

Université d'Ottawa
CĒPI
Centre d'études
**EN POLITIQUES
INTERNATIONALES**



University of Ottawa
CIPS
Centre for
**INTERNATIONAL
POLICY STUDIES**

CIPS POLICY REPORT

**Australia and Canada in the Indo-Pacific:
Middle Power Allies Should Coordinate
Strategies**

John Garrick and Margaret McCuaig-Johnston

January 2023

The Potential for Coordinated Indo-Pacific Strategies for Australian and Canadian Engagement

No Indo-Pacific country is closer to Canada in character and nature than Australia. Few countries are better suited in the Indo-Pacific region to collaborate and complement one another's strengths. A high degree of trust is already built-in after many years as ['Five-Eyes'](#) intelligence partners. Perhaps these factors explain why Australia was the first destination of the Executive Director tasked, at Global Affairs Canada in November 2019, with developing the country's first Indo-Pacific Strategy.

That [Strategy was released](#) after three years in consultation and development on November 27, 2022 to strong positive acclaim. Its strategic objectives are interconnected, notably to promote peace, resilience and security; expand trade, investment and supply chain resilience; invest in and connect people; build a sustainable and green future; and be an active and engaged partner in the Indo-Pacific. The Strategy also describes ways in which Canada has been engaging, and will continue to engage, constructively with other countries in the region including Japan, South Korea, India and [ASEAN nations](#).

A most remarked upon feature of the Strategy is its very different assessment of the role of China than previously seen in the actions of the Trudeau Government. The Strategy by its own admission offers a 'clear-eyed' analysis of China declaring it "an increasingly disruptive global power." Canada's strategic approach is aligned with those of its partners in the region and around the world and decries China's disregard of the same international rules that enabled its rise. The Strategy recognises that China's efforts to re-shape the international order are "for interests and values that increasingly depart from ours", citing the PRC's militarization of the region, coercive diplomacy, non-market trade practices such as forced labour, efforts to block an investigation of the situation of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, and arbitrary application of Chinese laws. Canada's approach to China is now inseparable from its Indo-Pacific Strategy. For many Canadians (and others) this assessment is refreshing and has been warmly welcomed, as the government once appeared as if it were walking on eggshells on China-related issues.

The Strategy was accompanied by a detailed package of initiatives with attached resources totalling \$2.3B. Some analysts saw this connected funding as adding real

action to the Strategy. One major initiative for sustainable infrastructure is funded over three years, with the other initiatives over five years. These include funding for defence, public safety, security partnerships and capacity-building, cybersecurity, a new Canadian Trade Gateway, trade missions, export and investment, agriculture diversification, labour assistance and compliance, expanding natural resource ties, innovation partnerships, standardization engagement, new trade and investment agreements (not yet costed), education programs, connecting citizen groups, feminist initiatives, tourism, ocean management, disaster risk and resilience, clean technologies, capacity-building related to the region, and targeted organisation funding. [Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mélanie Joly](#), has called the \$2.3B commitment a ‘down payment’ on a bigger ten-year commitment to the region. Indo-Pacific nations can expect to see Canadians much more often in a contributing, engaged capacity.

We see in the Strategy that Australia is a key ally and partner, and one with which Canada can work closely in areas such as technological development and security, marine management, economic empowerment and reconciliation of indigenous peoples (including the promotion of ‘green outcomes’), and supply chain resilience. With the release of Canada’s comprehensive Strategy, it is timely to identify how the two countries can work even more closely together. [Global Affairs Canada](#) reports that “Canada and Australia enjoy strong and multifaceted bilateral relations.” Indeed, Canada and Australia regularly consult with each other to advance common interests on international issues based on their policy convergence in key areas such as defence and security, trade (\$4.5B two-way), investment (\$63.9B two-way), economic growth, illegal migration, counterterrorism, counter-proliferation, social – including Indigenous peoples, transportation, and regional issues. Canada’s defence relationship with Australia is its largest in the Asia-Pacific region.

