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• (1650)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

I want to welcome two very familiar witnesses to this committee, who have recently been on a keen journey together. I'm sure they're going to share it with us. I'm told that Mr. Fadden is going to go first, and he's going to stretch the five-minute barrier. General Thibault will operate with his usual military precision and stay within five minutes.

With that, I'll call upon Mr. Fadden for his opening remarks, followed by General Thibault.

Mr. Richard Fadden (As an Individual): Thanks very much.

Let me start by saying there were 10 of us in Taiwan on a familiarization tour, much like the ones that are offered to parliamentarians or the media. All of us have an interest in national security, defence and foreign affairs. While we were there, we met the vice-president, representatives of five or six ministries, several think tanks, the university and a number of opposition members.

From my perspective, at least, I come back with a number of my views confirmed and deepened, but no fundamentally different perspective from having been there. There are a couple of things I want to emphasize.

Whatever the heck else Taiwan is, it's a vibrant democracy. It has shared values with Canada. It's not a quasi-democracy, and it's not a make-believe democracy. I would argue we don't emphasize that enough. It has a very active and industrious private sector. They are very conscious of the black cloud that is over them from China.

From my perspective, there are a few changes in intensity. One was the extent to which they have a democracy. The population is very much aware of the threat they're facing, but they seem to be getting on with it. Having said that, the Government of Taiwan is actively working on a whole-of-society defence strategy, and like any democracy, not everybody is on side. They're having to bring along various age groups and whatnot.

They believe that Canada could and should do more to support them, both bilaterally and multilaterally, although they acknowledge very much that we were there, and we play with them. One of the things that struck me was that they are particularly grateful for the RCN transits of the strait. They appreciate that, I think, more than virtually any other thing.

One of my takeaways was that Taiwan's treatment by China is going to be a bellwether for all of that region and possibly the world. If China ever invades Taiwan, there's a message for the rest of us, which I think is one of the reasons why we should do everything we can to try to prevent that from happening.

I have a couple of reminders.

Japan is only a couple hundred kilometres away. They're doubling their defence budget. They're really worried about what may happen. If something bad happened to Taiwan, it would fundamentally change, I think, the geopolitics of the area, including the Philippines, Japan and others. Fifty per cent of the world's container traffic goes through the Taiwan Strait, so I would urge us all to consider what would happen if that were somehow declared to be internal waters of China. It would have a significant impact on the world economy.

The big thing for me and I think for General Thibault is that over the years, China has shifted the goalposts. They have become more aggressive with naval and air activity. They have become more active with misinformation, disinformation, psychological warfare and a whole variety of wares, much of which is reported in the media. The west, on the other hand, has not moved that much at all. I think that's what they're trying to tell us, that if we recognize that China is pushing, they need help pushing back a little bit.

Canada, I'll argue in a minute, as I think General Thibault will, could do more than we are doing now, although they recognize we are there. All of our close allies are there to one degree or another. However, there are other opportunities, I think, to shift the way we view Taiwan within the one China policy. We have a one China policy. It's our policy. How we interpret it, I think, is up to us. If we wanted to push a little bit more and be more supportive, we could do it.

As an example, the policy says that the Governor General, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs can't go to Taiwan, because that would be an implicit recognition that it's a sovereign state. It doesn't say that other ministers or deputy ministers can't go, but by and large, we have not allowed that to happen. They ask themselves, "Why can't the deputy minister responsible for digital affairs visit Taiwan?" That's just a small example.

There are small things like that. I think General Thibault will give you a couple more examples in the defence sphere. Their view is that, equally, on the multilateral front we could do more, and we could do more without enraging China. We might annoy them, but if you start from the premise that—if you'll forgive my use of the vernacular—we're off China's Christmas card list to begin with, annoying them is not very easy.

I do not suggest we precipitate a conflict in that part of the world, but there are a lot of things we could do beneath the level of the three people I mentioned without necessarily having dancing girls and marching bands, but still help them more than we have been.

• (1655)

I'll stop there, because I want to give you as much time as I can to ask questions and for Guy to talk, but the core message I took away was that it's a democracy. It's one of the avowed positions of this country—both sides—that we support democracies. We could be doing more, and we should be doing more, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

Chair, I'll stop there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fadden.

General Thibault, you have five minutes, please.

Lieutenant-General (Retired) Guy Thibault (Former Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, As an Individual): Mr. Chair, thanks very much. It's great to be back at the committee.

To the committee members, thank you for focusing on this important topic.

