



Scott Simon

# NAVIGATING

## CANADA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Why Canada needs a renewed strategy to  
help safeguard peace in the Taiwan Strait

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## Executive Summary

While Canada legitimately has a valuable relationship with Taiwan, most of the attention Taiwan receives is a result of its connection to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and its role in Sino-American strategic competition. A recent example of this dynamic is from August 2022, when China carried out military exercises around Taiwan as an “impromptu” escalation in response to a one-day visit to Taiwan by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

High-level political visits to Taiwan should be a normal part of international diplomacy – and would be in the absence of Chinese hostility toward Taiwan. Taiwan's democratically elected state maintains formal or substantive diplomatic relations with most of the world, including Canada. But state leaders don't use usual descriptors for these diplomatic relations because they are coerced by China to use other vocabulary.

For historical reasons, the name of Taiwan's state is the Republic of China (ROC), but the PRC has never ruled Taiwan. In this context, Canada has developed its own independent stance toward Taiwan and, importantly, never endorsed PRC territorial claims over Taiwan.

Beginning in the early 1950s through the first and second Taiwan Strait crises, Canada has juggled the assertions and demands of both sides, dealing pragmatically with the reality that both states exist and it is in Canada's best interests to deepen trade and other relations with both states. In 1968, then Liberal Party leader Pierre Trudeau summarized this position neatly: “Our aim will be to recognize the People's Republic of China government as soon as possible and to enable that government to occupy the seat of China in the UN, taking into account that there is a separate government in Taiwan.”

Taiwan has become one of the world's wealthiest countries. It has also seen one of the world's most dramatic transitions to democracy, which has allowed the people of Taiwan to remake the ROC in their own image.

Economic relations between China and Taiwan have been strong for decades. From January to April 2022, the value of cross-strait trade was US\$71.2 billion,

up 14.4 percent from the previous year. Exports to China accounted for 26.2 percent of Taiwan's total exports; and imports from China were 20.1 percent of its total imports. China has pragmatically signed agreements with Taiwan resembling international treaties. Even cross-strait exchanges enact Taiwan's sovereignty through border controls and immigration policies.

Since the early 2020s, however, China has increased its aggressive posture toward Taiwan, both at sea and in the air. The goal of China's belligerence seems to be the elimination of the median line as a military boundary. China's unilateral military posturing has brought cross-strait relations to a historical low point. China's action undermines the arguments made, in Taiwan and internationally, that increased trade will inevitably lead to peace. There is a risk that, if the international community fails to demonstrate the will and capacity to maintain stability, China could employ non-peaceful means to assert control over Taiwan.

What can Canada do to continue to do to uphold the rule of law, peace, and human rights in the Taiwan Strait?

As this paper goes on to suggest, Canada should update its Taiwan strategy, including holding discussions directly between Canadian and Taiwanese government officials, former diplomats, academics, and think tanks. Parliament, too, can enhance its role, perhaps even by following Japan's example of a party-to-party Taiwan security dialogue. Situations could develop in which international recognition of Taiwan becomes the best strategy to deter war and Canada could lead the way. Canadian businesses and citizens on both sides of the Taiwan Strait need a government prepared for various contingencies.

Canada has always maintained that peace and rule of law in the Taiwan Strait is an international concern. A practical recognition of Taiwan's existence combined with the hope that its people will someday exercise their right to self-determination has long been the cornerstone of Canada-Taiwan relations. A renewed Taiwan strategy as part of a larger Indo-Pacific plan is necessary to maintain the peace and prosperity that we have enjoyed for the past seven decades and hope to bequeath to future generations.



## Sommaire

**L**e Canada entretient, de façon légitime, des liens appréciables avec Taïwan; il n'empêche que l'attention reçue par Taïwan s'explique surtout par ses interconnexions avec la République populaire de Chine (RPC) et son rôle dans la concurrence stratégique sino-américaine. Un exemple récent de cette dynamique remonte à août 2022, lorsque la Chine a mené autour de Taïwan des exercices militaires qui s'inscrivaient dans une escalade « impromptue » en réplique à la visite d'une journée à Taïwan de la présidente de la Chambre des représentants des États-Unis, Nancy Pelosi.

Les visites politiques de haut niveau à Taïwan devraient normalement faire partie de la diplomatie internationale – et le feraient si ce n'était l'hostilité de la Chine. L'État démocratiquement élu de Taïwan entretient des relations diplomatiques formelles ou étroites avec la majorité des pays, y compris le Canada. Toutefois, ses dirigeants n'ont pas recours aux appellations d'usage pour qualifier ces relations, car la Chine impose un autre vocabulaire.

Pour des raisons historiques, l'État de Taïwan est appelé République de Chine (RdC), bien que la RPC n'ait jamais gouverné Taïwan. C'est dans ce contexte que le Canada a adopté sa propre position indépendante vis-à-vis de Taïwan et, surtout, qu'il n'a jamais soutenu les prétentions territoriales de la RPC sur Taïwan.

Dès le début des années 1950, à travers la première et la seconde crise du détroit de Taïwan, le Canada a dû composer avec les affirmations et les exigences des deux parties, en envisageant concrètement l'existence des deux États et la primauté de son propre intérêt d'approfondir son commerce et ses autres relations bilatérales. Puis, en 1968, le chef du Parti libéral de l'époque, Pierre Trudeau, a bien résumé cette position lorsqu'il a affirmé que l'objectif demeurerait de : « reconnaître le gouvernement de la République populaire de Chine aussitôt que possible et de permettre à ce gouvernement d'occuper le siège de la Chine aux Nations Unies sans oublier qu'il y a un autre gouvernement à Taïwan. »

Taïwan est devenue l'un des pays les plus riches au monde. Elle a également connu l'une des transitions les plus spectaculaires vers la démocratie, ce qui a permis au peuple taïwanais de remodeler la RdC à son image.

