often pursued its own priorities even when these have clashed with those preferred by Washington. Further, the literature also shows that where Canadian government policy has been in step with Washington, it was determined principally through a consideration of Canadian preferences that overlapped or were coincident with the American preferred position.⁴ Canadian policy rarely occurred simply because of U.S. desire.

Kawasaki offers the reader an important analysis. Beginning on page 224 he lays out Ottawa's posture (i.e., during the latter Harper days), arguing that "...it is Canada's East Asia, not homeland defence, policy that requires reassessment" (227). Other than some border management issues, the operationalization of perimeter

Toronto, 2016); Elinor Sloan, "America's Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific: The Impact on Canada's Strategic Thinking," *International Journal* 70:2 (2015): 268-285; Bruce Gilley, "Middle powers during great power transitions: China's rise and the future of Canada-US relations," *International Journal* 66:2 (Spring 2011): 245-264; James Manicom, "A Policy Mismatch: Canada and the United States in the Asia Pacific Region," *CIGI Papers* 9 (November 2012), <https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/no9v2.pdf>; David Mulroney, *Middle Power, Middle Kingdom: What Canadians Need to Know about China in the 21st Century* (Allen Lane/Penguin, 2015); Marius Grinius, "Canada and Asia: Prosperity and Security," (Canadian Global Affairs Institute, June 2015).

⁴ There is considerable literature, as one might expect, on Canada's relations with the United States. For a recent volume, see Brian Bow, *The Politics of Linkage: power, interdependence and ideas in Canada-US relations*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009). Burney and Hampson's *Brave New Canada* (2014) also is illustrative, as is Dewitt and Kirton's *Canada as a Principal Power* (1983).

security, and the sharing of intelligence of respective citizens, this is a non-controversial assertion. He then continues in his penultimate section to assess what he views as four policy options: “active honest broker,” “staying put (status quo),” “active pro-US military policy,” and “active pro-US diplomatic policy” (227-230).

Here is where there is room for divergence from Kawasaki’s presentation. His analysis presumes the following three conditions for the selection of a new Canadian policy in light of this trans-Pacific strategic competition: “(a) it should not financially over-burden Ottawa; (b) it should stop the marginalization of Canada and increase the chance for Ottawa to achieve its stated policy goals in East Asia, especially obtaining EAS membership; and (c) it should not harm Ottawa’s current homeland defence projects with Washington” (227).

He is correct in the need to satisfy the first two conditions; on the third I am not aware of any evidence to suggest that this has been or is correct. Concerning the third condition, while there have been cases of Canada-U.S. disagreement on specific defence and security issues, little evidence suggests any spill-over either to the more generalized issues of security and defence cooperation and the key issue of interoperability or to other bilateral sectors. Moreover, sector and interest linkages in Canada-U.S. relations that were once assumed to be the way Canada-U.S. foreign policy was conducted have been reduced to an irritant linked to domestic politics in one constituency or another. Economic and trade policies, often linked to environmental issues such as energy access, pipelines, climate change or fresh water, have been an ongoing exception but are usually resolved through negotiation and management. Perimeter and homeland security, whether in terms of the North American continent or specifically the Canada-U.S. border and the Arctic, are in the interests of both countries to ensure coordination and effective management. Hence, this aspect of security and defence is unlikely to be affected by or to be a pawn in anything connected to the Asia Pacific. The Five Eyes network ensures ongoing intelligence sharing, which increasingly includes concerns about cyberthreats, a transnational arrangement that is generally immune to any bilateral tensions among the Five.

Turning to the first of Kawasaki’s stated two other conditions, to date there is little evidence to suggest any substantive change in Canada’s defence budget. Through both Liberal and Conservative governments, defence has been a trough for moving funds from the Department of National Defence (DND) to other federal government departments and initiatives. Although the Harper government came to power with declarations in which strengthening Canada’s military capabilities and presence were a centre-piece, and ‘commitments’ were made from procurement of major new weapons platforms to the presence of the armed forces in the Canadian Arctic, little of this came about. Canada’s deep commitment to the efforts in Afghanistan from 2001 through 2014 drew down defence, aid, and development budgets. Consequently, attention to other arenas – both geographic and substantive – in international affairs was concomitantly constrained. Although the new Justin Trudeau Liberal government announced somewhat different priorities, there is little expectation that this will result in major changes to the defence budget; rather a change in focus seems likely. Whether this will then resonate with any declared alterations to defence budgets and commitments likely will unfold in the coming year. However, short of a major foreign policy review, it remains unclear what, in fact, are Canada’s defence priorities and procurement and force implications beyond traditional bilateral arrangements with the United States on North American defence, with NATO on trans-Atlantic and European security concerns, and with the United Nations for some modest involvement in multilateral security actions.