I passed the War Memorial on the way here, and I was thinking about Corporal Cirillo and Warrant Officer Vincent today in terms of their sacrifice for our country.

This visit, I think for me and for the vast majority of other members who were accompanying Dick, was our first opportunity to go to Taiwan, and that says a little bit about Canada's engagement or lack of engagement in this part of the world. It was a great opportunity to better understand this global hot spot. It was a fantastic opportunity not only to meet with government officials, civil society actors, academics and think tanks but also to get a chance to see the perspective of Taiwan in the context of the threats that are posed by the PRC to their very existence.

We also had a chance to meet with the executive director of the Canadian trade office in Taipei. That gave us a good chance to see where we are on our trajectory on relations with Taiwan in accordance with what's called the multi-faceted relationship that's described in the Indo-Pacific strategy.

What do I take as the bottom line for Canada and Taiwan? Well, you just finished your session on Ukraine; we have a raging war going on in the Middle East, and Africa is on fire, so I think it's easy for Canadians to lose sight of what's at issue in the Indo-Pacific with China's aggressive expansionism, the brinkmanship and the dangerous activities they're undertaking in and around Taiwan, the South China Sea, Japan and in the north with South Korea. Clearly we're at a time when we, along with western like-minded nations, including Taiwan, are in an era of persistent conflict, under-the-

threshold conflict, grey-zone activities and psychological warfare with forces that are clearly not aligned with us and are hostile, in fact, to our interests. That was certainly reinforced in spades in Taiwan.

At home, of course, a casual review of our own last few years here has the stories of increased state-sanctioned foreign interference, disinformation, cyber-attacks, terrorism, theft of intellectual property and attempts to gain control of critical resources, while around the world the actions of belligerent countries and autocratic revisionist states are flaunting international norms and agreements and undermining the rules-based order upon which Canada depends for our way of life.

While we're not at war, we're certainly not in a period of peace. I think that this era of persistent conflict demands that we don't approach the world as business as usual when it comes to national security and defence. I think this means adapting our thinking, our strategies, our capabilities and our partnerships in order to counter the threats that we're facing. I would put Taiwan squarely into the mix of those partners to help us confront this world that we're in.

Taiwan fits at the intersection of our values in terms of a democratic, peace-loving, free society and our shared national interests in national security, peace, stability and security.

I think all of us who participated in this visit, just as Dick said, came away convinced that Canada could and should do more to engage deeply with Taipei in matters of national security and defence. This isn't about our necessarily helping Taipei. I think we have quite a bit to gain by working with Taipei.

First of all, given China's inevitable rising power and their warrior wolf diplomacy, if we really want to better understand China and what drives their leaders and their society, there's no better partner, I think, than Taiwan. It is basically positioned to help educate policy-makers and strategic planners about how to effectively deal with China, given their own geography, their history, their culture and, of course, the present threats and bullying that they get from China on a daily basis.

Second, we have a lot to learn from Taiwan about how they're dealing with all of the same threats that we're facing, which I just described a couple of minutes ago, their whole-of-society defence initiatives and their efforts to increase national resilience in the face of these kind of threats.

To kick off our visit, we had the vice-president speak to us. She gave us a master class in international politics, in national strategy, in defence and foreign policy budgeting against domestic priorities and squaring it all.

• (1700)

What was really striking was how clear the thinking was at the strategic level about how to confront the threats that they have in a calm manner, not wanting to provoke China, but nonetheless stand up for Taiwan's ability for self-determination.

Finally, if Canada is serious about engaging in this part of the world, I would say that security and defence are the first objectives of the Indo-Pacific strategy. If we're going to be relevant in this area, we need to be involved in the various multinational fora that are coming up. These are regional mechanisms, whether it be AUKUS, the Quad, or the tri-lat that's established. Canada needs a seat at the table and Taiwan needs to be at the table as well. There should be nothing about Taiwan without Taiwan.

My view, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, is that it's the time for us to pick sides in this one. If you're looking at who's the good actor and the bad actor, China, in terms of not living up to its obligations under the UN Security Council charter, is certainly not looking good when we compare it to Taiwan in fully meeting the expectations of being a member state of the United Nations.

The Chair: The Taiwanese are excellent at giving master classes in geopolitics. I share that view.

I'm going to go to the six-minute round and then we have the room until 5:51, so I may have to cut back on the second round. Let's go for six minutes in the first round.