La Chine et Taïwan entretiennent de solides relations économiques depuis des décennies. De janvier à avril 2022, la valeur de leurs échanges commerciaux a atteint 71,2 milliards de dollars américains, en hausse de 14,4 % par rapport à l'année précédente. La Chine contribuait à 26,2 % des exportations totales et à 20,1 % des importations totales de Taïwan. La Chine a fait preuve de pragmatisme en signant avec Taïwan des accords assimilables à des traités internationaux. Même les échanges interdétroit concèdent à Taïwan sa souveraineté par le biais des politiques sur les contrôles aux frontières et l'immigration.

Au début des années 2020, toutefois, la Chine a adopté une posture plus agressive tant en mer que dans les airs. Sa belligérance a semblé avoir pour objet d'éliminer la ligne médiane en tant que frontière militaire : sa position unilatérale sur ce plan a fait reculer les relations interdétroit à un creux historique. Les mesures prises par la Chine sapent les arguments avancés, à Taïwan et sur le plan international, que l'accroissement des échanges commerciaux conduira inévitablement à la paix. Si la communauté internationale ne peut démontrer sa volonté et sa capacité de maintenir la stabilité, la Chine risque d'utiliser des moyens non pacifiques pour garder la haute main sur Taïwan.

Que peut faire le Canada pour continuer à faire respecter la primauté du droit, la paix et les droits de la personne dans le détroit de Taïwan?

Comme on le propose dans ce document, le Canada doit actualiser sa stratégie à l'égard de Taïwan, notamment en organisant directement des discussions entre responsables gouvernementaux, anciens diplomates, universitaires et groupes de réflexion canadiens et taïwanais. Le Parlement peut lui aussi renforcer son rôle, voire en suivant l'exemple du Japon, qui a organisé un dialogue bilatéral sur la sécurité à Taïwan. La situation pourrait évoluer vers la reconnaissance internationale de Taïwan comme meilleure stratégie anti-guerre, et le Canada pourrait montrer la voie à ce chapitre. Les entreprises et les citoyens canadiens des deux côtés du détroit ont besoin d'un gouvernement préparé à divers scénarios.

Le Canada a toujours maintenu que la paix et la primauté du droit dans le détroit de Taïwan sont une préoccupation internationale. La reconnaissance pratique de l'existence de Taïwan, associée à l'espoir que son peuple exerce un jour son droit à l'autodétermination, a longtemps été la pierre angulaire des relations entre le Canada et Taïwan. Une stratégie renouvelée à l'égard de Taïwan dans le cadre d'un vaste programme indopacifique est nécessaire pour maintenir la paix et la prospérité dont on jouit depuis sept décennies et que l'on espère léguer aux générations futures.

## Introduction

Taiwan is important to Canada. At least 200,000 Canadians are of Taiwanese descent. Over 60,000 Canadians live in Taiwan, representing the fourth biggest Canadian diaspora community in the world. Taiwanese semiconductors power our smartphones and auto industry. Taiwan is a society of 23.5 million people, slightly less than Australia, which means that Canadians can legitimately value a relationship with Taiwan as highly as the one with Australia. But Taiwan grabs attention mostly in a discourse of greater power competition between the US and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The most recent example is from August 2022, when China employed psychological warfare by carrying out military exercises around Taiwan (which would take weeks to prepare at a minimum) as an “impromptu” escalation in response to a one-day visit to Taiwan by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly immediately stated that visits such as Pelosi's are a normal part of diplomacy and cannot be used to justify aggressive action. Canada then joined a Group of Seven (G7) statement warning against Chinese military action in the Taiwan Strait (Berthiaume 2022).

Joly was right to call visits to Taiwan a normal part of diplomacy, which they would be in the absence of Chinese hostility toward Taiwan. Taiwan's democratically elected state maintains formal or substantive diplomatic relations with most of the world, including Canada. The Lowy Institute Index ranks Taiwan as 32nd, just ahead of Sweden and Israel, in diplomatic power (Lowy Institute 2019).

The only reason that state leaders don't normally describe these as diplomatic relations is because they are coerced by China to use other vocabulary. Confusingly, the name of Taiwan's state, for historical reasons dating to only 1945, is the Republic of China (ROC). The fact remains that the PRC has never ruled Taiwan, even as it tries to coerce third countries to accept their claim. In this context, Canada has developed its own independent stance toward Taiwan in ways that have shaped Canadian foreign policy and provided a model to others. Most importantly, the Canada-Taiwan relationship has never been merely a subset of Canada-China relations. Canada has never endorsed PRC territori-



al claims over Taiwan. Canada has asserted to this day that peace and security in the Taiwan Strait is an international issue rather than, as Beijing would prefer to frame it, an internal Chinese affair that brooks no foreign intervention.

What has Canada done and what can Canada continue to do to uphold the rule of law, peace, and human rights in the Taiwan Strait? To answer that question, this paper explores Canada-Taiwan relations in three sections: 1) Canada's diplomatic history among the architects of the Indo-Pacific legal regime; 2) an appraisal of contemporary Canada-Taiwan relations; and 3) modest suggestions for the future. The main point is that peace in the Taiwan Strait is an international global good and Canada plays a role in protecting it.

## Canada's blueprint for peace

Canadian relations with Taiwan (Formosa) began with Christian missions. Missionaries witnessed as the Manchurians claimed sovereignty over all of Taiwan in 1875, failed to subdue Indigenous populations that autonomously ruled over half the island, and then ceded it to Japan in 1895. As Canada pursues reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, this starting point is important. Canadian Presbyterian missionary and author George Mackay wrote, "These aboriginal inhabitants held the island to be theirs by the right of centuries of possession; and when the Chinese came, they were regarded as intruders, who would not respect native rights" (Mackay 1895, 268). In those days, Canadian interests in Formosa were subsumed under Canada-Japan relations, which officially began with the opening of an embassy in Tokyo in 1929 (Hilliker 1995, 112-113).

