

Strengthening Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation

A key component of Canada's non-proliferation action plan is strengthening regional security cooperation to reduce underlying causes of tension, particularly in such chronic hot-spots as the Korean Peninsula, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. Canada is bringing its experience and expertise in verification to the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group of the Middle East peace talks. We have also been instrumental in encouraging the countries of the North Pacific to consider ways to enhance their security through cooperation and dialogue.

The following is the text of an address by External Affairs Minister Barbara McDougall at the North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue Conference in Vancouver on March 21. Scholars and officials from nine Asia-Pacific countries participated in the Conference, which was organized by York University's Centre for International and Strategic Studies.

Last month I addressed the Vancouver Board of Trade and the Asia-Pacific Foundation prior to my trip to Japan. I chose as my topic that day "Canada and the Pacific Century," and I emphasized the remarkable pace of economic growth in Asia-Pacific and Canada's role within this dynamic region. Today, I want to address the evolving security agenda in Asia-Pacific and Canada's objectives in the region.

We are at a pivotal moment in Asia-Pacific security. The past three years have seen enormous progress in a variety of forums. But where do we go from here? It is worth taking as our starting point the stark reality that only a few years ago Asia-Pacific was locked in the stalemate of the Cold War. A series of initiatives by countries in the region, beginning in 1986, opened up the issues of Asia-Pacific security to wider discussion.

True, many of these early proposals were steeped in the logic of Cold War thinking. Ultimately, too, most were unworkable in the absence of any regional forum to advance debate. Canada drew two early conclusions:

- that it is almost impossible to rely on unilateral or bilateral approaches to address what are essentially multilateral questions; and
- that, though the end of the Cold War removed many of the reasons for security

arrangements in Asia-Pacific, new worries almost certainly would emerge.

In addition, there were concerns shared by many in the region that US political and military withdrawal would create a subsequent power vacuum and that local rivalries would persist. These concerns triggered new debates about the relationship between regional and sub-regional security, and how to create stability.

Our own examination of the Asia-Pacific security agenda three years ago resulted in our conclusion that a sub-regional approach to building institutions was necessary before constructing a larger regional institution. We began by focusing on the North Pacific. We created a two-track approach, governmental and non-governmental, to encourage the broadest possible interchange of ideas.

While the focus of much of our efforts was on the North Pacific, we did not neglect the other regional security dimensions. Some two and a half years ago, at a special Canadian-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) foreign ministers meeting in Jasper, we suggested to ASEAN foreign ministers that they consider security issues for the agenda of the annual ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference — the PMC. Two years ago at the 1991 ASEAN-PMC, I spoke openly about Canada's interest in discussing security issues with our partners. Many in ASEAN also sensed the sea change in international security issues and the need for new approaches.

As you know, in 1992 the ASEAN-PMC did place regional security issues on its agenda. This dialogue was expanded through the recent decision by ASEAN to host security discussions with ASEAN and Dialogue Partner senior officials outside the PMC.

Even more broadly, Canada is consolidating a consistent and balanced involvement in the region that addresses not only political and security issues, but also trade and economic questions.

In promoting dialogue, we have focused on our strengths. We have used our multilateral credentials to advantage, for example, through our activities in Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to seek greater inclusiveness and institutionalization, as the process of multilateral cooperation matures. We have also used our official development assistance to work with others to foster dialogue on regional issues — the Spratly Islands question has been a prominent case in point.

We are prepared to use imagination and flexibility to defuse tensions or to advance cooperation in arms control and disarmament issues and participation in regional policy planning discussions. For example, Canada recently called for a moratorium on nuclear weapon testing, an issue of great concern to China's neighbours and the Asian subcontinent.

Another example is the Canada-Japan



External Affairs Minister Barbara McDougall (right) with Yuan Ming (centre) of Peking University and Paul Evans (left) of the University of Toronto-York University Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies at the Vancouver North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue Conference in March.

Photo courtesy of the York University Centre for International and Strategic Studies