Mr. Bezan, you have six minutes.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank both Mr. Fadden and General Thibault for coming to committee and sharing their experience. A number of us around the table have been to Taiwan on a couple of occasions.

General Thibault, I welcome your final remarks that we have to pick sides and that it's time to move on and support Taiwan in a more robust manner.

You and Mr. Fadden talked about the whole issue of multilateral relationships.

Is it time for us as Canadians, as the Government of Canada and as the Parliament of Canada to advocate for Taiwan to be a full-fledged member in other international fora, such as the World Health Organization and the United Nations?

Mr. Richard Fadden: Chair, absolutely, without any reservation whatsoever. The UN Security Council resolution that made China the representative of China on the Security Council and in the General Assembly said absolutely nothing about what Taiwan could do in the specialized agencies and elsewhere.

To most people, it is incomprehensible that Taiwan could not be a member of the WHO, the UNDP or ICAO. I think if we did this in a clear, step-by-step manner, we could do this without enraging China. I do think one of our objectives in this.... I agree with General Thibault about picking sides, but enraging China is not helpful either.

There's a way of doing this, if the government decided it wanted to, in a thoughtful way, push far more than we have for membership.

• (1705)

Mr. James Bezan: Both of you have extensive expertise on defence and national security. Just last week we saw the PRC, using the PLA navy and air force, barricade and institute a 12-hour blockade around Taiwan, by both air and sea. After being there, do you believe Taiwan is ready for conflict with mainland China, especially when you hear the U.S. Pacific Command often reference the fact that it expects to be in war with the PRC by 2027?

LGen (Ret'd) Guy Thibault: Mr. Chair, I think that we came away with a very clear view from Taipei and the officials we met with about their determination and their recognition, first and foremost, that they have to be prepared to go alone however things unfold. They're determined really to be able to defend themselves and they're putting the investments in asymmetric capabilities. Their defence budget just has gone from, I think, 1.8% of GDP to 2.5% and they're on a trajectory to continue to invest more. I think that's all with a view to making sure that they're sending the right messages not only to China, but also to their allies and friends that they're doing what they need to do within the means they have available to them to be able to defend themselves.

Clearly, the issue of what the PRC, the PLA and the PLAN are doing is demonstrating, probing and continuing to exhaust the Taiwanese defence forces through the Taiwanese defence forces being required to stay on the highest levels of alert at all time. They have a strategy that is really working to exhaust the Taiwanese defence forces. I think they are in a very difficult position from that perspective.

They're doing everything they can, and I think that they would welcome other friendly countries to continue to help them make sure that they can defend themselves. I think that's where we need to be thinking about how Canada might be able to help in the defence.

Mr. James Bezan: We saw just yesterday that in response to the blockade that was instituted during exercises.... I'm not sure when an exercise actually becomes an act of aggression. You would think that if you're shut down for 12 hours, it could be interpreted as an act of aggression. I look at the whole issue that Canada did sail, with the HMCS *Vancouver*, I believe, through the Taiwan Strait yesterday, along with a U.S. destroyer, an Arleigh Burke.

What more should Canada be doing to provide military co-operation and assistance to Taiwan beyond practising the freedom of navigation through the Taiwan Strait?

LGen (Ret'd) Guy Thibault: First and foremost, I think the freedom of the high seas and what we're doing in those transits were surprisingly important to all of us—how they appreciated it. They knew when our ship sailed through. From that perspective, that obviously resonates with Taipei as being very important, so we need to continue with that.

To your question about what more to do, it comes to the last point that Mr. Fadden said. We need to be more creative in terms of allowing officials to actually engage with the Taiwanese defence and national security organizations. I would start with military and political staff talks to identify a number of menu items of what Canada could be doing in co-operation with Taiwan.

To me, there's probably a number of things we could be doing to help not only in country, but also institutionally with their efforts to make sure that they can defend themselves properly.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. Collins, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both witnesses for their attendance.

General Thibault, I'll start with you.

In terms of picking a side, I'm watching with great interest what's happening with the BRICS summit that Russia is hosting right now. That coalition started as an economic one, and it seems to be more of a military coalition slowly over time. We see North Korea's involvement now assisting Russia with the war in Ukraine, so that group's getting a little bigger and a little stronger over time.

If I look at what's happening to NATO and what's happening south of the U.S., we see some sabre-rattling, of course, with former president Trump. That situation is changing, so when you pick a side, you want to make sure that your team is as strong as, or stronger than, the others.

