

**JAPAN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER:
WILL THERE BE A SHARED CANADA-JAPAN FOREIGN AND
SECURITY POLICY AGENDA FOR THE NEW DECADE?**

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Introduction

Canada and Japan are modern and sophisticated democracies, committed to protecting the rights of their citizens, following the rule of law, and providing equality of opportunity. As market economies, they subscribe to the values and principles in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Convention in favour of economic growth and international trade, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Bretton Woods institutions. They are close allies of the United States. They enjoy largely conflict-free trade and investment relations and collaborate in sectors such as energy, infrastructure, science and technology, tourism, and youth exchanges. Canadians and Japanese share a great deal of respect for each other's societies and cultures.

So, Is There a Problem?

One other feature shared by Canadians and Japanese is a historical and ever-present belief that the bilateral relationship has never fully lived up to the expectations and aspirations of both countries. Both governments and civil societies have sought ways to energize the relationship and make it more productive and beneficial. Canada-Japan forums have provided ideas and the impetus to achieve the unfulfilled promises of our relations.

Some Informative History

At the level of national governments, over the seven decades of post-war diplomatic relations, in fact there have been dynamic, creative periods in the relationship.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Prime Ministers Diefenbaker, Kishi, and Ikeda were able to substantially broaden relations between Canada and Japan because Japan, less than a decade since regaining its sovereignty, again needed resources and markets, but also legitimacy in a world where it had yet to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the IMF, or the OECD, and required the support of countries such as Canada. For its part, Canada had emerged from the war as an industrial and resource powerhouse and a growing economy. Kishi was the first Japanese prime minister to visit Canada, in 1960, and a subsequent visit by Ikeda launched a Canada-Japan Ministerial Committee whose cabinet-level participants met 7 times in 14 years, well into the Trudeau era. From a strategic perspective, it might be argued that this was the high-water mark of Canada-Japan relations.

Prime Ministers Trudeau, Sato, and Tanaka also were actively and regularly engaged in an equally expansive agenda of ministerial meetings, trade delegations, Osaka Banpaku, and Canadian proposals for establishing a privileged economic relationship between the two countries.

What distinguishes these two periods in Canada-Japan relations, however successful, from those that followed was the personal interest and engagement of the prime ministers of both countries in setting the agenda for the relationship.

Not that their successors did not devote time to the bilateral relationship: Mulroney, Chrétien, Martin, and Harper, and their 20 contemporaneous Japanese colleagues, most notably Nakasone, Koizumi, and today's prime minister, Abe Shinzo, did undertake the kind of bilateral visits that lead to policy initiatives. Many of these visits registered real progress, such as the 2005 Canada-Japan Economic Framework, signed by Martin and Koizumi, which structured ongoing government-to-government mechanisms to improve the bilateral trade and investment frameworks, and launched a joint study potentially leading to a Canada-Japan FTA—the latter discussions ultimately absorbed by the much broader and beneficial Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Another important bilateral achievement during the Koizumi years was the adoption during the visit of Prime Minister Martin in January 2005 of the Canada-Japan Agenda for Peace and Security Cooperation.

But in these cases, the drivers were the government departments in both countries—principally the defence ministries, ministries of foreign affairs, and trade and economic ministries—pursuing their individual mandates.

What this thumbnail history suggests is that, fundamentally, there have been three sets of drivers of Canada-Japan bilateral relations policy:

- Prime ministers from both countries—their initiatives tend to be structural, seeking to transform the fundamentals of the relationship;
- Government departments pursuing specific policy interests, notably Global Affairs Canada; the Department of National Defence; Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada; and their Japanese counterparts; and
- Civil society, writ large, which nudges bilateral policies from the ground up.

That Was Then, This Is Now

The liberal international order is in profound transition, with some states, including Japan and Canada, attempting to save as much of the post-war rules-based system as possible, and others seeking to either subvert it or transition it to a structure serving more directly their national interests. In principle, these turbulent conditions may point to a number of areas in which strategic Canada-Japan collaboration could be envisaged. The question is thus: what national interests could drive both countries to work together, and where will the initiative and energy for collaboration come from?

Leaders

Time pressures and domestic political priorities will largely shape the agenda for both leaders, as has the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, which put a pause on the agendas of all governments, not only those of Canada and Japan.

Trudeau is managing a minority government, which means, among many other things, managing priorities emphasizing domestic issues that the opposition NDP and Bloc Québécois can support, as well as the publics in the parliamentary seat-rich provinces of Ontario and Québec. Little can be expected with regard to a foreign policy strategy, grand or otherwise, until Trudeau has secured a new majority, if then, with the exception being the all-important, indeed existential, relationship with the United States. The post-election policy-setting speech from the throne in December 2019 stuck to boilerplate Liberal foreign policy issues, as did the mandate letters from the prime minister to each of his ministers, including the Minister of Global Affairs: promotion of democracy and human rights; action on climate change; continued support for the UN, NATO, peacekeeping, and targeted official development assistance (ODA); and a nod toward the ethical use of artificial intelligence. For that matter, this 43rd Parliament speech was not very different from that of the 42nd in 2015, when Trudeau came to power: both displayed a lack of disposition to devote significant political capital to international affairs.