### *The San Francisco Peace Treaty*

Political transitions after Japan's defeat in 1945 were traumatic. Based on Allied promises that Taiwan would be transferred to the ROC, President Chiang Kai-shek's government was entrusted with post-war occupation. There was still no peace treaty, and it was not clear if the Taiwanese were satisfied. After Chiang suppressed protests in 1947, Canada's chargé d'affaires in Nanking reported that "Taiwanese are now being executed in a holocaust more terrible than anything inflicted upon them by the Japanese" (Ronning 2004, 108). Communist revolution resulted in the establishment of the PRC and the re-location of the ROC to Taiwan as the government-in-exile in 1949. Approximately 1 million Chinese refugees fled to Taiwan (Yang 2020, 16). They became the ethnic group of "Mainlanders," socially distinct from Hoklo and Hakka "Native Taiwanese" and Indigenous peoples who were already there. In the early decades, the Native Taiwanese experienced the ROC as a colonial imposition and developed their own Formosan nationalism (Mendel 1970). Martial law made it impossible for them to express their desires in democratic ways.

After Canada joined United Nations (UN) efforts in Korea (which was promised independence after Japanese occupation), Parliament debated Formosa. Foreign Minister Lester Pearson differentiated between the UN-led defence of Korea and US interference regarding Formosa (Canada 1950, 96). Liberal MP Hugh MacKenzie summarized Chiang's repression, described Formosa as a "country," and reported public sentiment as "quite anti-nationalist," meaning anti-KMT (Canada 1950, 171). M.J. Coldwell, leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (now the NDP), preferred "to give the Formosan people an opportunity to choose their own form of government" (Canada 1950, 125). Canada's quandary was that Americans spoke about the interests of Formosa while supporting Chiang whereas Britain proposed recognizing the PRC. Cold War strategy linked Formosa to China because it was occupied by Chiang's forces and the US wanted his agreement for military bases (Hara 2006, 54).

Canada was one of 49 state parties to the San Francisco Peace Treaty (SFPT). This treaty ended war with Japan and regulated the disposition of Japanese territory. The two competing Chinese states were notably absent from the negotiations because of disagreement of which side should represent China. The ROC was a founding member of the United Nations and still held the UN seat for China, yet the PRC was already exercising full jurisdiction over most of China's 19th century territory and population.<sup>1</sup>



*Cold War strategy linked  
Formosa to China because it was  
occupied by Chiang's forces.*

Only the US and the Philippines argued that the ROC could sign the SFPT on behalf of all of China. Because the US excluded the PRC, negotiations happened without China, with the understanding that Japan would sign a separate agreement. The US, however, did consult with the ROC about the SFPT. Conflicts among the negotiating states about China made determining the legal status of Taiwan impossible, yet everyone agreed on the importance of ending the war with Japan through a multilateral peace treaty.

In order to prevent the SFPT negotiations from breaking down due to disputes about China and Taiwan, Canada supported the principle of non-discrimination, which would simply not define to which states territories would be ceded. The actual disposition of territories would instead be subject to future negotiations. Canada suggested this solution for Formosa (US Government 1977, 1058-1059). Henceforth, the SFPT did not define Taiwan's status and Japan determined its own relationship with the ROC (Hara 2006, 65).

Article 2 stated, “Japan renounces all right, title and claim to Formosa and the Pescadores.” El Salvador declared that it did not accept or ratify decisions where “the freely expressed will of the affected populations was not consulted and respected” (United Nations 1952a). The subsequent treaty between Taipei and Tokyo (United Nations 1952b) transferred state property to the ROC and made islanders into ROC citizens, but did not settle Taiwan’s international status.

A genuine decolonization would have allowed the then 6 million people of Formosa to determine their own political status. Ironically, this was once the position of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), as explained to journalist Edgar Snow in 1936. Communist leader Mao said, “If the Koreans wish to break away from the chains of Japanese imperialism, we will extend them our enthusiastic help in their struggle for independence. The same thing applies for Taiwan [Formosa]” (Snow 1968, 110). After 1949, however, the US wanted Taiwan to stay under ROC control and the PRC began to claim the island. The Soviet Union, which eventually refused to enter into the SFPT because of disagreements with the US, supported the PRC position. Taiwan was treated as an object of great power competition and thus, in contrast to Korea, was not granted independence.

Canada noticed that the rights of the people of Formosa to self-determination were excluded. Pearson said, “I hope possibly in that eventual solution some people who are overlooked in this matter, I mean the people of Formosa themselves, might be given some consideration. I do not know what they would decide if they were asked what they wanted to do. I suspect, however, that their decision might be a surprising one” (Pearson 1951, 12). As a contemporary of these events, Pearson saw clearly what often gets forgotten today. The ROC was imposed on Formosa by the wartime Allies without consulting the people, and the Taiwanese suffered greatly in the transition. Fearful of both Communist infiltration and Taiwanese demands for independence, the ROC imposed a strict martial law that silenced the Taiwanese for 40 years.

## First and Second Taiwan Strait Crises

In a territorial dispute between the PRC and ROC over several islands in the Taiwan Strait, known as the first Taiwan Strait Crisis (1954-1955), the US helped the ROC evacuate citizens and military personnel from China’s Dachen Islands. This led Canada to further distinguish between the questions of which state represents China (the American framing) and the status of Taiwan (Canada’s independent stance). Pearson analysed the situation this way:

In this area of tension and danger, a distinction can validly be made between the position of Formosa and the Pescadores and the islands off the China coast now in Nationalist hands. The latter are indisputably part of the territory of China; the former, Formosa and the

Pescadores, which were Japanese colonies for 50 years prior to 1945 and had a checkered history before that, are not. (Canada 1955a, 499)

Rejecting all commitments outside the UN, Canada decided it would be a “grave decision” to join any security arrangement aimed at supporting Taiwan, as the island’s future remained an undetermined international issue (Canada 1955b). Canada’s lukewarm commitment to the ROC also manifested itself in that, although the ROC accredited an ambassador to Ottawa, Canada did not reciprocate (Reford 1968, 19). In the second Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1958, PRC and ROC militaries clashed on coastal islands until the US intervened.

These crises inspired Pearson’s thoughts about the peacekeeping role of middle powers. He even drafted the blueprint of a multilateral regime with a *cordon sanitaire* in the Strait and enforcement by an international naval force including a Canadian carrier. This project was not well received by Canada’s allies and was subsequently shelved. Pearson recognized that it could not happen under UN auspices because China was not a member (Reford 1968, 66-68). Nonetheless, Pearson’s Taiwan plans honed the creative thinking that eventually led him to find a solution to the Suez Crisis for which he was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. The US established an unofficial military boundary line or median line in the centre of the Taiwan Strait to prevent conflict between Taiwan and China.

