



CANADA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC INITIATIVE

Policy Brief

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MLI's Canada and the Indo-Pacific Initiative: Briefing series

Jonathan Berkshire Miller

In an effort to improve Canada's approach to the opportunities and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, earlier this year, the Macdonald-Laurier Institute officially launched a dedicated "Canada and the Indo-Pacific Initiative." This important new project will look at this pivotal region which has become a centre of geoeconomic and geostrategic gravity. Indeed, the true litmus test for the rules-based order will be its ability to evolve and withstand the challenges in the Indo-Pacific in the coming years. The COVID-19 crisis has only heightened these challenges and proven the need for Canada to develop a robust, comprehensive, and multipronged approach to the region.

Up until this point, successive governments have failed to lay out a clear strategy for how Canada can develop a robust role in the Indo-Pacific. Yet the world's future will likely be shaped in this crucial region. On one hand, the Indo-Pacific contains four of the world's five largest economies and over half of global GDP. On the other hand, it also plays host to some of the most significant challenges to the rules-based international order, including managing China's rise, North Korea's nuclear weapons program, tensions between India and Pakistan, conflicts over freedom of the seas, and much

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more.

The threats and opportunities emanating from the region present Ottawa with a compelling need to engage the region more substantively. Through stronger collaboration with allies and partners, there is an opportunity to transform Canada's role from one of a fair-weather partner to that of a regional power engaged on key economic, trade, security, and defence issues.

MLI has long been the leading voice in Canada on rethinking how we engage in this region. By further expanding our work into a dedicated initiative, MLI seeks to provide even greater guidance and clarity for policy-makers in search of a coherent approach to the region. Frankly, the need for this initiative is self-evident and the future of Canada's security, prosperity, and place in the rules-based global order will be determined in the Indo-Pacific region. Canadians deserve answers as to how our government plans on proceeding, and MLI's work will provide a framework for policy-makers as they navigate these issues.



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Through our Canada and the Indo-Pacific Initiative, MLI has kicked off discussion on key challenges and opportunities in this region in both security and economic terms. This includes three webinars (one forthcoming) highlighting a range of expert voices across the region to look at challenges to maritime security and the need for open and transparent trade and infrastructure. Our capstone webinar at the end of this month will weave these themes from earlier sessions to examine what this all means for Canada's engagement in the region.

One important element of our project, in addition to our webinar series, is a policy briefing series that will look at a range of challenges in this region. Specifically, in the coming weeks this series will cover three issues of concern. First, we will present a policy brief exploring the growth of strategic competition between the United States and China, and its impact on regional security and Canada. While Beijing remains an important part of the Indo-Pacific, it must abide by international laws and norms for it to shift the perception of many in the region that it is an adversary. China's increasing assertive posture in the maritime realm is of deep concern, in addition to its predatory lending practices and coercive diplomacy. As Canada looks to develop its approach to the region, managing the challenge posed by Chinese activities is a significant – but not all encompassing – consideration.

The second policy brief will look at the situation on the Korean peninsula and

in particular the sustained threat posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons program and proliferation of missiles. This paper will build on the discussion on US-China strategic competition and discuss another heated security challenge in the Indo-Pacific. While most of the international attention is zeroed in on Chinese ambitions in the region, the stability of the Korean peninsula remains crucial to a secure region and Pyongyang's growing weapons capabilities continued to threaten key partners for Canada in the region, especially Japan and South Korea.

Finally, our series will end with a policy brief that discusses how Canada should approach the Indo-Pacific. Despite a long history of engagement, the consistency of Canada's role often appears unmoored and not fully aligned with our interests and stakes in the significant geopolitical shifts taking place here. A frequent critique from stakeholders and officials in the region is that Canada must make a more consistent and comprehensive approach that demonstrates an investment of time and capital that goes beyond merely trade and investment. Specifically, there is a need and desire – at least from most states – for a strong Canadian voice on political-security developments, be it on maritime security, nuclear non-proliferation or the plethora of non-traditional security challenges facing the region. This is where the tenets, rules and values that form the basis of the emerging growth of Indo-Pacific frameworks will help Canada better serve its interests and promote its role.

Canadians want answers about how their government should respond to the geoeconomic and geostrategic developments in the Indo-Pacific – from the growing strategic competition between Beijing and Washington to the sustained threat posed by a nuclear North Korea. This series will provide nuanced analysis of these developments and a clear-eyed view of Canadian priorities, thereby helping to set a course for our country to embrace its role in the Indo-Pacific and support a more durable global order in that region.

