



## CANADA-US RELATIONS AFTER TRUMP: BACK TO NORMAL AND A LITTLE BIT MORE

BY STEPHEN NAGY AND BRAD GLOSSERMAN

*Dr. Stephen Nagy ([nagy@icu.ac.jp](mailto:nagy@icu.ac.jp)) is a senior associate professor at the International Christian University in Tokyo; a distinguished fellow with Canada's Asia Pacific Foundation; a fellow at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute (CGAI); and a visiting fellow with the Japan Institute for International Affairs (JIJA). Twitter handle: @nagystephen1.*

*Brad Glosserman ([brad@pacforum.org](mailto:brad@pacforum.org)) is deputy director of and visiting professor at the Center for Rule Making Strategies at Tama University as well as senior advisor (nonresident) at Pacific Forum. He is the author of *Peak Japan: The End of Great Ambitions* (Georgetown University Press, 2019).*

*The following is part of a post-election series on the impact of the Biden administration on US relations in the Indo-Pacific. Visit [here](#) for part one.*

Ahead of the US presidential election, Canadians were battered with ads underscoring its importance—and periodic reminders that they could not vote. Those commercials were offered as a joke, but acknowledged the country's anticipation over the election.

Between the threats of tariffs on Canadian exports, rude treatment of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and rejection of many of their dearest ideals, views of their neighbor to the south have deteriorated and there was [a clear preference](#) for Joe Biden. Canadians expect Biden to return to the core values guiding previous administrations and providing a foundation for close cooperation, which could pay real dividends in the Indo-Pacific.

Over the last decade, the number of Canadians who consider the US a friend plummeted from nearly 90% to 60%, below India, Germany, and Japan. A Focus Canada survey revealed that respondents with a “somewhat” or “very favorable” opinion of the US dropped to 29% from 73% in 2010. Another survey revealed more than 60% of Canadians held an unfavorable view of the US and two-thirds favored Biden.

Driving Canadian unease is a belief that the Trump administration rejects core tenets of their foreign policy: multilateralism and international institutions, human rights, and a principled (not transactional) policymaking process guided by strategy, not whim or narrowly defined national interests. The tariffs Trump slapped on Canadian exports were disturbing; so was US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris Climate Accord, plus the bullying throughout negotiation of the US-Mexico-Canada trade deal.

Especially painful has been the saga following Huawei Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou's detention. Two years ago she was detained in Vancouver and held for extradition at US request for allegedly violating US sanctions against Iran. The Chinese government quickly detained Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, two Canadian citizens living and working in China; Ottawa and human rights groups charge that their arrests were retaliation for holding Meng. Canadians complain Washington did not consult them about the extradition request in advance, nor show any consideration of their national interests.

Canadians want the new administration to be successful but to also consult with allies on core concerns, especially those directly impacting their national equities. Canadians are prepared to back a more competitive China policy, but it must be reasoned, consistent, and strategic, as China is a critical partner on issues such as climate change.

Canadians would cheer if, has been reported, Biden rejoins the Paris Climate accord, the World Health Organization, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to cap Iran's nuclear weapons program. Canada would be delighted if the US rejoined the

Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership, which the Obama administration helped negotiate as the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Ottawa should demonstrate readiness to sustain institutions of regional and global order and work with Washington to reform others, like the World Trade Organization. These discussions should emphasize shared values and a commitment to multilateralism. Especially valuable are initiatives that show allies' willingness to shoulder commitments.

According to the Asia Pacific Foundation's [2020 National Poll](#) on Canadian Views of Asia, Canadians identify cyber security, public health, and environment/climate change as critical issues. Proximity and integration of the two countries' telecommunications infrastructures makes cybersecurity cooperation a necessity. Canada should work even more closely with the US on cybersecurity regulations; enhancing the 2012 Cybersecurity Action Plan Between Public Safety Canada and the Department of Homeland Security is a good place to start. The two countries should cooperate in forums such as the G7 and among the Five-Eyes through rubrics such as "Data Free Flow with Trust" (DFFT), initially floated at the G20 in Osaka in June 2019.

Canada strongly supports US emphasis on the Indo-Pacific. Canadian foreign policy is guided by the idea of an ongoing shift in geopolitical and economic power from the Atlantic to the Pacific. During then-Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's April 2019 visit to Ottawa, Trudeau acknowledged the two countries' "shared vision for maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region based on the rule of law." Trudeau spoke to Abe's successor, Suga Yoshihide, at the end of September; they reaffirmed their countries' dedication to a "free and open Indo-Pacific."

More recently, Japanese Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo and Canadian counterpart Harjit Sajjan reiterated [intent to strengthen defense cooperation](#) through the Free and Open Indo-Pacific framework. One focus is robust shared messaging strongly contesting "any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by coercion or activities that escalate tension." Significantly, that Asia Pacific Foundation poll found that a "majority of Canadians (83%) feel

that their government should stand up to China as Canadian national values such as the rule of law, human rights, and democracy are on the line."

This contrasts with Ottawa's reluctance to embrace the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) concept articulated by the Trump administration. The administration's ideological tone and aggressive unilateral approach left policymakers fearing that it is a vehicle for containing China. The Canadian government will back efforts to support the rule of law and reject unilateral revisionism but these should be framed as initiatives to sustain a regional order rather than target a specific country.

Canada will cooperate with the US (and other regional partners) on hard security concerns. In 2017, Canada and Japan launched bilateral naval drills and the Canadian Navy has participated in the US-Japan *Keen Sword* exercises. In 2018, Canada and Japan signed an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement. Canada has contributed forces to multilateral efforts to support implementation of UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea. In 2018, Canadian Gen. Wayne Eyre was appointed deputy commander of the UN Command on the Korean Peninsula. Ottawa should expand its role in regional security on its own and in coordination with the US. It could leverage intelligence-gathering capabilities to enhance maritime domain awareness in the East and South China Seas, support the rule of law and freedom of navigation, and join exercises such as *Malabar*, *Keen Sword*, and multilateral exercises with the US, Japan, Australia, and other regional forces.

While Canada will be ready in a crisis, the country's most important contributions to the region—and the most valuable form of US cooperation—are in development assistance. Ottawa has worked through the Asian Development Bank since its foundation, was a founding member of the CPTPP, and is in exploratory discussions regarding free trade agreements with Japan, China, Thailand, and ASEAN. It has active development assistance programs across South and Southeast Asia but could do more. One step would be joining the Australia-Japan-US Infrastructure initiative; another would be joining the [US-Mekong Partnership](#).

To help the Biden administration “[build back better](#),” Canada should work with other CPTPP members to return the US to the pact. Both countries’ middle classes are remarkably similar and would benefit from policies promoting infrastructure development, spurring and safeguarding development of new technologies, and good governance. Both countries should work together to diversify and ensure that supply chains are more resilient; Canada and the US should join the [Resilient Supply Chain Initiative \(RSCI\)](#) launched by Australia, Japan, and India.

Biden’s administration is an opportunity for Canada-US relations to upgrade their partnership in North America and the Indo-Pacific. Key platforms for an immediate upgrade include cybersecurity, Five-Eyes coordination on “Data Free Flow with Trust,” infrastructure and connectivity initiatives, joint exercises, development, and trade promotion, among others. These will strengthen North American resilience and middle class prosperity, sustain a rules-based regional order in the Indo-Pacific, and reinforce a partnership integral to the success and security of both countries.

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