Both nations are advanced middle powers with long Pacific coastal features, known for constructive engagement in multilateral fora and known to provide mutual support to each other in economic and diplomatic fields – in both good times and times of adversity. Indeed, both have in recent years felt the harsh brunt of China’s trade and arbitrary detention [coercion](#) in retaliation for various unrelated perceived slights. In addition, both countries have been adversely affected by China’s [predatory business practices](#). In Canada’s case, [this is one of the reasons](#) why steps have been taken under the rubric of the Strategy to help companies

diversify away from China to other countries in the region. This approach was also undertaken to reduce and help manage risk exposure to China-related business. For example, Canada's former Ambassador to China, [Dominic Barton](#), identified the need for such diversification to protect Canadian businesses. Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy is clear on the need for retaining trade with China while opening new trade and investment opportunities in other countries in the region.

In developing its own strategy, Canada has not had a formal Australian strategy to use as a framework or guide. Australia has been engaging on many levels and dimensions in the Indo-Pacific but without the kind of strategy that other nations, and the European Union, have in place. Australia *has* had parts of policies and ministerial statements, including a [2017 Foreign Policy White Paper](#), which has a short section referring to the [Indo-Pacific](#), a [2020 Defence Strategic Update](#), and various ministerial [announcements](#) and [press releases](#). Some relevant initiatives of significance include the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue involving the US, Japan and India (the Quad), the [AUKUS Pact](#), [Prime Minister Albanese's Statement](#) at the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, and membership in the [Pacific Islands Forum](#). A particular focus for Australia *is* the Pacific Islands region, which forms an important part of its neighbourhood. Soon after Prime Minister Albanese came to power in 2022, he announced a "[Defence Strategic Review](#)" to help better understand where Defence should prioritise investment and ensure "the Australian Defence Force is well positioned to meet the nation's security challenges through to 2033 and beyond." The Review and its recommendations are expected to be delivered to the Government in early 2023. However, the Review's findings can only help to *inform* strategy, not represent a comprehensive whole-of-government Strategy.

In a 2022 article in *The Conversation Global*, we [proposed](#) that both countries would benefit by implementing comprehensive, coherent and detailed strategies to guide their relations with other nations and regional multilateral fora. This would be more than simply a framing of strategy by ministerial speeches on how the country is already dealing with other nations. This is what occurred with the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs' speech in 2020 using keywords such as "[challenge, compete, cooperate, coexist](#)" to describe Canada's relations with China. But keywords and taglines do not answer strategic questions such as:

- in which sectors?
- with what level of priority?

- how?
- with whom? and
- what resources are you prepared to allocate to each?

Nor do they help in making the vital strategic decisions going forward or identifying how other nations can most constructively engage. That is precisely what the comprehensive Canadian Indo-Pacific Strategy facilitates.

Australia's 2020 Defence Strategic Update similarly provided a policy-level "intent statement" presented through a rubric of "[shape, deter, respond](#)". However, this does not go far enough to articulate *how* Australia may do this (i.e. the domain of strategy). For example, which countries/regions are high, mid and low priorities? How is 'engagement' best conducted (and by whom)? What funding and resources are to be allocated? Such questions are more than reasonable given the limited resources that can be apportioned across the region. Good, co-ordinated Australian and Canadian strategy would need to establish, for example:

- How best to co-ordinate and deploy expertise and resources?
- How to assess the risks/dangers of nations moving under China's orbit of influence?
- Where may military/security partnering be required?
- Which areas may need economic incentives to be assigned?
- Which areas may require more considered applications of 'soft power' to help, encourage, shape and persuade? Quiet, back-room diplomacy should never be underrated!

At the same time, economically impoverished nations are becoming adept at playing the "China card" to attract western attention and subsequent funding and support. For example, island states of the Pacific – from the larger Papua New Guinea to the smaller island state of Tuvalu – now find themselves in influential positions as the west and China seek their strategic backing.

[Timor-Leste](#) is another example of a small nation finding itself with a new negotiating strength by playing the China card, illustrated in plans to develop [natural gas deposits](#) in seas within Timor-Leste's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The China card gives them more power to attract much-needed foreign investment and international aid to tackle problems. China is a willing and skilful player in this game having dramatically expanded its presence in the Pacific Islands over the past

10-15 years, an indication that it has a “long game” plan for the region.¹ This growing presence contributes to an emerging dynamic in Australia’s Pacific approach: playing ‘[whack-a-mole](#)’ by seeking to counter directly individual Chinese moves through economic statecraft. For example, Australian-owned telecommunications giant ‘[Telstra](#)’ recently purchased ‘[Digicel Pacific](#)’, headquartered in PNG. Some [analysts](#) saw this purchase as an attempt to shut Chinese telecommunications out of the Pacific Islands region. China countered this move through its security agreement with the Solomon Islands, which subsequently [borrowed heavily from Beijing](#) to construct Huawei mobile phone towers across its main islands.

