

RESPONSE TO JEREMY PALTIEL'S ARTICLE "CANADA AND CHINA: AN AGENDA FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY —A REJOINDER TO CHARLES BURTON"

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My report, "A Reassessment of Canada's Interests in China and Options for Renewal of Canada's China Policy," was commissioned by the Canadian International Council in 2008. It was released in February 2009 (Burton, 2009, February). This report builds on my study on the Canada-China bilateral human rights dialogues that was commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in 2005 (Burton, 2006, April).

This latter study attracted considerable public attention on its eventual public release in May 2006. Shortly thereafter, a report about my study appeared on the front page of *The Globe and Mail* (York, 2006, June) accompanied by an editorial ("China isn't listening," 2006) urging the government to implement the recommendations of the report.¹ Later that year, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development began a study of the issues raised in my study that continued into 2007. In 2008 the full Commons Foreign Affairs Committee began to hear evidence relating to the subcommittee's report reflecting consensus of all four political parties on the subcommittee, but to date the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development has not tabled its report on the Canada-China bilateral human rights dialogues in Parliament. As a consequence, there has been no bilateral human rights dialogue between Canada and China since the fall of 2005.

Related to the high degree of public debate on the previous study, my "Reassessment of Canada's Interests in China and Options for Renewal of Canada's China Policy" has attracted considerable attention by government and the media in Canada and abroad. In May 2009, the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) advised me that they had found reports on my study issued by forty-eight media outlets throughout the world. The report has been downloaded over 2,000 times from the Canadian International Council Web site as well as mirrored on other Web servers in Canada and elsewhere.

As Jeremy Paltiel points out, some of these media reports have focused on certain aspects of the report, "overwhelming, even obscuring, Burton's policy recommendations." For example, the first report of my new study to appear in *The Globe and Mail* by Colin Freeze, the paper's national security correspondent, said: "much of the study's focus is on China's unconstrained spying and Canada's relative naïveté" (Freeze, 2009). But I would not characterize my report as primarily about "unconstrained spying and Canada's relative naïveté." The subheadings of my report, in fact, are:

- Trade and Investment
- Immigration and Consular Matters
- Development and Human Rights

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¹ See also York & Laghi (2006, October 27), and many other media reports that are listed on my Web page: <http://spartan.ac.brocku.ca/~cburton>

- Political and Economic Relations
- Taiwan, Tibet, Uyghur, Mongolian Issues, and Falungong Issues
- Public Diplomacy

The front page report that subsequently appeared in *The Globe and Mail* on April 13, 2009, entitled "Embassy employees in Beijing inadequate in Chinese, expert says: Day had praised their language skills" (Curry, 2009) that Paltiel alludes to was prompted more by some ill-advised comments made the day before by Minister of International Trade Stockwell Day on the CTV program "Question Period" that also featured an interview with me and Paul Evans of the University of British Columbia (UBC) than my report itself (Burton, 2009, April). A more balanced report on my study came out in *The Toronto Star* on March 7, 2009, entitled "Why is Ottawa still bungling the China file? As Canada dawdles on bridge-building with Beijing, countries like Australia are cleaning up, critics say" (Schiller, 2009, March).

But in my judgment the best critique of my study has come out in one of the numerous Chinese language reviews of it. It is entitled (in Chinese) "Canadian Think Tank Recommends that the Government Readjust Its China Strategy." I respect this one to the extent that I have posted a full translation and response to it on my blog (Burton, 2009, March). It is highly critical, but I judge it erudite and dispassionate.

Regrettably, Jeremy Paltiel's review, like some of reports listed, largely distorts the overall tenor of my study. I will attempt to correct that below as best I can. In general, I would encourage readers of *Canadian Foreign Policy* to first read my report and then read the various critiques and reviews of it. Nevertheless, I am very grateful that my colleague and friend Jeremy Paltiel has taken the time and care to assemble such a comprehensive review of my report.

I would like to address some of the more controversial and questionable assertions that he has made in his text:

1. *"The report overlooks what is centrally at stake for Canadians in the relationship and to prioritize what we might hope to achieve through it and for whom"* (p. 109).

I actually address this in the first paragraph of my study. But to elaborate further, as I have noted elsewhere, the minister of foreign affairs made a statement on foreign policy in the House of Commons on October 19, indicating "[o]ur objectives are enhancing prosperity, improving security and promoting our fundamental values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law." This formulation strongly echoes the 1995 Liberal foreign policy framework paper published under the title *Canada in the World*, which proposed a foreign policy for Canada based on three pillars: "the promotion of prosperity and employment, the protection of our security, within a stable global framework, and the projection of Canadian values and culture" (Burton, 2007, November).

2. *"By exposing the shortcomings of past policies while playing to ideological stereotypes of China's government the overall direction of policy tilts away from deeper engagement towards an attitude of vigilance, the result of which would be to restrict Canada's economic opportunities and diminish Canada's status in the world. China's importance to Canada is portrayed more as a threat than an opportunity"* (p. 109).

To my knowledge there is no promotion of "ideological stereotypes of China's government" in the study and Paltiel does not elaborate further on this point. Contrary to his mischaracterization of my views, I strongly endorse the pressing necessity for "deeper engagement" and do not perceive China "more as a threat than an opportunity." On May 11, 2009, I was quoted in *The Toronto Star* as indicating that "both Canada and China are highly motivated and committed to improve and

intensify relations” (Schiller, 2009, May). I very much agree with what Jeremy Paltiel says further on in his text: “China is not only vital to our own economic future, but is, like it or not, key to the restructuring of the global economic system.”

