

Canadian Centre  
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**CANADA-CHINA RELATIONS:  
ROUNDTABLE REPORT**

Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

November 19, 1996

**5009.1E**

ISBN: E2-403/1996E-IN  
0-662-30852-2

## CANADA-CHINA RELATIONS: ROUNDTABLE REPORT

On November 19, 1996 the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development hosted a consultation on Canada-China relations. The purpose of the consultation was to provide Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy with policy options for Canada on how best to promote political stability, security and respect for human rights in China.

Participants were invited from across Canada and included academics, representatives of Amnesty International, and members of the Chinese-Canadian community. Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific) Raymond Chan chaired the first hour of the consultation and Steven Lee, the remainder. Officials from the department attended and contributed useful policy information.

The following views were widely agreed upon:

### POLITICAL STABILITY

Canadian Policy on institution building in China should focus on *educating the judiciary* and *training Chinese corporations and individuals* in Canadian business skills and best practices.

Special attention should be given to engaging key people and groups in outlying provinces. Where possible, information technologies should form an integral part of Canada's institution-building efforts.

### HUMAN RIGHTS

At every opportunity, *the Canadian government should present lists of detained dissidents to Chinese authorities*. In addition, the government should *monitor and report on the Chinese government's violation of its own legal procedures*, especially in light of the new legal code.

To improve respect for human rights in China as a whole, the government should work with business to formulate a *code of corporate conduct for Canadian companies*. The code should not be China specific but apply to all Canadian commercial activity abroad.

### SECURITY

Considering the important political role the *People's Liberation Army* (PLA) will play in the formation of the post-Deng government, Canada needs to directly engage the PLA in "track two" dialogues within the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Canada also should engage the PLA in Canadian civil control of the military and other relevant experience as a democratic development, confidence-building and counter-nationalism effort.

When discussion turned to *China and the security of South East Asia*, the group felt that China's steady accumulation of offensive military capabilities vis-a-vis its neighbours and the West would continue. Recent procurement of submarines and amphibious transport vehicles from Russia is a development Canada should be concerned about. China's ongoing military exercise in the South China Sea are symptomatic of China's interest in expanding its sphere of influence.

The consultation concluded with a view that Canada's foreign policy on China should strive to *engage China in constructive ways during a time of great potential instability*. Blanket denouncements and sanctions will only exacerbate an exceedingly delicate situation. Increased trade and helping China develop a more resilient civil society should be Canada's contribution to international efforts to assist China through a difficult transition.

## OVERVIEW

Many participants were pessimistic about the middle to long-term *stability of China*. Internal events ranging from rural migration, the destitution of state industries, chronic unemployment and rising corruption and crime were identified as factors that would inevitably force change on China. Beijing's authority over the provinces could well be the first casualty. In addition, civil unrest and its suppression by the military could become a common occurrence and an unstable economy could become a wellspring for a virulent Chinese nationalism.

Some felt that the fear of instability would allow China to ride out the worst of its economy's growing pains. Also the benefits of China's continuing double-digit growth are not being felt by average Chinese. Whatever the deficiencies of the existing system, economic and social reform is proceeding at a marketable pace considering that as recently as a decade ago China was, of all intents and purposes, a closed society. In other words, the resiliency of Deng's China should not be underestimated.

On the topic of human rights, participants were generally agreed that *trade and human rights* are not necessarily in conflict. The trade versus human rights issue was thought to be based on the false dichotomy that Canada had a choice of one over the other. By 2010 China will be Canada's second largest export market. China holds a seat on the United Nations Security Council and is suspicious of multilateral dialogues. On cultural issues, Canada is considered a rank cultural outsider, if not an intruder, in Asia.

Canadian policy on trade and human rights need not be in conflict if Canada matches increased trade with increased pressure on the Chinese government for human rights reform. Canada should have modest policy goals in this area. Canada should denounce publicly new arrests, name the imprisoned and document cases of abuse of the Chinese rule of law. Attention should be given to providing lower levels of government with the opportunity to internally pressure the leadership in Beijing.