Will this affect Canada’s military-related presence in East Asia? Not likely. Although Mr Harjit Sajjan, the current Minister of National Defence, has real military experience abroad and is keenly interested in the Asia

Pacific, armed forces capabilities are not yet sufficient to alter what has been an extremely modest if not low-level of Canadian military activity. A recent study provides an overview of Canadian armed forces presence over a 25 year period.⁵ Both in terms of force deployments and the use of platforms for diplomatic purposes, Canada's East Asia security and defence presence has been slight. Moreover, even in the softer areas of attending defence and security meetings, whether government-to-government (track one), official but also involving non-governmental experts, usually academics or those from think tanks (track 1.5), or non-governmental meetings among experts interested in and connected with policy (track 2.0) track one, 1.5 or 2, with only a few exceptions Canadians have not been a significant presence. Were this to change while defence budgets do not, it would require a major reallocation of force commitments to East Asia away from NATO and other areas of operation. Even then, until new sea and air capabilities are on-line and not just distant commitments, Canada will remain very constrained in its abilities to enhance its presence beyond, for example, more ships and naval personnel to RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific maritime exercises) or similar exercises, or strengthening its intelligence, surveillance, and interdiction capabilities in collaboration with others.

Kawasaki's second condition is also correct. Certainly there is a broad and deep awareness on both sides of the Pacific that Canada is a marginal actor in East Asia, at least in core and material aspects of defence and security. Under both the Jean Chretien/Paul Martin Liberals followed by the Harper Conservatives, the focus has been on economic linkages, including trade, foreign direct investment, and services, along with related interests in managed immigration. Although the 1990s did see a heightened Canadian presence and role in security and defence related matters (for example, in the South China Sea, the Korean Peninsula, engaging China, the deepening and broadening of ASEAN, support for the ARF, commitments to the emergence of an East Asia trans-Pacific network of security scholars and policy planners through track 2 and track 1.5 activities, human rights dialogues, human security, etc.), without a clear material military capability, even during this period of heightened presence, Canada remained a modest actor in the region. Canada pursued most of its interests without the deployment of military assets other than occasional port visits and participation in U.S.-led exercises. All this took place at a time when Ottawa and Washington were of similar, if not common minds concerning the emerging security architecture (to employ an old term) of East Asia.

At the time of the writing of this review, Canada's Department of National Defence is in the midst of undertaking a formal policy review that has included broad consultations with expert communities. To date, I am aware of little to suggest that the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific regions have yet to receive heightened priority or consideration of significant new policy commitments or operational adjustments. At the same time, the department of Global Affairs Canada is not yet pursuing a foreign policy review, and observers wonder whether soon there will emerge a Liberal government coherence on priorities. Whether East Asia emerges as a focus remains unclear. Were it to do so, would it go beyond trade, investment and intellectual property concerns? All three categories feature prominently in any discussion about China, with human rights and environment also being topics of interest.

Kawasaki's assertion of Canada's desire to be invited to join the East Asia Summit EAS is correct, and this situation may not change until Canada does increase its real military presence in East Asia. This could occur

⁵ David Dewitt, Mary Young, Alex Brouse and Jinelle Piereder, "A Mapping Exercise of DND and CF Activities Related to Asia Pacific and Indo Pacific Security, 1990-2015," (Defence Research & Development Canada, Centre for Operational Research and Analysis, April 2016).

through an enhanced humanitarian assistance and disaster response commitment (Canada's Disaster Assistance Response Team or DART unit) or more active and in-place surveillance and intelligence presence. One also might imagine that should new ships be procured in a timely fashion, a number of them could be assigned to shared facilities in the western Pacific or East Asia. The latter requires more money and time, neither of which are in ready supply, and considerable diplomatic initiative.

So where does this leave us in terms of Kawasaki's essay and argument? First, Ottawa is keenly aware of and affected by China's changing international status and its rapidly enhanced security, intelligence, and defence capabilities, just as it acknowledges and is keen to benefit from trade and investment opportunities with China. This does little if anything to alter Canada-U.S. relations. Second, Canada has a range of interests in East Asia generally, including China, but little capacity in East Asia to leverage outcomes. Third, Canada-U.S. defence relations remains the *sine qua non* of Canada's defence policy; interoperability is foundational and fundamental, affecting everything from weapons procurement through field operations and training. All else is residual. With this in mind, and recognizing that, consistent with decades of behaviour, Ottawa continues to remain loath to being viewed as a government that necessarily and automatically concurs with Washington's policies, asserting, as Kawasaki suggests, the preference for "an active pro-U.S. diplomatic policy" (230) is not likely to be warmly received in Ottawa or even other parts of Canada.

