

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 were 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 U.S. 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