The Canadian Indo-Pacific Strategy is a prime example of the type of comprehensive policy that its citizens, and Indo-Pacific countries more generally, had hoped for and deserve. Prime Minister Trudeau now demonstrates through a comprehensive strategy that Canada understands and embraces the full potential of the role it can play in the region by contributing to the wellbeing of individual nations and its multilateral fora. Prime Minister Albanese could, for instance, use such a comprehensive Indo-Pacific Strategy to demonstrate his own government’s more concrete policies compared to his predecessors. When Prime Ministers Albanese and Trudeau [spoke in May 2022](#), they “agreed to advance common objectives in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in working with partners and allies to promote security and uphold democratic values... and to work together to advance shared priorities”. That was an important start for aligning policy and initiatives in the region. When they met again on September 18 on the margins of the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II, they reiterated that commitment, and [more specifically addressed](#) the need to uphold the rules-based international order, combat climate change, cooperate on the global supply of critical minerals, advance gender equality, achieve meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, and secure economic growth that benefits everyone. These shared commitments identify priority areas for both countries to be developed across the region in the coming years.

As middle powers, Australia and Canada have together and separately had recent serious lessons in contemporary geopolitics. Both need to adapt quickly to the new

¹ Rush Doshi’s “The Long Game” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021) describes the tactics that China is using to advance day by day its 1949 target of displacing the U.S. as the dominant economic and geopolitical superpower.

realities of strategic power competition across the Indo-Pacific and step-up support to Pacific Island nations. From an Australian perspective, an inclusive Canadian engagement through its Indo-Pacific Strategy is most welcome as a like-minded ally and partner. Co-operation, shared intelligence and technical expertise, and collaboration around deepening economic and sustainable development partnerships across the Indo-Pacific is needed while upholding democratic values and human rights.

Five Strategic Areas of Focus for Australia and Canada in the Indo-Pacific Region

Here we recommend five interrelated prongs to Indo-Pacific strategy which, if well-developed and implemented, should help Canadian and Australian policy frameworks to optimal effectiveness.

First, extend diplomatic ties – Canada can widen its circle of partners to help counter-balance China’s aggressive outward expansion, not only in the Asia-Pacific, but deeper into the Pacific Islands and beyond. China’s trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has evolved into a global operation used to bolster China’s authoritarian governance model and extend its military reach. The EU, US, UK, Canada, and Australia have been calling for common Western strategies to respond to China’s use of trade coercion and hostage diplomacy for some time. A new integrated approach to the Indo-Pacific region can help diversify Canada’s engagement and deepen diplomatic partnerships, signalling to traditional allies that Canada is more closely aligning with them. Widening partners includes connecting with France’s deep interests in the South Pacific with territories, including New Caledonia, sharing extensive EEZ sea-boundaries with the Solomon Islands. Canada’s deep links with France, and vice versa, may be valuable in how a new era diplomacy – that seriously tunes in to the needs of the Pacific Islands – can better engage across the Indo-Pacific.

Furthermore, Canada and Australia should see themselves not only as members of coalitions of like-minded middle powers, but also as aligned with a broad range of allies that share common interests such as India, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia among others. A vital element of effective diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific will be how well the middle power allies are co-

ordinated and how their strategies connect to the interests of their more powerful strategic partners. Herein lies the most critical challenge of all: how the US-China relationship develops from this point, and how Australia and Canada position themselves in relation to the [era of great power competition](#). It is outside our remit in this paper to explore each country's detailed strategy options in [the US-China dynamic](#), but this dynamic will, of course, profoundly affect how Australia and Canada liaise and engage with each other and the Indo-Pacific nations more generally.

[Washington's interest](#) in the Pacific Islands has undoubtedly been piqued over 2022 due to China's expansionist policies. In May 2022, the US unsuccessfully [proposed a trade and security agreement](#) to ten Pacific island nations. On September 28-29, 2022, however, President Biden hosted fourteen Pacific leaders² at the White House for the first US-Pacific Island Country Summit, and was able to get all on board with a [Joint Declaration](#) despite [initial reticence by the Solomon Islands](#). Commitments to act in partnership on the climate crisis, economic growth, sustainable development, disaster response, good governance, health and pandemics, peace, security, and nuclear non-proliferation are also common objectives of Canada and Australia, which can collaborate with these Pacific countries to improve their opportunities and bolster their region.