That's increasingly more in question as time goes on. Hopefully, all of this has to do with the election, in terms of his statements. However, if some of the things he has proposed come to fruition and he follows through on them, I think it presents an issue for Canada and its allies in terms of where we go next, especially in the Indo-Pacific region where China is coalescing a stronger group.

With all that said, what is your take in terms of picking a side under a scenario in which the U.S., as a partner, with a Trump presidency, might not be as reliable as it has been in the past?

LGen (Ret'd) Guy Thibault: I certainly don't want to speculate in terms of U.S. elections. What I would say is they just celebrated the 75th anniversary of NATO in Washington, and when you're looking at real alliances versus when you're looking at alliances—the nations that are coming together—that Russia is picking as its friends, we're clearly in a world in which NATO is still very relevant. I don't think, notwithstanding any posturing or any kind of comments we may be hearing for political purposes, that NATO is at any real risk in terms of continuing to serve our respective nations.

We all need to burden share. I think there is a certain continuity with the comments that the former president made, in terms of the countries of NATO sharing the burden. The United States has obviously been the backbone of the western alliance, so we all need to do our part.

I think that extends into other parts of the world, and to the partners with NATO in the Indo-Pacific as well where we have partnerships now with NATO—with Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand—to recognize that the world is moving in a way where we have the friends and we have those who are not friendly.

From that sense, I would hope that NATO will continue, or should continue, in my view, as being very relevant for the problems of the 21st century.

Mr. Chad Collins: Mr. Fadden, I will ask you the same question.

Mr. Richard Fadden: To back up one step, one thing that's clear to me, and, I think, to General Thibault, is that if China for any reason decides to really pop the clutch against Taiwan, the position of the United States would be critical. We can delude ourselves as much as we want that we, Japan or Australia could help, and we probably could, but if the United States stood back and did not intervene over the course of several days, if not a week or two, there wouldn't be a lot that Japan or Australia could do—they're the two closest allies—and it would take us a while to mobilize.

Having said that, I think Canada has always been a joiner. Sometimes we join everything that's available, but I would argue that in the Indo-Pacific, we're not joining the right clubs, and we need to up our association with Japan across the board—not just militarily but politically and in trade. Australia is pretty good. There are a number of other countries that are growing at a great rate, if not in that part of the world; they're getting to be very good.

We tend not to like defence alliances. I understand why; it's not our history. In terms of dealing with China, I would submit it's the only thing they understand.

As a possible hedge against the United States not being terribly enthusiastic, I would argue the three, four or five countries that we've both talked about need to start talking yesterday about at least making sure China understands that if we can't defend against them militarily—reject their military advances per se—there will still be severe political, strategic, economic and trade sanctions instantaneously. It's not only defence. It's a whole raft of things, I would argue.

• (1715)

Mr. Chad Collins: I have a quick question on the grey zone that was mentioned and the misinformation and disinformation. It seems like every study we undertake at any committee here in Parliament these days involves AI and/or misinformation and disinformation.

Jake Sullivan talked about four projects they were going to undertake in the Indo-Pacific region with NATO allies. One of them was addressing misinformation and disinformation.

What are your thoughts on the importance of our participation and investments in those areas?

Mr. Richard Fadden: It's not just us, but any number of the western allies.

One of the things that our Taiwanese counterparts told us when we were there is that if we thought we were being bombarded with cyber-attacks and misinformation and disinformation, we were barely being touched. They have a problem because there is not unanimity about how to push back. They're a democracy. They're having a big problem.

How Jake Sullivan thinks he's going to be able to help when he's dealing with democracies who all have very different perspectives, I'm not sure. From our immediate perspective, I think we could quite easily take three or four departments here and develop an on-going counterpart relationship. I do believe we're working on cyber with them now. We could do far more. They have a problem that may well become ours in the next decade or so if we don't do something about it.

Canada alone can do nothing. We have to do these things amongst alliances and with other partners, and it may mean an investment of intellectual capacity and physical and financial resources. Without wishing to appear to be partisan, we've been uneven on that front. I think we just need to do more.

The Chair: I'm going to leave it there.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to talk more about how Canada could be a stronger voice in helping Taiwan participate in a number of international organizations. You mentioned the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, the Quad, and the AUKUS alliance, but Canada itself is having trouble joining those organizations. Many see Canada as being relegated to the kids' table while the big players eat at the grown-ups' table.