In 1960, President Eisenhower’s triumphant parade marking the US-ROC Mutual Defence Treaty in Taipei gave the appearance of success, but changes were already underway. The biggest change was expansion in UN membership following a general worldwide decolonization. From a membership of 51 states in 1945 to 76 in 1955, when Afro-Asian countries demanded universal participation, the number grew to 132 by 1971. New members tended to support the PRC. Simultaneously, Taiwanese students with aspirations for Taiwan’s independence from the ROC started coming to Canada. They created events such as “Taiwan Night” to share Taiwan’s history, music, and culture with Canadians. They felt excluded from decolonization and alienated from the Cold War system that had imposed an authoritarian government on their country. The credibility of Chiang’s regime was threatened from many sides.

A breakthrough began when Prime Minister John Diefenbaker broke the US-led trade embargo against China by allowing wheat sales to China from Canada. Diefenbaker’s defiance led to friction with the US, which even coerced Imperial Oil to refuse to fuel China-bound vessels (Donaghy and Stevenson 2009, 39). Although he challenged the US, Diefenbaker created a precedent for cultivating substantial relations with one side while still maintaining official relations with the other.

Canadian policy-makers argued that China’s isolation only increased tension, evidenced not only by the two Taiwan Strait crises but also China’s interven-

tion in Korea, invasion of Tibet, war with India, nuclear testing, and support for Vietnamese communists (Edwards 2009, 300). In the interest of universality, Canada supported China's membership as a permanent member of the Security Council, with dual recognition for both China and Taiwan in the General Assembly as a "reasonable interim solution" (United Nations 1966, 135-136). Secretary of State for External Affairs Paul Martin, Sr., explained:

We consider that the isolation of Communist China from a large part of normal international relations is dangerous. We are prepared to accept the reality of the victory in mainland China in 1949... We consider, however, that the effective political independence of Taiwan is a political reality, too. (Martin 1966, 431)

Frustrated by US obstructionism, Prime Minister Pearson suggested: "Should Communist China fail to be admitted to the United Nations, the Government might eventually have to consider the advisability of a unilateral recognition of Communist China by Canada" (Canada 1966). His recommendation would have to wait, not least because China descended into the chaos of Cultural Revolution. But Pearson reinforced a conviction that Canada sometimes needs to take unilateral action.

## Canadian and international recognition of the PRC

In 1968, Liberal Party leader Pierre Trudeau announced, "Our aim will be to recognize the People's Republic of China government as soon as possible and to enable that government to occupy the seat of China in the UN, taking into account that there is a separate government in Taiwan" (Edmonds 1998, 202). Shortly after Trudeau became prime minister, negotiations with China began in Stockholm. Cabinet ordered Secretary of State for External Affairs Mitchell Sharp to avoid "any position that would deny the possibility of recognising Taiwan as an independent state sometime in the future, if circumstances would make it feasible" (Canada 1969). China refused any "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan" approach, but Canada remained firm in the position that neither side would endorse their counterpart's positions about territorial limits or sovereignty (Edmonds 1998, 209).

The 1970 Canada-China communiqué said, "The Chinese Government reaffirms that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China. The Canadian Government takes note of this position of the Chinese Government." An accompanying statement, approved by Chinese negotiators, is the legal foundation of Canada-Taiwan relations. It reads, "The Canadian Government does not consider it appropriate to either endorse or to challenge the Chinese Government's position on the status of Taiwan" (Sharp 1994, 204). This framework, known as the "Canadian" formula, was immediately adopted by Italy and at least 30 countries establishing diplomatic relations with China while continuing trade with Taiwan (Edmonds 1998, 212; Wu 2005).



Canada's recognition helped China increase the support it needed to join the UN. Despite US-led opposition, the 1971 General Assembly Resolution 2758 recognized the PRC as "the only lawful representatives of China." Referring only to which government represents China while saying nothing about Taiwan, the resolution was to "expel forthwith the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek from the place which they unlawfully occupy at the United Nations and in all the organizations related to it" (United Nations 1971). Canada supported the resolution in public defiance of US requests, but the resolution was not aimed at Taiwan. Delegates, regardless of their eventual votes, also expressed support for the rights of the Taiwanese people, in hope that Taiwan would eventually join *as Taiwan*. In Ottawa, Sharp rebuffed concerns that Canada's actions led to Taiwan's expulsion. He argued that Taiwan was not ousted, because it was never a member in the first place, and that the UN could eventually consider Taiwan's membership (Ottawa Bureau, Toronto Daily Star 1971). Nonetheless, China nowadays brandishes Resolution 2758 to limit any access by Taiwan to the UN and related organizations (Drun and Glaser 2022).

Five years later, Canada refused admission to Taiwanese athletes seeking to compete in the 1976 Olympics in Montreal (Macintosh, Greenhorn, and Hawes 1991). The sticking point was that their government wanted to participate as China and carry the ROC flag. Although Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's decision annoyed the US and the International Olympic Committee, it enabled China to join the Olympics and, ultimately, Taiwan to participate as "Chinese Taipei" in Los Angeles in 1984. Trudeau Sr. thus launched a new era of official diplomatic relations with China combined with flexibility on Taiwan. It was no longer possible for the government in Taipei to claim to represent China. ROC authorities had to get used to the fact that they ruled only Taiwan and could only represent Taiwan.

## Canada-Taiwan relations in the One China context

Under the new framework, Canada and Taiwan expanded economic and social relations. After closing the ROC embassy in Canada, Taiwan opened the China External Trade Development Council in Montreal and a General Chamber of Commerce in Toronto in 1979 with approval from Prime Minister Joe Clark (Hulmes 2011, 44). When Prime Minister Brian Mulroney decided to improve Canada-Taiwan trade, Canada in 1986 opened the representative office that became the Canadian Trade Office in Taipei (CTOT). After opening offices in Toronto and Vancouver, Taiwan established the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) in Ottawa in 1993. Both CTOT and TECO are staffed by professional diplomats and carry out the functions of an embassy.