The Joint Declaration follows a 2021 US Congressional bill, *Boosting Long-term U.S. Engagement in the Pacific Act or the [BLUE Pacific Act](#)*. The *Blue Pacific Act* authorises activities related to US foreign policy in the Pacific Islands, including the Cook Islands, Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu and is designed to address the needs of the region and shore-up the geopolitical

² Prime Minister Mark Brown of Cook Islands
Prime Minister Josai Voreqe Bainimarama of the Republic of Fiji
President David W. Panuelo of the Federated States of Micronesia
President Edouard Fritch of the Government of French Polynesia
Charge d'Affaires Josie-Ann Dongobir of the Republic of Nauru
President Louis Mapou of the Government of New Caledonia
President Surangel S. Whipps, Jr. of the Republic of Palau
Prime Minister James Marape of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea
President David Kabua of the Republic of the Marshall Islands
Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa of the Independent State of Samoa
Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare of Solomon Islands
Prime Minister Siaosi 'Ofakivahafolau Sovaleni of the Kingdom of Tonga
Prime Minister Kausea Natano of Tuvalu
Ambassador Odo Tevi of the Republic of Vanuatu

interests of the US and its Pacific allies, including Australia. Canada has already [signed on](#) to the Blue Pacific initiative. USAID has also released its 2022-2027 [Strategic Framework](#), which “envisions a more resilient region that can better respond and adapt to climate and disaster impacts, pandemics, and economic shocks, with strong political systems that champion democratic values, good governance, human rights, and promote equity and inclusion for all Pacific Islanders.” To do this, USAID aims to partner with key regional organisations, Pacific governments, civil society, and the private sector to strengthen overall resilience and accelerate the development progress of the Pacific Island countries (PICs). In short, the US is mobilising resources to restore itself rapidly in the region as it challenges “authoritarian actors” who challenge the region’s stability and democratic systems. If they are to be optimally effective, Australian and Canadian Indo-Pacific strategies will need to be linked effectively with US initiatives.

Second, broaden and diversify economic relations – Rather than being so heavily focused on China, with the business risks mentioned above, it makes good sense for Canada and Australia to diversify their market connections proactively by developing deeper linkages with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia, and India among others. As a first step, Canada is [actively pursuing](#) its stated ambition by applying, with U.S. support, to become part of the new [Indo-Pacific Economic Framework \(IPEF\)](#) announced on 23 May, 2022 by US President Biden. Prime Minister Trudeau had [previously referred to the IPEF](#) as a “compromise framework” by the Biden administration for the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). The CPTPP is a free trade agreement among Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, New Zealand, Singapore, and Vietnam signed on 8 March 2018 in Chile, but the US had already withdrawn from its predecessor TPP. In addition, the CPTPP and the IPEF are not the same type of agreement, as the IPEF is a “standards-setting framework” rather than a “trade agreement”. As such, it is intended to shape the evolution of *trade rules* as distinct from opening market access.

Professor Stephen Nagy (2022) [argued](#), correctly in our view, that “Canadians should be concerned about its absence from partnerships like the IPEF because it sets up the trade rules in the region, standards of governance and role of governments in economies”. [Founding members](#) include the United States,

Australia, Brunei Darussalam, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam of the Indo-Pacific region. Furthermore, following the May 2022 visit of China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi to meet Pacific Islands foreign ministers, [Fiji also announced](#) it had joined IPEF, making it a founding member. There are tremendous opportunities for increased trade, investment, standards, and research linkages among Canada, Australia and other nations in the region including New Zealand, particularly in climate change research, fish stock management, sustainable timber management, minerals, energy and environmental technologies -- all areas that China is also keenly focussed on accessing.