I'd like to know if this situation is an advantage or a disadvantage, and to what extent. On the one hand, it might be an advantage if Canada thinks it may have nothing to lose, since it isn't currently a member of those organizations. On the other hand, it may be a disadvantage in the sense that, even if Canada decided to be more assertive, its voice would not be heard.

What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Richard Fadden: I would start by choosing other agencies. I would start with the UN specialized agencies, such as the World Health Organization and the organization in Montreal. We're already members of those organizations, and we have credibility within them. I think Taiwan would be delighted if it could become a member of three or four of the UN specialized agencies.

If we don't belong to a particular organization, it's going to be very difficult for us to try to develop an engagement program for

Taiwan. I would start with the agencies we already belong to. I'm talking about agencies in which we already have a lot of credibility and where there's really no reason to oppose this. These aren't national security or defence agencies. As soon as we touch defence, everyone, including China, starts getting agitated. I would start with the organizations where there's likely to be less tension.

Mr. Thibault might want to elaborate on that.

LGen (Ret'd) Guy Thibault: In terms of our participation or our desire to participate in sub-regional organizations, such as the AUKUS alliance and the Quad group, I can offer a couple of observations.

In its long-term strategy, Canada had no choice but to look to the Indo-Pacific and the Far North. I think we have to do whatever it takes to set our priorities. With respect to this strategy, what we want to do is clear, but we have to set ourselves up to add value to the regions. Our lack of resources makes that harder to do right now.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Fadden, you said that talking about military operations could increase tensions, particularly in China, yet there are frigates sailing through the Taiwan Strait.

Could that be considered without necessarily offending China? Could this type of operation exist in a grey area? Operation Unifier comes to mind. There could be joint training operations with military personnel in Taiwan.

Should Canada be looking at that?

● (1720)

Mr. Richard Fadden: Politically, I would say yes. However, that wouldn't necessarily mean that members of a Canadian regiment would wear the uniform. Many of our allies have deployed military personnel to Taiwan, but they don't generally wear a uniform.

What you are talking about is certainly possible, but I believe we have to think about it a bit and be careful about how such an operation is carried out. I'm not talking about the principle; I'm talking about how it would be done.

Having said that, I think there are certainly opportunities.

LGen (Ret'd) Guy Thibault: We also need to be more creative with things like military skills development. There's no reason we can't invite officers and NCOs to take part in our professional development programs or military training at the Canadian Forces College, for example. We need to get to know them better and invite them to forge a relationship with the Taiwanese forces.

Mr. Richard Fadden: Can I add something?

Ms. Christine Normandin: Please do.

Mr. Richard Fadden: I completely agree with that, to the extent that we can do it at the same time as our allies and in collaboration with them once we've thought about the message we want to convey to China. I think that would make things easier. By itself, Canada can implement useful initiatives, but that's not going to change the world. Canada should expand its alliance with other countries, which would allow it to do more than it is currently doing.

Ms. Christine Normandin: I only have a minute left, so I'd like to ask you a quick question.

When you appeared on *Power & Politics*, you said that Canada was one of the most cautious countries, one of the ones that makes the least noise.

What countries are setting examples we should be following?

Mr. Richard Fadden: I would suggest the United States, but they're in a completely different class as a global power. I think Australia is much more direct. Even France and England can sometimes be more direct than Canada. I don't mean to suggest that Canada never says or does anything, but Canada is so worried about upsetting China anytime it does anything.

The countries I just mentioned seem to have a comprehensive policy that enables them to act within a framework. It doesn't necessarily surprise China. In Canada, the one China policy has been interpreted so restrictively that anything Canada says immediately sets off a lot of reactions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

[*English*]

You have six minutes, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I was one of the MPs who was able to travel to Taiwan, and we saw that ministry entirely devoted to digital affairs. I recently went to Poland. They were talking about a lot of the same things. We're very far behind in terms of education, but is this something that Canada needs to think about when you were talking about those larger issues and provisions of how we move forward in a faster way?

Mr. Richard Fadden: Yes, is the short answer. I think we are far behind. We are catching up in some ways here and there. The deputy minister of digital affairs, in fact, said to us directly they want to talk to us more than they have been. They want to share more information. I would guess they have more intelligence about what China is doing than we do. It's a two-way street. We could learn from them, but that's an area where it's not directly military. As I was saying to Madam Normandin, it will not upset them quite as much, but we could make a substantive difference if we, again, developed a bit of a program and push forward over a few years.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Would it be a department though?

Mr. Richard Fadden: Pardon?