Members of Canada's Parliament, who established the Canada-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Group in 1982, continued to visit Taiwan, as they had done since 1974 (Hulmes 2011). Canadian parliamentarians raised concern in

1990 when Taiwanese-Canadian Y-S Columbus Leo was detained and charged with sedition for advocating Taiwan's independence from the ROC (Blaikie 2011, 122). Beginning in 1992, when Taiwan began holding legislative elections, shared democratic values could only deepen the relationship between lawmakers in the two countries. Annual National Day and Taiwan Night banquets in Ottawa, attended by parliamentarians and community members, became public affirmations of Canada-Taiwan relations. All of these activities happened below the threshold of formal diplomatic relations between states, with a pragmatic focus instead of trade and people-to-people ties.

In the 1990s, Canada tried to balance trade and other relations with both sides. Although the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre initially seemed to weaken Beijing's global standing, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien took the first Team Canada Mission to China in 1994. There were also less-publicized trade missions to Taiwan that took place without the prime minister.



*Taiwan only started to regain prominence in Canadian policy circles after 2018.*

The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995 and 1996 tested Canada's commitment to Taiwan. As a response to Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui's visit to speak at his alma mater, Cornell University, China mobilized troops in Fujian and carried out military exercises. In the run-up to Taiwan's first democratic presidential election in 1996, China tried to dissuade the Taiwanese from voting for Lee (the KMT candidate) by conducting missile tests in the waters just outside of Taiwan's main ports. The aggression only increased support for Lee, who won the election with 54 percent of the vote, compared to China's preferred independent candidate Lin Yang-kang, who got 15 percent. Moreover, the openly pro-independence candidate Peng Ming-min got an additional 21 percent of the vote for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

As the US Navy deployed to the region, Canadian parliamentarians of all parties expressed support for Taiwan and the government tried a diplomatic approach to resolve the crisis. Minister of Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy initiated discussions with the Chinese ambassador to encourage peace and rule of law, and offered Canadian help to find an international resolution. Axworthy described the situation frankly in Question Period as "tensions between the Government of China and the Government of Taiwan" (Canada 1996). Parliamentarians congratulated Lee for his election. Axworthy notably visited Taiwan after leaving office and met with President Chen Shui-bian of the DPP, who was elected in 2000. In a Taipei lecture, Axworthy explained his concept

of human security, as “an alternative way of seeing the world, taking people as the point of reference, rather than focusing exclusively on the security of territory or governments” (Chu 2002). The Liberal agenda of a “responsibility to protect” clearly includes the people of Taiwan.

During the administration of President Chen Shui-bian (DPP, 2000-2008), Taiwan’s attempts to upgrade the bilateral relationship were often unsuccessful. Canada denied visas to high-ranking Taiwanese officials and a transit stop to President Chen on his way to Panama. Canada refused to consider a proposed Canada-Taiwan Judicial Cooperation Agreement on the grounds that Canada does not recognize Taiwan as a state and can thus not negotiate a binding agreement. This does not mean that Canada accepted the PRC claim to Taiwan, however. In 2005, when the PRC passed an “Anti-Secession Law” codifying the option of non-peaceful means, Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew issued a statement opposing “unilateral action by either side to change Taiwan’s status.” Calling for mutual understand and reduced tensions, he spoke in favour of maintaining the status quo (Canada 2005).

There was one attempt to legislate Canada-Taiwan relations. While in opposition, Conservative MP Jim Abbott in 2005 tabled a *Taiwan Affairs Act*, which gained the support of around 150 MPs from all parties and would have permitted Canada to treat Taiwan as a state in Canadian law. This Act was not completed before Parliament dissolved, nor reconsidered during the subsequent Conservative government (Hulmes 2011, 60). As we will see below, Taiwan only started to regain prominence in Canadian policy circles after 2018.

## Contemporary Canada-Taiwan relations

Political scientist Paul Evans (1990) argued that the future of the Canada-Taiwan relationship will be shaped by 1) Taiwan’s economy, 2) Taiwan’s polity, 3) cross-strait relations, and 4) Canadian domestic politics. These have all evolved greatly in the subsequent three decades, making it all the more urgent that Canada develop its own Taiwan strategy based on its own interests and values.

### Taiwan’s economy

The UK Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) ranks Taiwan as the world’s 21st largest economy. Despite COVID-19, Taiwan’s economy grew 3.1 percent in 2020 and 5.9 percent in 2021. In 2021, Taiwan’s purchasing power parity (PPP) adjusted GDP per capita reached US\$59,398, surpassing Germany and making Taiwan one of the world’s wealthiest countries (CEBR

2021, 209). The Heritage Foundation (2022) gave Taiwan an economic freedom score of 80.1, sixth in the world.

In 2020, Taiwan was Canada's 15th largest trading partner; and sixth among Asian countries (Chiang 2022). In 2021, Canada exported more than \$2.4 billion worth of goods and services to Taiwan, led by mineral products, vehicles and equipment, and base metal products. Canada's imports from Taiwan totalled nearly \$8 billion and were led by machinery, mechanical and electronic equipment, and base metal products (Canada 2022a). Taiwan also provides Canada with IT, communication tools, and semi-conductor chips. There are important foreign direct investment projects in both directions, but there is room for improvement (Stephens 2022). Trade and investment relations are likely to benefit both sides if Taiwan joins the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and if the two countries negotiate a bilateral trade agreement.