3. *“Burton rightly urges better coordination among our trade and diplomatic staff, the Canada-China Business Council, and the Export Development Corporation in carrying out a trade policy. These are the only recommendations directly relevant to our trade performance. Paul Evans of the Asia-Pacific Foundation has pointed out our generally myopic business culture as a key factor in the problem of our trade performance”* (p. 110).

Actually on page 5 of my study I state:

The problem lies in the “culture” of Canadian business which lacks vision, drive and which is conditioned by 'coddling' from Government subsidies and incentive programs. So Canada's lack of energetic grasping of great opportunities in the Chinese market is at its source due to the same factors that have informed Canada's overall industrial decline as best exemplified by our failing auto industry in recent years. This explanation with regard to China is given at some length in the popular book by the journalist Andrea Mandel-Campbell, who resided for an extended period in China, *Why Mexicans Don't Drink Molson*. As the Canadian Chamber of Commerce has said with regard to its own membership: “many companies are small, ‘unworldly,’ and risk averse with limited knowledge of the Chinese market.”

4. *“[H]e recommends giving exiled diaspora organizations a direct say in programs carried out in their homeland....Rather than mobilize our diaspora communities as a check on our diplomacy, we should empower our citizens of Chinese origin to forge closer links to China and enhance Canada's image”* (pp. 110, 113).

My principle in this regard is that Canadians of PRC origin (regardless of whether they are Han or of other ethnic origins) are an important and inadequately mobilized resource in Canada's policy-making process. Their organizations do not necessarily consist of “exiles.” Only a portion have come to Canada as refugees. I see their potential role as comparable to that of the Canadian Jewish Congress in advising the Government of Canada on policy to Israel, for example. The point is that their expertise is not being taken advantage of sufficiently by the government at present.

5. *“Rather than publicly shaming the Chinese state for its surveillance of diaspora activists, we should ensure that Chinese officials posted to Canada strictly conform to our laws while firmly insisting on the priority role that these communities play in bridging our differences. Law enforcement on Canadian soil is not properly a foreign policy issue”* (p. 113).

China's diplomats in Canada enjoy protection from prosecution by Canadian law by virtue of their diplomatic immunity. The actions of Chinese diplomats that are in violation of Canadian law and so inconsistent with their role as representatives of their government in Canada fall under the purview of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAIT). Typically, these matters are raised privately with the Government of China by DFAIT, and DFAIT would make any determination of designation of persona non grata as the ultimate sanction for unacceptable actions by diplomats. Typically, these “unacceptable actions” consist in espionage and harassment of Canadian residents or of visitors to Canada, including Chinese citizens, on Canadian soil.

6. *“A proposal for renewed engagement ought to eschew inflammatory insinuations. Dr. Burton refers to the Chinese ‘Ministry of Propaganda’ when surely he knows that no such ministry exists. To invoke Orwell in advising our future relations with China is chilling. I see no need to refer to the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party as the self-styled ‘Publicity Department’ either, but Professor Burton’s report (Recommendation #4) inflates the role of Communist Party institutions in the making of policies of interest to Canada and seriously distorts the professional orientation of China’s policy process in the areas of most interest to Canadians”* (p. 114).

Actually, to my understanding, the standard translation for *Xuanchuanbu* in academic literature is “Propaganda Ministry,” just as the Chinese *Waijiaobu* is the “Ministry of Foreign Affairs” (and not rendered in English as “Foreign Affairs Department”). I certainly had no intention to evoke Orwell’s *1984*, much less as Orwell’s novel has no “Ministry of Propaganda” in it. The protagonist, Winston Smith, works in a fictitious “Ministry of Truth.” Moreover, I hold to my contention that the Chinese Ministry of Propaganda has an important function in policy formulation. I quite agree that “a proposal for renewed engagement ought to eschew inflammatory insinuations.”

7. *“We should not depart from any obligations undertaken when we agreed to establish diplomatic relations”* (p. 113).

The Canadian formula with regard to China’s claims over Taiwan, which is that the Government of Canada “takes note of” them, formed the basis for Canada’s recognition of the PRC in October 1970 and was subsequently adopted by many other nations who followed to recognize the PRC in the years following. It is correct that Canada should acknowledge PRC sovereignty over the territory under the control of the Government of Beijing within its borders, but just as Canada may someday through a democratic process accept the separation of Quebec as an autonomous entity in some form such as “sovereignty-association,” we should not rule out the possibility that something comparable may happen over Taiwan or other parts of the current PRC. In the meantime, Canada should have a non-policy on the claims of groups within China seeking enhanced autonomy for certain territories. These matters fall within China’s domestic affairs and should not be subject to foreign interference. Conversely, Canada would not welcome the Government of China articulating a “One Canada” policy as this would constitute unacceptable foreign interference in Canada’s domestic debate on the status of Quebec. The Chinese Premier did meet with René Lévesque for ninety minutes in Zhongnanhai in 1984 and Canada rightly raised no protest about this at the time.

Finally, some observations by Jeremy Paltiel with which I fully concur:

- “A properly organized human rights dialogue can give us a channel to convey our concerns to the Chinese authorities while reaching out to the Chinese civil society.”
- “A globalized China has to make peace with diversity, for which we can offer a ready model. As China is still developing and its institutions are evolving, we should craft our policy to take account of this, and position ourselves to engage both state institutions undergoing reform and China’s evolving civil society. The close consultation with NGOs that is a hallmark of our foreign and development policies must continue, and our policy should involve fostering trans-national and bilateral NGO networks.”
- “We should celebrate Canada as a place for people of diverse outlooks to work together under the protection of the rule of law.”
- “Deepening our ties with China is not a partisan issue.”

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