For both Australia and Canada, developments in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait are primary security concerns. However, enhancing economic relations with Taiwan is also of particular importance to both countries. Although the Australian Government does not formally recognise the [Republic of China](#) (Taiwan) as a sovereign state, Australia does have a substantial relationship with Taiwan encompassing trade and investment, education and tourism. Taiwan was Australia's seventh largest two-way merchandise trading partner in 2021-22, with trade worth A\$32.6 billion and Australia's fifth largest merchandise export market, worth A\$23.1 billion, over the same period. Canada is primed to negotiate with Taiwan a promising foreign investment protection and promotion agreement. In addition, [consultations in Canada](#) with businesses and Canadians regarding the prospect of Taiwan joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership ([CPTPP](#)) were encouraging, with Taiwan second only to Thailand for support. Canada is engaging behind closed doors with other CPTPP members in this regard. Both countries support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organisations such as the International Civil Aviation Organisation ([ICAO](#)) and the World Health Organisation. Collaborative consultations between Canada and Australia in these areas will serve to identify and strengthen areas of engagement with Taiwan.

Third, deepen defence and security partnerships – Canada has long had defence and security engagement with Australia. A case in point is its participation in the biannual multinational air force collaboration “Operation Pitch Black”, which is hosted by Australia and includes joint exercises off its north coast from Darwin. In 2022, for example, [100 aircraft from 17 countries participated](#), including the US, Canada, Indonesia, Singapore, Republic of Korea, Japan and, for the first time,

Germany. Clearly there is increasing international concern about the security and defence of the region.

But Canada does not necessarily need to be a full member of *all* regional defence collaborations, for there are other ways to contribute. For example, Australia is a member of both the Quad and AUKUS, and Canada can usefully contribute to their technology working groups given that their identified priority technologies are strengths of Canadian researchers and engineers – including artificial intelligence, biotechnology, advanced materials, photonics, quantum, and oceans technologies. Indeed, Canada has already offered to contribute to the AUKUS technology development, an offer that has been positively received by Australia. New Zealand too has [expressed interest](#) in contributing to the development of emerging cyber and other technologies in AUKUS, including artificial intelligence and quantum computing, while maintaining its ban on nuclear-powered submarines.

As far back as 1987, the Government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney [announced](#) that it would have a fleet of ten nuclear submarines with an option for two more, and for two years that \$8 billion procurement process moved ahead. The fiscal deficit around 1989 led Finance Minister Michael Wilson at the time to have that decision reversed. However, if Canada is serious about the defence of the Arctic and safeguarding Canadian jurisdiction, this would require nuclear-powered submarines as they can stay under the ice for long distances without refuelling. Australia faces similar [issues with the Antarctic](#), which was one of its reasons for seeking to acquire nuclear powered submarines.

AUKUS submarines will not be launched for some time into the future, and already face [fierce Chinese opposition](#), but in the meantime Canada can certainly determine how it will collaborate with this important defence and security initiative through technology development. Further, as mentioned above, Canada could contribute to the Quad's [technology working group](#) to benefit the current four member countries and itself. Indeed, Canada could become a Quad-Plus member like New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam, to work with that group on critical and emerging technologies such as 5G, diversification of equipment suppliers, standards, biotechnology, and critical technology supply chains.

Australia's defence support is not directed towards large infrastructure investments, although this *is* a primary focus of Chinese interest in the region.

Instead, it aims to build habitual relationships with the Pacific Islands' militaries through training exchanges and embedded officers in each other's systems (for example, the Australia Defence Force and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces). In this way, Australia has built a synergy as *the* security partner of choice. This relationship is well demonstrated when Fiji reaches out to Australia and, on occasion, New Zealand to partner for major training exercises, while excluding PRC participation.

Another immediate concern to Pacific Island countries is the repeated aggressive forays by [illegal fishing fleets](#) depleting stocks. Canada has strengths in satellite monitoring and fisheries management that can work in concert with [US](#) (which provides some Coast Guard enforcement targeting illegal fishing in the region), along with Australian and New Zealand efforts to assist Pacific Island countries. This is a vital element of Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy and one of the funded initiatives.