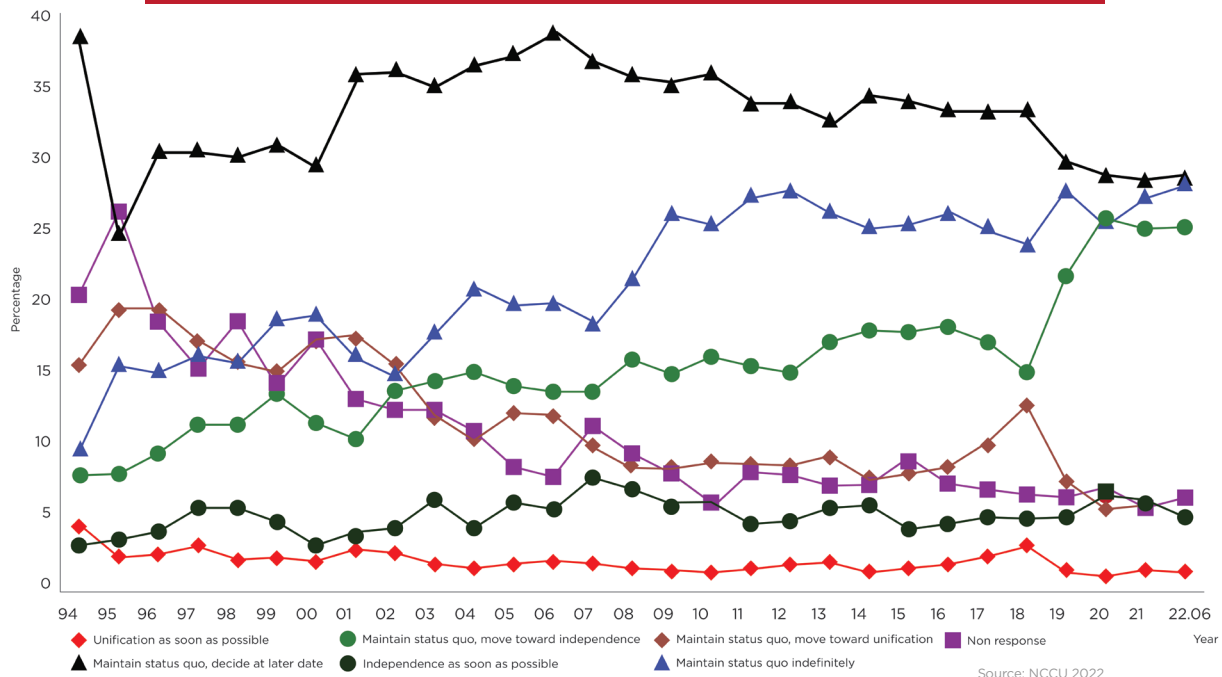
## Taiwan's polity

Taiwan's has seen one of the world's most dramatic transitions to democracy. After ending martial law, Taiwan began direct legislative elections in 1992 and presidential elections in 1996. Taiwan has thrice managed peaceful transitions between the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT or Kuomintang) and DPP presidencies. President Tsai Ing-wen (DPP) is a woman, as are 41.6 percent of legislators, ranking Taiwan first in Asia and 18th in the world in its percentage of women legislators (ROC 2022a, 5). Taiwan and Canada share many progressive public policies. Taiwan is the only country in Asia to recognize same-sex marriage, and is also working on truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Democracy has allowed the people of Taiwan to remake the ROC in their own image. The state no longer seeks jurisdiction over China. Surveys show that only 1.3 percent of Taiwanese want unification as soon as possible and only 5.2 percent want independence as soon as possible (Figure 1), with nearly everyone in favour of some version of the status quo (NCCU 2022), which means that Taiwan is not under the jurisdiction of the PRC.

Since 1945, many Taiwanese (including hard-liners in the DPP today) have advocated formal independence from the ROC and the establishment of a new Republic of Taiwan. This made sense when the ROC kept Taiwan under martial law, excluded the people of Taiwan from political power, and insisted that the ROC represents all of China. Since democratization, however, most Taiwanese have come to accept that the ROC and Taiwan have merged and that the ROC has no legitimate claim to China. President Tsai and the DPP now advocate that the ROC is an independent state and has no need to declare independence.

**FIGURE 1: CHANGES IN THE UNIFICATION - INDEPENDENCE STANCES OF TAIWANESE IN SURVEYS BY ELECTION STUDY CENTER, NCCU**



Majority support for the status quo means that most Taiwanese people have embraced this pragmatic stance. They know that a unilateral declaration of independence would unnecessarily provoke China. At the same time, the Taiwanese remember the arrival of the ROC in 1945 for its violent repression. None of the inhabitants of Taiwan wish to suffer conquest and repression from China.

Elections still partially reflect conflicting nationalist imaginations, as the DPP promotes Taiwanese nationalism and most of the KMT endorses a pan-Chinese identity, with both sides claiming to protect the interests of a sovereign state. In 2020, although Tsai and her DPP enjoyed a landslide victory, Chinese nationalist Han Kuo-yu (KMT) received 39 percent of the general vote and over 70 percent in Indigenous-majority districts (Simon forthcoming). The status quo remains, not only because of external pressure, but also because of contested nationalist imaginations within Taiwan (Simon 2003). No government in Taipei could afford to move either towards formal independence or talks with China about unification without grassroots resistance from either die-hard Chinese nationalists or radical Taiwan independence supporters.

Tsai has created an awkward consensus among most of the population by embracing a hybrid Taiwan (ROC) and stressing that it is already an independent, sovereign country. Surveys show that, despite their political differences, 75.3 percent of Taiwanese think that democracy is the best political system and 72.5 percent would fight for Taiwan if China invaded (Taiwan Foundation for Democracy 2021).



The main problem is that China is not willing to wait for the people of Taiwan to settle their own differences, can only accept one outcome, and has demonstrated the ability to use non-peaceful means to impose their will.

## Cross-strait relations

Economic relations between China and Taiwan have been strong for decades. From January to April 2022, the value of cross-strait trade was US\$71.2 billion, up 14.4 percent from the previous year. Exports to China accounted for 26.2 percent of Taiwan's total exports; and imports from China were 20.1 percent of its total imports. Since 1991, 54.1 percent of Taiwan's total outbound investment has gone to China (ROC 2022b, 1-15 – 1-16). Historically, Taiwanese foreign direct investment played an important role in China's development and export success (World Bank 2010). These ties are accompanied by large numbers of Taiwanese businesspeople establishing residence in China and intermarriage between the two sides. Between 2008 and 2015, talks between Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation and China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits led to 23 formal agreements.

