

Consistent with the Red Book but without prejudging the outcome of the foreign policy review, I have identified four policy principles as a basis for our foreign policy.

As stated earlier, the Government is seeking to democratize the foreign policy decision-making process. A two-day National Forum on Canada's International Relations was held in Ottawa in March. Parliament has already debated major foreign and defence policy issues five times in the last six months. A parliamentary committee is undertaking a review of Canada's foreign policy. I am personally involved in a parallel set of consultations with a wide range of Canadians with invaluable experience and knowledge in foreign policy, such as the people in this room.

A second principle is our commitment to promoting the full range of Canada's interests and values in the conduct of our international affairs, be they human rights, the environment, the economy or trade.

A third principle is setting a more independent course for Canada vis-à-vis the United States. The United States remains our most important partner and ally. However, we will not hesitate to pursue distinct approaches when it is in Canada's interest to do so, as exemplified by ideas we are promoting on Cuba and Haiti. This does not prevent us from working closely with the Americans on issues of common concern such as Bosnia, where we have warmly endorsed American leadership.

The fourth principle of this government is our determination to reaffirm Canada's commitment to multilateralism, and to modernize it in the context of the approaching 21st century. This is why we are actively working toward UN reform. Canada is also seeking ways to improve the effectiveness of the OAS [the Organization of American States], the Commonwealth, La Francophonie and the G-7 [Group of Seven (leading industrialized countries)]. Canada has called as well for the creation of an Arctic Council to promote circumpolar co-operation.

These foreign policy principles are important. It is equally important, however, to incorporate them in foreign policy and to communicate both principle and policy to Canadians in a clear fashion. This is why I welcome this opportunity tonight to speak to you about a particularly complex issue — our relationship with China.

Many commentators have reduced our relations with China to a debate over the link between trade and human rights. Our government's policy starts with the premise that trade and the promotion of human rights are part of a larger set of policy objectives, which are, in fact, mutually reinforcing.