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Do you mean a fulsome federal department?

Mr. Richard Fadden: It could be a department, an agency, it doesn't matter. In my view, form should follow substance. Once you figure out what you want to do, then you can figure out whether it's part of a department or whatever. It's whatever you create or utilize, as long as there's the possibility of direct links.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I want to shift gears a bit and talk about the Indo-Pacific strategy in terms of India.

India has become quite something in the news, and we haven't really put our entire minds to it over this past year. Certainly Thanksgiving was a wake-up call—

● (1725)

The Chair: Excuse me for a second here.

We did invite the witnesses here to talk about the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific is more than just Taiwan and, similarly, both General Thibault and Mr. Fadden have expertise that far exceeds their visit to Taiwan. I take the view that these two gentlemen are uniquely qualified to talk about not only past events but current events as well.

We are, if you will, fortunate to have both of you here at this particular time.

My view is that this line of questioning is in order.

Ms. Mathysen, please continue.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I appreciate that, Chair. Thank you.

Last fall I asked senior officials from Global Affairs Canada and DND about India.

I was talking about the ongoing military strategic partnerships with the Modi government. We've seen them engage in extrajudicial killings and interference in Canada. I asked specifically about Canada's co-operation with India's military engaging in Exercise Sea Dragon. The response I got at the time was only that they would be reassessing engagements into the future. We haven't seen anything change as far as I understand it in that regard.

Could you comment on that and on whether Canada should reassess those continuing operations?

Mr. Richard Fadden: I think we should, because it seems to me that what has been made public over the course of the last little while has fundamentally shifted our relationship with India.

I know there are a lot of people in Canada who still think back to how it's a Commonwealth country. We were one of the first ones that recognized its independence. There are a lot of personal connections, but the people who are running India right now care not one whit about any of that.

We certainly need to find a way, in my view anyway, to maintain communications. We can't break diplomatic relations. I think there's been an agreement we'll continue on the trade front.

I would argue—and this is not directed exclusively at the current government; we've done this in Canada over the decades—that we have a tendency of registering objections to things and not doing anything. Maybe we can register the objection and at least suspend, if not terminate, some of these arrangements—that would be my view—while acknowledging that we have to keep up diplomatic relations. We have to find a way of continuing to talk.

The Prime Minister and ministers have been very blunt in their views of China, but they've only articulated their view. I don't think we have done anything. I think India will not register our concern unless we do something.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Would a fair assessment be potentially the banning of the RSS or naming them as a terrorist organization in this country, as has been requested by the World Sikh Organization and many Muslim organizations?

Mr. Richard Fadden: I'm not sure that the criteria we currently apply would make it such that it would be easy to ban the RSS. I haven't looked at that for a long time. To call them a terrorist organization, *point final*, I'm not sure. There must be some ways of registering our concerns other than simply saying so, however forcefully.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: In the conversations that we just heard and the conversations about joining the Quad and so on, that includes India, so how does that colour or change a response in that regard?

Mr. Richard Fadden: If you join a club, it doesn't mean you love everybody equally. I think that's true in personal life, and I would argue that in international relations it's also true.

If the majority of the members of the Quad are our allies and there's somebody there who we don't really like, we can use it as an opportunity to push back on them.

I would not say we can't join because India's there. We should use every opportunity we can with our allies to push back in those organizations.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Do you feel the same way in terms of, potentially, the expulsion of certain diplomats, whether they be Chinese, Russian or Indian?

Mr. Richard Fadden: Well, I'll—

• (1730)

The Chair: We're getting into some pretty...

Answer very briefly, please.

Mr. Richard Fadden: All I can say is that in a large chunk of my career in working in national security, I tried to convince GAC and its ministers to expel people from a number of countries on which we had fairly decent information, and that's a very difficult thing to do.

The Chair: We're going to leave it there. We're not going to be asking for details.

Mr. Cooper, welcome to the committee.

We have 20 minutes for six questioners. That's not going to work, is it? Is that three minutes per question? Okay.

You're down to three minutes, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Last week, we saw a significant escalation by the Beijing regime with a military exercise off the Taiwan Strait that included 153 aircraft and 36 naval and coast guard breaks. Several of our allies, including the U.S., Australia, France, Japan, and the European Union, have voiced concern. In contrast, there has been silence from the Government of Canada from the Minister of Foreign Affairs on down.

What do you make of that?