About the author



Jonathan Berkshire Miller is an international-affairs professional with expertise on security, defence and intelligence issues in Northeast Asia. He has held a variety of positions in the private and public sector. Currently, he is a Senior Fellow with the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) and Director and Senior Fellow of the Indo-Pacific Program at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. He is also a Distinguished Fellow with the

Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada. Additionally, he currently holds senior fellowships on East Asia with the New York-based EastWest Institute and the Asian Forum Japan, based in Tokyo. Miller is founder and Director of the Council on International Policy in Ottawa. He also holds appointments as Canada's ASEAN Regional Forum Expert and Eminent Person (EEP) and as a Responsible Leader for the BMW Foundation.

Previously, he was an international affairs fellow with the Council on Foreign Relations, based in Tokyo. Miller also held a fellowship on Japan with the Pacific Forum CSIS from 2013-16, and has held a number of other visiting fellowships on Asian security matters, including at JIIA and the National Institute of Defense Studies (Ministry of Defense - Japan).

About the Macdonald-Laurier Institute

What Do We Do?

When you change how people think, you change what they want and how they act. That is why thought leadership is essential in every field. At MLI, we strip away the complexity that makes policy issues unintelligible and present them in a way that leads to action, to better quality policy decisions, to more effective government, and to a more focused pursuit of the national interest of all Canadians. MLI is the only non-partisan, independent national public policy think tank based in Ottawa that focuses on the full range of issues that fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

What Is in a Name?

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute exists not merely to burnish the splendid legacy of two towering figures in Canadian history – Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir Wilfrid Laurier – but to renew that legacy. A Tory and a Grit, an English speaker and a French speaker – these two men represent the very best of Canada’s fine political tradition. As prime minister, each championed the values that led to Canada assuming her place as one of the world’s leading democracies. We will continue to vigorously uphold these values, the cornerstones of our nation.



Working for a Better Canada

Good policy doesn’t just happen; it requires good ideas, hard work, and being in the right place at the right time. In other words, it requires MLI. We pride ourselves on independence, and accept no funding from the government for our research. If you value our work and if you believe in the possibility of a better Canada, consider making a tax-deductible donation. The Macdonald-Laurier Institute is a registered charity.

Our Issues

The Institute undertakes an impressive program of thought leadership on public policy. Some of the issues we have tackled recently include:

- Aboriginal people and the management of our natural resources;
- Making Canada’s justice system more fair and efficient;
- Defending Canada’s innovators and creators;
- Controlling government debt at all levels;
- Advancing Canada’s interests abroad;
- Ottawa’s regulation of foreign investment; and
- How to fix Canadian health care.

constructive

important

forward-thinking

insightful

high-quality

active

Celebrating 10 years

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT MLI

The Right Honourable Paul Martin

I want to congratulate the **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** for 10 years of excellent service to Canada. The Institute's commitment to public policy innovation has put them on the cutting edge of many of the country's most pressing policy debates. The Institute works in a persistent and constructive way to present new and insightful ideas about how to best achieve Canada's potential and to produce a better and more just country. Canada is better for the forward-thinking, research-based perspectives that the **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** brings to our most critical issues.

The Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould

The **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** has been active in the field of Indigenous public policy, building a fine tradition of working with Indigenous organizations, promoting Indigenous thinkers and encouraging innovative, Indigenous-led solutions to the challenges of 21st century Canada. I congratulate **MLI** on its 10 productive and constructive years and look forward to continuing to learn more about the Institute's fine work in the field.

The Honourable Irwin Cotler

May I congratulate **MLI** for a decade of exemplary leadership on national and international issues. Through high-quality research and analysis, **MLI** has made a significant contribution to Canadian public discourse and policy development. With the global resurgence of authoritarianism and illiberal populism, such work is as timely as it is important. I wish you continued success in the years to come.

The Honourable Pierre Poilievre

The **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** has produced countless works of scholarship that solve today's problems with the wisdom of our political ancestors. If we listen to the **Institute's** advice, we can fulfill Laurier's dream of a country where freedom is its nationality.

M A C D O N A L D - L A U R I E R I N S T I T U T E



323 Chapel Street, Suite 300,
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7Z2
613-482-8327 • info@macdonaldlaurier.ca

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