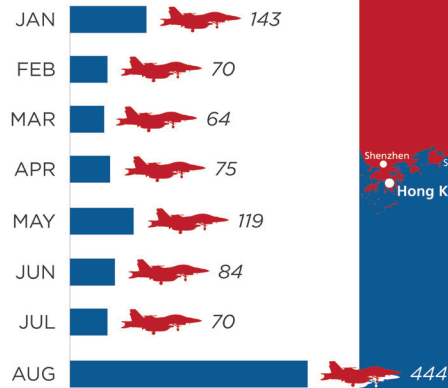
Since Tsai was elected in 2016, Taiwan has sought to uphold existing cross-strait agreements, but China has suspended new negotiations. China's trend toward non-compliance with cross-strait agreements, combined with other forms of threats and aggression, including in Hong Kong, reveal China's disdain for international rule of law (Chen and Cohen 2019). China initiated military aircraft crossings of the median line in August 2020 during a visit by the US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar. Although the jets leave when intercepted, these actions are a sign of China's hostile intentions.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, China only increased its aggressive posture toward Taiwan, both at sea and in the air (Simon 2020). On June 13, 2022, China's Foreign Ministry reiterated its position that the Taiwan Strait is not international waters (China 2022). In the first half of 2022, warplanes from China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) made 555 violations of Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) (Brown 2022). In August 2022, saying it was a response to US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit, China conducted unprecedented military exercises surrounding Taiwan on all sides with naval and aerial forces, shooting missiles over the island, and even launching missiles into Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). China initially announced that exercises would end on August 7, but extended them indefinitely on August 8. Since then, PLA military jets have crossed the median line on a daily basis (Figure 2). This all proves Japan's warning in the 2022 *Defence White Paper* that the threats are urgent and present globally shared challenges (Japan 2022).

**FIGURE 2: CHINA MAINLAND MILITARY JETS OVER TAIWAN'S AIR DEFENCE IDENTIFICATION ZONE**

1069 Chinese warplanes and helicopters have made incursions since January 1, 2022

Daily Counts



Source:  
Data used is from Brown 2022



China's goal seems to be the elimination of the median line as a military boundary. China's unilateral military posturing has brought cross-strait relations to a historical low point. China's actions undermine the arguments made, in Taiwan and internationally, that increased trade will inevitably lead to peace. It would be naïve to pursue business as usual now that China has violated the terms that have maintained peace since the 1950s. China repeated its threats following its August 10 release of a White Paper on Taiwan. Even if China does not attempt a full-scale invasion and occupation of Taiwan in the near future, its intentions are clear and must be taken very seriously in any policy regarding China or Taiwan.

## Domestic politics in Canada

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Liberals have had successive minority governments since 2019. Judging from parliamentary discussions and speeches at Taiwan events in Ottawa, there is broad consensus across all parties in favour of deepening Canada-Taiwan relations and concern about China's threats. In 2019, in reaction to China's arbitrary detention of two prominent Canadians, the House of Commons established a Special Committee on Canada-China Relations. This was revived in 2022 with the support of all but the Liberal Party. At the end of a day-long debate, Liberal MP Ken McDonald focused on Taiwan as he explained the Liberal position. He argued that the issues, including the Taiwan Strait, are already discussed in existing committees. He said, "We remain committed to advancing our interests with Taiwan within the framework of Canada's long-standing policy" (Canada 2022b, 5252).

Canada-Taiwan relations have indeed deepened in the past few years. In 2014, Canada and Taiwan signed a memorandum of understanding on money laundering and terrorist financing. In 2016, CTOT and TECO signed an agreement for the avoidance of double taxation. In January 2022, Global Affairs Canada announced that Canada and Taiwan will begin discussions on a foreign investment promotion and protection agreement (Canada 2022c). Canada also signed the Indigenous Peoples Economic and Trade Cooperation Arrangement (IPETCA) with Australia, New Zealand, and Chinese Taipei (Canada 2022d). These agreements, based on the economies being members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, deepen Canada-Taiwan economic relations.

Canada has not remained silent about Taiwan's security predicament. In the 2022 G7 leaders' communiqué, Canada and its closest allies reiterated a shared desire for peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait (Canada 2022e). Since 2018, Royal Canadian Navy vessels have transited the Taiwan Strait at least once annually as part of operations designed to enforce UN Security Council sanctions on North Korea. Canada considers the Taiwan Strait to be international waters (Canada 2021).

China's repression of Hong Kong, internment camps for Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities, and the arbitrary detention of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor have made the threats visible to all. Justin Trudeau even marked the 50th anniversary of Canada-China relations – one of his father's greatest achievements – by calling out China for coercive diplomacy. “We are going to continue to work with our fellow, like-minded nations around the world to impress upon China that its approach to internal affairs and global affairs is not on a particularly productive path for itself or for all of us,” he said (Fife and Chase 2020). Trudeau has clearly inherited his father's vision despite the fact that the unilateral escalation of China's threats makes it even more challenging to engage with China without denying support to Taiwan and the rights of the Taiwanese people to self-determination.

On February 14, 2022, Weldon Epp, Director General of North Asia at Global Affairs, summarized Canada's ties with Taiwan under the One China policy. By repeating that Canada does not endorse or challenge China's claim to Taiwan, he declared that this foundation of flexible relations with Taiwan is unchanged. He restated Canada's support for Taiwan's effective participation in international organizations and concerns about Chinese military aggression. He argued that “Canadian engagement with Taiwan is multi-faceted and has, on its own merits, an important role to play in advancing Canadian interests. The value to our two societies goes beyond the cross-strait security question” (Canada 2022f).

Taiwan has been a reliable partner for Canada. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when both China and the US were hoarding personal

protective equipment (PPE), Taiwan donated masks to Canada, ensuring that First Nations communities received supplies (Rosen 2020). Canada-Taiwan relations seem closer today than ever before. Within this context, Canada continues to seek pragmatic arrangements that are mindful of the rights of Taiwanese people, including those of the island's 580,000 Indigenous people.