Ongoing talks aimed at securing FTAs with ASEAN and Mercosur went unmentioned in the throne speech, as did followup to the institutional strengthening of the WTO, a theme promoted by Canada and ostensibly still somewhere on the agenda. What is formally unstated is what matters most: managing relations with the United States and its prickly administration, which is, for Canada, a daily responsibility, while conducting business as usual with Canada's other established partners.

Prime Minister Abe will also be familiar with the primacy of the U.S. relationship in its fullest. But Japan, unlike Canada, is on one of the geographic fault lines of this transitional era, needing to respond to an assertive China and an even more hostile neighbour, the DPRK, the latter through the unsteady and unpredictable hands of a U.S. president who is "in love" with the dictator across the Sea of Japan and who one day could bomb Niigata. Abe used his United Nations General Assembly speech in 2019 to state that the threat from the DPRK is Japan's greatest concern.

Abe "reset" relations with China over the past year. President Xi Jinping's May visit will potentially determine the scope and substance of China-Japan relations for the mid-term. Relations with South Korea can only overcome the human costs of occupation and annexation over generations, a built-in legacy of bilateral instability that Abe has barely managed but cannot avoid. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept, which Abe can legitimately claim to have given an early push, is already at the centre of Japanese security policies. The Middle East remains the source of over 85 percent of Japan's crude oil and a special area of concern for Abe. On the other

hand, with the CPTPP and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in the bag, the Japanese prime minister has his hands free to manage the U.S.-Japan economic relationship.

And while Abe's control of Japan's diplomatic priorities can't be disputed, his ability to keep his job—as with Trudeau—remains to be seen. A three-term limit on the LDP presidency is in place, but an extension to a fourth term can't be discounted. COVID-19 will create its own disruptions. Fortunately for Abe, the opposition parties are largely irrelevant.

All this to point to the fact that the leaders of the governments of Canada and Japan have domestic political management issues that will monopolize their time and strategies throughout 2020.

Government Departments and Ministries

This will leave the job to cabinet ministers and their departments. Here, the possibilities may be more promising. A variety of common themes can be drawn from current policy statements and actions of both governments. Some offer opportunities for collaboration in ways that address the challenges of the decade. Three come to mind.

WTO and Strengthening the International Trading System

The drumbeat in favour of strengthening—some would say saving—the functional roles of the WTO echoes across the globe, flagged as a priority of the G20, the G7 minus 1, the EU, and all advanced trading nations, and led, to some extent, by the 13-member Ottawa Group. Mary Ng, responsible for international trade, has been specifically tasked by the prime minister to pursue “realistic, meaningful and pragmatic reforms” in the WTO. Her counterpart, METI Minister Hiroshi Kajiyama, has been working on several fronts, including a skeptical United States, to move the reform process forward. Triangulating from our shared commitment to open trade and specific reform objectives, working together on strategy and tactics would serve both Canada's and Japan's national and systemic interests.

Climate Change

This public policy area is daunting in breadth and fearsome in its timelines. Attendant policies have to address decades-long structural changes to energy production and usage, and in the much shorter term, mitigate upfront damages and intermediate risks. Both Japan and Canada are committed to action. In his statement to the UN in 2019, Environment Minister Koizumi Shinjiro flagged the commitment of Japan's major cities to eliminating carbon emissions by 2050. For his part, Canadian Environment and Climate Change Minister Jonathan Wilkinson has been instructed to develop a national plan toward achieving a zero-emission future by 2050 as well. Given the profiles and complexity of these objectives, opportunities for collaboration on the sciences and policy areas are numerous.

International Security and Bilateral Defence Co-operation

The joint statement issued by Canada's Department of National Defence and the Ministry of Defense of Japan in 2019 reviewed an array of actual and potential fields of co-operation, building on Japan's National Defense Program Guidelines, Canada's 2017 defence policy statement and commitments by Prime Ministers Abe and Trudeau last April to collaborate on peace and security issues. Peacekeeping, joint training and personnel exchanges, humanitarian and disaster relief, and minister-level exchanges on regional and geopolitical issues and challenges were particularly flagged. What wasn't mentioned, but is of equal if not greater importance, is exchanges on managing relations with our U.S. ally.

This Is Where Civil Society Fits In

To paraphrase a famous "Mattisism": the public has a vote. Our business communities have views and express their needs and aspirations regarding the global trading system, including the WTO, through a variety of mechanisms. The environmental community helps shape climate change policies. Academics and veterans influence defence and security policies and choices. Former diplomats opine on just about everything. The churning of ideas and recommendations influences the big picture, even if such influence is hard to measure.

What Canada and Japan realize, in the conduct of their affairs, is that they can't go it alone in any sphere of importance. Collaboration is one of the ways that we deal with what reality throws in our path. The challenge is choosing our partners and our issues.