We've touched on Arctic and Antarctic issues in relation to AUKUS. However, there are other areas of common concern to Canada and Australia, particularly with [China's plans and activities](#) for those regions. Deeper collaboration is entirely appropriate. Although Australia is not a member of the Arctic Council, it has pertinent knowledge to share about the [development of Antarctica](#) from research and the emerging geopolitical stresses there. New Zealand too has an essential [perspective](#) on polar engagement. Scientists are on the frontline of these issues, and there is already tremendous engagement among the scientists of the two Poles. Since June 2022, much of the work of Arctic Council members has [resumed without Russia](#). This is noteworthy as Russia was to be Chair of the Council until June 2023 but was excluded from this role and its engagement with other members due to its war on Ukraine. China's status at the Council is as an "observer". Facing the distinct possibility of China building [military infrastructure](#) in the Arctic "to support shipping and resource development", as reported by the state-owned *Global Times*, Canada and Australia should [mutually recognize](#) each other's territorial claims in the [Arctic](#) and [Antarctic](#) respectively.

NATO is opening-up engagement with other like-minded countries. Australia is an "[enhanced opportunities partner](#)" along with Japan, Korea and New Zealand. How middle-power countries like Australia and Canada, already a NATO member,

respond to regional challenges and contribute to NATO's new "[Strategic Concept](#)" will present new challenges and collaborative opportunities for both countries.

Cyber risk is the most challenging risk to Canadian financial institutions, and the [frequency of attacks](#) of ransomware on companies increased 45% in the past year, often resulting from IT equipment sourced from Chinese companies. Cyber security is a critical area of focus for Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the US as Five Eyes nations. Huge risk exposure across the economies of each country as well as Indo-Pacific partners could crystallize overnight, particularly if cyber is used as a weapon – and a cyber crisis would almost certainly morph into bigger geopolitical crises. There are also issues of tracking the flow of capital such as crypto currencies used in money laundering, a serious issue in Indo-Pacific countries. Yet financial institutions are not typically part of Indo-Pacific Strategies; they must be represented as they collectively constitute the financial backbone of national and international systems. Collective international cyber security agreements will be necessary as these challenges are beyond individual institutions or even individual nations to address. This is a vital area of exchange for Indo-Pacific nations.

Fourth, strengthen international assistance – Canada can make very important contributions to international humanitarian aid and assistance in the region, particularly in key areas where the region's needs include climate change solutions and adaptation, natural disaster responses, and sustainability.

Canada's foreign aid does not come with "tied conditions", in contrast with China's "development loans" to developing nations along its Belt and Road Initiative. Indeed, aid options provided by democratic nations are needed in response to China's new [Global Development Initiative](#) designed to [bring "Chinese solutions"](#) such as surveillance technologies and policing methods to less developed countries.

Generally, Pacific Island countries value relationships over funding, although some may doubt this given recent examples and the sheer scale of economic, environmental, and geopolitical challenges faced. Important Pacific countries like Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and PNG will accept financial support from *any* interested regional "partner", but they are also highly attuned to the "conditions" or "[strings attached to aid](#)", and the transactional fashion in which it is offered. One example of

the type of aid Australia has constructively provided is the [Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme \(PALM\)](#), which represents a strategic investment by the government in countries like Fiji providing mutual benefits that can yield even further benefits years from now that few other countries can match. The relationships forged from these people-to-people (P2P) connections help cement in a generation of Fijians' minds, for example, the genuine partner that Australia, and Australian people are, as part of a broader Pacific “Vuvale” (family).

Another area where Canada can contribute is population health and pandemic collaboration. Australia's [Health Security Initiative for the Indo-Pacific Region](#) is an important partner for Canada in international health sector development with other regional countries. The Australia initiative provided \$300M in funding over five years starting in 2019, and an [additional \\$375M](#) over five years was allocated in 2022. Given the potency of recent pandemics, collaboration with Australia makes good sense for Canada, and brings a constructive Canadian role on an issue of great concern to other nations in the region.

Fifth, protect democratic values and respect for human rights – China's attempts to promote authoritarian governance and to export military technology security systems are significant concerns to Australia and Canada. The 2022 development in the Solomon Islands to engage Chinese security services to support the Solomon Islands' government is controversial, raising red flags for those concerned about how the agreement may unfold for the region in future. Respect for [human rights in the PRC](#) is not its strongest selling point across the region. It is a highly contentious issue within the Solomons—spilling deep into local politics. For instance, in September 2022, the [Solomon Islands' parliament passed legislation to delay the next general election](#), despite objections of the opposition party members who accused Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare of a “power grab”. Australia offered to fund the national elections with Mr Sogavare accepting the offer. Nonetheless, the government voted to delay the timing of the next poll until 2024 on the basis that the country could not host the Pacific Games *and* stage the scheduled elections in the same year (2023). Government [opposition members](#) opposed delaying the election, one [suggesting](#) the Pacific Games should not be the reason “for us to adopt any communist ideas, behaviours and approaches hostile to the way we treat our democratic practices including the voice of the people”. Local political tensions are charged by deep concerns about the directions being taken by the current government.