LGen (Ret'd) Guy Thibault: First of all, I would say that what China undertook was not a surprise. They expected when President Lai was going to have the Independence Day speech that they were going to demonstrate, so they've characterized President Lai as a separatist. The bottom line is that there was nothing that was unanticipated about what they did.

The problem, I think, in some respects is that the peaceful status quo in the Taiwan states—upon which we've said we're going to maintain our policy of strategic ambiguity and our one China policy, all without wanting to harm or put at risk the peaceful status quo in the Taiwan states—is changing every day. The status quo isn't peaceful and—

Mr. Michael Cooper: I'm sorry, but my time is brief.

Should the Minister of Foreign Affairs—the Government of Canada—join her allies in condemning that escalation?

LGen (Ret'd) Guy Thibault: I think so.

Mr. Richard Fadden: I agree.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay.

When we talk about engagement with Taiwan, often the push-back is Canada's one China policy. The joint communique that sets out Canada's one China policy says that Canada merely takes note of Beijing's contention that Taiwan is part of the PRC. It does not endorse that in any way, shape or form, and quite deliberately so. Therefore, often we see the one China policy conflated with Beijing's very different one China principle.

Can you elaborate a little bit about the significant flexibility that the policy provides and how Canada might leverage that?

Mr. Richard Fadden: I will try.

First of all, as I was trying to say in my remarks, the one China policy is our policy. If we want to change it, we can change it. If we want to interpret it differently, we can interpret it differently. I happen to be of the view that if we do that, we should do so with our allies as much as we can. It's like any other policy of the Government of Canada. If it is our policy, we can change it.

I believe, and I think General Thibault agrees, that the current government interprets it rather conservatively or restrictively. While I don't think that we should interpret it so broadly that—to use my expression—we enrage China, I think that there's a fair bit of space there that would enable us to do a great deal more.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Lalonde, you have three minutes.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you very much.

First, I want to say thanks to General Thibault for his service, as well as to Mr. Fadden for being here.

In recent years, Canada has certainly had increased presence in conducting transit, as we mentioned, in the Taiwan Strait. It is certainly our objective to keep free, open and inclusive the Indo-Pacific and to reaffirm the freedom of the navigation on these international waterways.

This past weekend, and I think my colleague was trying to refer to it, Canada successfully completed a joint transit through the strait with frigate HMCS *Vancouver* alongside the U.S. destroyer USS *Higgins*. This transit was completed in a safe and professional manner, but we know that this, unfortunately, has not been the case for all transit, certainly for us and some partners.

I would really like you both to speak about the danger of interfering with the transit and the diplomatic implication of it, please.

• (1735)

LGen (Ret'd) Guy Thibault: I think the rules of conduct that we had, say, at the height of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the allied forces were pretty well demarcated in how to work together to avoid having an event that would snowball. I think we don't have that in place with the PRC today, and that's one of the challenges we see in the South China Sea, off the coasts of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

We are seeing them undertake quite dangerous activities and there is the potential for an act that will result in casualties. In fact, there was an event with fishers off the island of Kinmen recently.

This is one of the concerns, and it is one of the reasons that you need to continue to engage with China. Notwithstanding the fact that we're picking friends and choosing sides, you still need to keep the lines of communication open with your adversaries to avoid things that would complicate things as a result of miscalculation or behaviours which create an accident and kill people.

Mr. Richard Fadden: I think that's right. I'm going to be more practical and say we're arguably living in one of the most dangerous periods since World War II. I don't think any country on the planet wants war.

What worries me more than anything is a mistake or an accident. What I think General Thibault was saying, if I interpreted him correctly, is we have no protocols to deal with accidents, including Russian bombers and fighters that go down most of our coast. We scramble our CAF jets to keep an eye on them, but what if something goes wrong and one of them blows up or they blow each other up? There are no real protocols to deal with this.

That's why I think the general is right. We absolutely have to keep hounding the Chinese for a protocol to deal with accidents, but we can't stop, because if we stop and the allies stop going through the straits, the Chinese will take them over and that will be the beginning of the end.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for a minute and a half.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

We know that China is providing drones to Russia as part of the war against Ukraine.

Mr. Fadden, I'd like you to tell us about the nature of the relationship between China and Russia. Are they allied countries? Does their relationship change depending on what's in their interest?

For example, would Russia help China if it invades Taiwan?

Mr. Richard Fadden: That's an interesting question. I don't think there's a consensus on that. I would say they're allies on an ad hoc basis. They're not strategic allies, mainly because China is much more powerful than Russia. That's clear.