Finally, a key aspect of my conversation with Kawasaki's article revolves around his final sentence: "But whatever Ottawa's choice may be, Canada cannot avoid assessing its geopolitical position within U.S.-China strategic competition" (230). This is a truism. It has been and remains part of Ottawa's 'standing operating procedures' always to track and to assess U.S. positions on most issues of actual or possible international importance, and especially those deemed fundamental by Washington. One hopes that also means factoring such analyses into decisions about Canadian policy. It does not mean that Canada will necessarily follow suit; rather that Ottawa is aware of the costs and benefits of pursuing positions that may or may not line up with those of Washington.

Kawasaki's essay offers much information, analysis, and insight, especially its overview of the U.S. perceptions concerning strategic competition with China in East Asia. It is not, however, clear where Kawasaki has provided sufficient evidence to argue for necessity of what he implies should be a new policy of Ottawa's support for the United States.

In the end, while Kawasaki offers an informed and interesting review and assessment of the American strategic position in East Asia, there really is little evidence to suggest that this will significantly alter either Canada's place in that region or Canada's relationship with the United States. The latter is much bigger and more complex to be held hostage to any specific regional security policy, and in any case, the intense bilateral political, economic, and security relationship between Ottawa and Washington mitigates against any radical alterations in Canadian policy. Were Ottawa to invigorate its security and defence commitments, not least budgets, personnel and equipment, there is little doubt that Washington would be pleased, that both the trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific arenas would be serviced, and that Canada would then be able very selectively become a more visible and active participant in a number of security and strategic issues in East Asia. Would it demure to the United States due to some fear over homeland or perimeter security? This is doubtful and not even necessary, since on the big issues there is little difference. Might it be more assertive in those 'softer' areas focusing on law, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief HADR, human rights, policing, judicial reform, gender equality, and overall 'human security' (now that the term may be coming back into vogue)? Probably. Would a larger and stronger Canadian military be a more 'principal' ally to the United States and a

number of other similar-minded countries in East Asia? Likely. But this is not a necessary condition either for sustaining a strong Canada-U.S. bilateral relationship, nor is it alone likely sufficient to provide the impetus for Ottawa to re-invigorate Canada's armed-forces capabilities. Moreover, Canada would always have to be weighing the impact on its longer term set of bilateral relationships with China.

Whether one views China as a revisionist or consolidationist power, it is a significant – perhaps the most significant – Asian actor in both Asian and global affairs. Canada will explore and pursue bilateral interests whenever and wherever possible with China, and will continue to be careful and even subtle in its criticisms of Chinese policies, whether domestic or foreign. Ottawa's messaging regarding the recent Chinese-Philippine South China Sea commission decision was decidedly muted and careful. At the same time, it is likely that Canada will maintain its very limited but regular involvement in U.S.-led maritime military exercises (such as RIMPAC), its participation in intelligence, surveillance, and interdiction, and possibly an upgraded capacity in having available its DART units. Beyond that, all depends on the roll-out of a new defence budget and the ongoing national defence policy review which may, even in the silences emanating from Global Affairs Canada, help point Canada towards a more engaged Asia Pacific presence, acknowledging China as a definer of the future and hence the need for Canada always to track, if not always agree with, American policy.

David Dewitt is University Professor and Professor of Political Science at York University. Recently on sabbatical as the Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto, he served as the Vice-President of Research & Programs at the Centre for International Global Governance (CIGI) 2011-2015, immediately following his two terms as Associate Vice-President of Research at York. From 1988 until 2006, he was Director of York's Centre for International & Security Studies. He has published in areas covering Canadian foreign, defence and security policy, international and regional security in the Middle East and the Asia Pacific, as well as arms control and nuclear proliferation. Dewitt has been active in various t2 (Track Two) and t1. 5 diplomacy initiatives in both the Asia Pacific and the Middle East. He currently serves as Chair of the Advisory Committee, Partnerships for International Strategies in Asia (PISA). He has been a visiting scholar at the Dayan Center for Middle East & Africa Studies, Tel-Aviv University and an international research fellow at the Korean Institute for Defense Analysis. He co-directed the Canadian-sponsored North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue (NPCSD) in the early 1990s.

Copyright ©2017 The Authors.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)