## Conclusion

A Taiwan strategy is vital to Canadian interests, but faces two constraints. The first is the effective political reality of Taiwan. Taiwan's sovereignty manifests itself when, for example, Taiwanese passports are accepted around the world or the New Taiwanese dollar is converted into other currencies. Since Taiwan's state institutions are independent of China, all countries must negotiate agreements with Taiwanese state actors. China itself has pragmatically signed agreements with Taiwan resembling international treaties. Even cross-strait exchanges emphasize Taiwan's sovereignty through border controls and immigration policies (Friedman 2015). This undeniable reality is why Canada cannot endorse China's position.

The second constraint is China's intransigence. The world has long assumed that China's participation in international organizations fosters peace. Of course Canada must nurture relations with China, through commerce and multilateral cooperation, precisely to reassure China that peace best serves their own interests. The goal is not to escalate tensions with China but to prevent war in the first place. Ominously, however, China appears increasingly willing to use military coercion, even against Canada. In May 2022, the People's Liberation Army's Air Force interactions forced Canadian military aircraft on a UN mission in international airspace to divert from their planned flight path in ways that compromised crew safety several times (Canada 2022g). There is a risk that, if the international community does not demonstrate the will and capacity to maintain stability, China could continue to employ non-peaceful means to assert control over Taiwan. Canada may need to remind China that the policy of not challenging it on Taiwan is based on the condition of peace. China's military threats require a global response. Now more than ever the international community needs to continue normal diplomatic, trade, and other relations with Taiwan to demonstrate to China that the world does not accept its strong-arm tactics.

China's revanchism demands that Canada update its Taiwan strategy. A modest start would be what foreign policy specialists call "Track II diplomacy": unofficial discussions among government officials, former diplomats, academics, and think tanks. Canada could gain new perspectives by holding direct discussions with counterparts in or from Taiwan and other stakeholders (e.g.,

Japan, US, ASEAN, the EU, or Commonwealth states). Parliament can enhance its role, perhaps even by following Japan's example of a party-to-party Taiwan security dialogue. New Canadian legislation may be warranted. If China continues to follow the path of aggression, it may become too costly or too risky for Canada to abstain from challenging China. Situations could develop in which international recognition of Taiwan becomes the best strategy to deter war, and Canada could again lead the way. These issues need to be discussed among Canadians, in both government and among the wider public. Moreover, Canadian businesses and citizens involved on both sides of the Taiwan Strait need a government prepared for various contingencies.

Within its own "One China" framework Canada already supports Taiwan's accession to international organizations. As both are World Trade Organization (WTO) and APEC economies, Canada can advance a bilateral trade agreement with Taiwan and support its accession to the CPTPP. It is pragmatic to prioritize areas where there are clear benefits to Canada, such as securing supply chains, or where Taiwan offers useful expertise, such as Indigenous rights or health care. Since even limited recognition of the ROC is useful, Canada can encourage states that still have relations with the ROC to maintain them. Canada and Taiwan can collaborate even more with these countries, for example, on joint economic development initiatives or disaster relief in Haiti or in Oceania. Its allies also appreciate Canada's military presence in the Indo-Pacific, but more can be done (Lerhe 2018).

China is the only aggressive state of the two bordering the Taiwan Strait, which is why the G7 ministers, in a statement against China's military exercises, have called on China to not unilaterally change the status quo (Canada 2022h). Canada has always maintained that peace and rule of law in the Taiwan Strait is an international concern. A practical recognition of Taiwan's existence combined with the hope that the people of Taiwan will someday exercise their right to self-determination has always been the cornerstone of Canada-Taiwan relations. A renewed Taiwan strategy as part of a larger Indo-Pacific plan is necessary to maintain the peace and prosperity that we have enjoyed for the past seven decades and hope to bequeath to future generations.



## About the author



**Scott Simon** (Ph.D., Anthropology, McGill University, 1998) is Full Professor in the School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies, holder of the Research Chair of Taiwan Studies, and member of both the Centre for International Policy Studies and the Human Rights Research and Education Centre at the University of Ottawa. With an undergraduate background in both East Asian Studies and

Germanic Studies, he has lived, studied, worked and done research in Taiwan, Japan, China, Germany, and France. His first long-term research project in Taiwan (1996-1998) was about the formation of Taiwanese national identity amidst Taiwan's rapid post-war industrialization. He has done ethnographic field research in Seediq and Truku indigenous communities of Taiwan since 2004, including over two years of residence in indigenous communities. He also did one year of research in Japan in 2017-18, while working at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka. In 2020, he was a visiting scholar at the University of Guam, where he did research with the Chamoru people.

Simon is author of three books about Taiwan (and one in press at the University of Toronto), among numerous other academic publications. His main academic interests are human rights, indigenous-state relations and the socio-anthropology of politics (including international relations). His current SSHRC-funded research project "Austronesian Worlds: Human-Animal Relations in the Pacific Anthropocene," looks at how indigenous peoples in the Western Pacific affirm local sovereignty and multi-species entanglements amidst ecological threats including militarization. Based on an intellectual interest in self-determination and sovereignty as fundamental human rights, he has also written about Taiwan's journey towards self-determination, Chinese threats to popular sovereignty in Taiwan and elsewhere, the security of the Indo-Pacific, and how Canada and other states can enhance relations with Taiwan.

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## Endnotes

- 1 The PRC goal was to reclaim all of the territory gained during the vast territorial expansion that happened during the Manchurian-led Qing Dynasty (1644-1991), especially westward to Tibet and Muslim territory, the latter of which the Qing claimed as the Chinese province of Xinjiang (meaning “new frontier”) in 1884. The Qing had also gained full jurisdiction over half of Formosa, and designated all of Taiwan as a province in 1887. Here I say the PRC was ruling over “most” of Qing territory, not because of Taiwan, but because in 1952, the PRC had not yet fully consolidated its rule in Tibet and Xinjiang. They accepted that Outer Mongolia was lost for good due to Soviet influence. The PRC could also have legitimately foregone Taiwan. In 1952, what was probably most unacceptable to the PRC was that their nemesis Chiang Kai-shek was on Taiwan and still had international recognition as China’s government.

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### 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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

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