

relationships in those countries, and encouraging their economic and political development. They say that personal relationships are especially important in Asian societies, where ties of kinship, friendship, business and official connection are often preconditions of influence. Moreover, the argument runs, the very structures and habits necessary for active trade and investment--the rule of law, transparent and reliable regulation, relatively free markets, education and much else--tend sooner or later to engender conditions favouring respect for human rights. Finally, it is often said that economic growth from trade and investment leads to an expanding middle class with the political and economic heft to assert individual rights and freedoms. (South Korea and Taiwan being the currently preferred examples.)

What is the best policy approach? Is the single-minded determination to speak and act against foreign human-rights abuses just so much sanctimony? Is "constructive engagement" nothing more than profitable self-justification? Or rather, can these two seemingly opposed positions be accommodated in an effective foreign policy that Canadians could support? To explore the potential for useful compromise, consider two other issues:

Issue One: The rights that Canadians generally value most (the ones listed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, for instance) might not include all the rights that others value. A community's right to stable order, perhaps. Or a country's right to non-intervention by others. Or a poor society's "right to development," as it has been called. None of this is to diminish the significance, or the universality, of rights recognized in Canada's Charter (or in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). The issue, nevertheless, is whether the human rights understood by Canadians can be--or should be--balanced with other sorts of rights understood in some Asia-Pacific countries. The norm of non-intervention carries special authority among many Asian governments; in part it explains why some of the otherwise alarming security threats have so far been managed by discreet bilateral diplomacy in preference to public or multilateral confrontation. To repeat: Rights are more complex, less absolute, than we sometimes think.

As a case in point, should Canadians pressure foreign governments to respect freedom of the press and other media? Canadians easily recognize that freedom of the media, derived from the larger freedom of expression that belongs to everyone, is an essential of democracy. We readily interpret police intimidation of journalists, arbitrary censorship, and state-administered media monopolies as threats to a free society and democratic government. But Canadians are also familiar with cultural sensitivities--with a shared desire to create and manage our own communications media safe from interference by powerful outsiders. Should we tell Singaporeans or Malaysians how much independence they must allow their newspapers and television stations? Are we entitled to withhold aid or trade from a state that fails to satisfy Canadian standards of free media? For what it's worth, CIDA has adopted a different approach: In at least three Asia-Pacific countries (Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia), small amounts of Canadian aid have supported modest seminars and training, for journalists and government officials, on the expected relationships between governments and free media--and on the professional obligations of responsible journalists. The aim is to elicit a respect for media freedom, not to impose it.