Other [nearby nations share concerns](#) about whether the directions of the Solomons-China “security agreement” could see an authoritarian turn in Pacific Islands’ governance and consequent diminution of human rights. PNG and Timor-Leste have both been relentlessly courted by China. Still, each has recently signed a security partnering agreement with Australia following energetic and [direct diplomatic engagement](#) by Foreign Minister Penny Wong, who has recognised and responded to local needs. The Albanese government did promise to listen to Pacific interests, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has responded with significant compromises on climate change policy and additional development assistance. A key to the Australian agreement with PNG is that it was not framed as part of a geo-strategic competition; nonetheless, PNG has declared where it stands.

Furthermore, the Canadian Prime Minister had [announced](#) a number of funded initiatives at his Summit with ASEAN nations on November 13, 2022 aimed at protecting democratic values and respect for human rights, particularly related to gender rights, women, peace and security dialogues, feminist international assistance policy development, and strengthening relations with local partners including in areas of foreign policy, cultural diplomacy and academic ties.

Conclusion

Australia and Canada have much to offer each other in the short and long terms in approaching the region. At the same time, both countries need to consider other countries’ Indo-Pacific strategies and priorities, as an effective Strategy must connect its progressive domestic aspirations to the realities of the Indo-Pacific’s needs and complexities. Canada is already well connected with key Asia and Pacific Forums such as ASEAN and APEC, but it can develop new and deeper opportunities with the IPEF, AUKUS, the Quad and the Pacific Islands Forum. By working with key economic and security organisations, the Canadian Indo-Pacific Strategy will more likely succeed in key goals around trade and economic development, climate change, cyber and maritime security, fisheries management, energy, critical mineral security and the skillful use of middle power diplomacy.

As a middle power and a Pacific nation, it makes sense for Canada to be engaged along with the US and Australia as a collaborative Indo-Pacific partner. Its Strategy facilitates this engagement. In Australia, there appears to be an Indo-Pacific strategy at play that is emergent in nature, shaped by political imperatives at the time, and forged by Australia's key government agencies – including DFAT, Defence, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), and Treasury and Finance officials. These key agencies seek to identify and develop opportunities in financially sustainable ways, rather than through a centralised planning process with an overall strategic vision.

The challenge in the coming months and years will be for both countries to implement comprehensive Indo-Pacific Strategies that connect ground-level initiatives to broader opportunities and help positively reset the most difficult relationships where possible – to more cooperative, diplomatic tones rather than aggressive militaristic stances. But Australia and Canada cannot simply rely on China changing its trajectory or that the US will not revert to a hard-line "[America First](#)" national security strategy should political circumstances change. The two Commonwealth countries are ideally suited to collaborate on many initiatives in the region. It would be disingenuous, however, to sugar-coat the challenges ahead; the strategies will need to be operationally clear, achievable, and very savvy.

John Garrick is Research Fellow in Law at Charles Darwin University. He is a Supreme Court lawyer in Australia and was previously in private legal practice with a major Sydney law firm specialising in commercial law, Chinese commercial law reform and international comparative law. Dr Garrick has worked extensively in both legal practice and academia in Hong Kong, the Middle-East, North America and Australia and he is author and co-editor of a wide range of scholarly publications. His degrees are LLB (Hon 1, UTS), M.Soc Stud (Policy) (Sydney), and Ph.D (UTS).

Margaret McCuaig-Johnston is a Senior Fellow at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and a Senior Fellow with the Institute for Science, Society and Policy, both at the University of Ottawa, as well as a Board Member of the Canadian International Council (NCR), the Canada-China Forum, Human Rights Watch Canada, the forthcoming China Risks Institute, and a Policy Advisor to the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project. Her research includes China's human rights violations and technologies used in surveillance, as well as China's innovation system. She was a Canadian public servant for 37 years, including as an Assistant Deputy Minister and holds an MA in International Relations focused on China, and an Honours BA in Political Economy.