However, can a relationship between the two countries cause a lot of problems, in Taiwan or Ukraine? I certainly believe it can.

At the end of the day, I think China is much more useful to Russia than Russia is to China. What worries me more than anything is that neither country really cares about international law or their people's welfare.

I don't think they're strategic allies, but I think the west should do everything it can to prevent them from becoming strategic allies.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I've heard a number of concerns from the Filipino diaspora about the Indo-Pacific strategy and our goals of expanding military capacity and building initiatives with regional partners, which also lists the Philippines, yet their current government has taken part in horrific human rights violations.

As General Thibault mentioned, we need to be careful with those who are hostile to our interests. I would consider human rights protections and so on to be our interests.

How do we adapt that Indo-Pacific strategy so that we're not empowering regimes working against those interests to uphold the international, rules-based order?

Mr. Richard Fadden: I'm probably not the best person to ask this question of, because I think the Indo-Pacific strategy was largely, on the part of the government, an opportunity to revise its policy on China. It was the first time the government called China an adversary, a strategic adversary. The rest of it was all very important, but I think that was the core of it all. It changed its view on China, which I think was highly desirable.

I think we have a great deal of flexibility in how we implement the Indo-Pacific strategy. You may disagree with me on this, but I think that despite the fact that we likely share the view that human rights are important, we have to have relations with some countries that violate human rights, because the only way we're going to change them is if we dialogue with them.

Any number of countries in that part of the world don't share our views on the rule of law and a whole bunch of other things, but I think that failing to deal with them through the Indo-Pacific strategy will only make it worse over time. We already have a problem in the world about the west restraining itself and a lot of countries tending towards China and Russia on a whole variety of fronts.

It's an imperfect answer to your question, but it's the best I can do. I don't know if the General can do better.

• (1740)

The Chair: That was a very long answer to her question.

Mr. Richard Fadden: I'm sorry.

The Chair: Ms. Gallant, you have three minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): To make sure I get both questions in, and fulsome answers, I'm going to ask both at once.

Earlier today, the PLA conducted large-scale live-fire exercises on its island closest to Taiwan, which is only 66 miles away. How will Taiwan actually know when the first real shot in a conflict is fired? That's question number one.

The west has underestimated the PLA's technological progress in the past, and so we expect a war by 2027. In your estimation, can an armed invasion of Taiwan happen sooner than that?

LGen (Ret'd) Guy Thibault: I know there's a lot of speculation about what the PLA may or may not do. I don't think anybody really knows. We've heard the Davidson 2027. We've heard Xi Jinping say that for the centennial they need to be prepared for the reunification of greater China.

How will we know? Well, I think Taiwan has said they're going to do nothing to provoke China, so China they're going to take the first shot. They will take the first shot, and that will be the shot that's going to change the course of that region, perhaps, based on what the PLA is doing.

I think this is one of the concerns about all of their posturing and the exercises they're doing, and the testing. It's to say, is this real or isn't it? Is this when they're going or not?

We saw it with Ukraine, with Russia building up. The Americans were saying that it was going to happen. They could see all the indicators, and I think that with China we'll have those same indicators.

What is probably true on the nature of the exercises they have, even though they're really impressive and they're very significant, is that the rest is all the logistics would have to follow, all of the things that would have to happen on the mainland. I think the United States for sure will be telegraphing what China is doing to the rest of the world as well with their intentions, based on the intelligence we'll have on what China is doing.

I don't think there's any real risk in the short run. I don't think that's the view we saw in Taiwan: that they're expecting to be invaded tomorrow. I don't think the conditions are there. I think that in some respects China is changing the status quo without having to do that, and I think China would prefer that, because it's a hard military nut to crack in terms of Taiwan. If you've been there—and I think a number of the members of the committee have been there—you will get the sense of it. It's a mountainous region. It's rainforests. It's tropical. There are very few accesses to undertake an amphibious assault on the island.

It's not an easy problem, I think, to take Taiwan. China is watching what's going on in how the west has reacted to Ukraine and how the Ukrainians themselves have responded to them, and I think they're taking notes.

I think that would be my take. I think we all walked away thinking that it's not an imminent problem that China is about to invade Taiwan.

Mr. Richard Fadden: Can I add two sentences to that? I think you have to define what's the first shot and whether it's kinetic or whether it's cyber. If China closes down Taiwan's electrical grid or closes down its telecommunications with the outside world, currently my understanding is that international law does not recognize that as an act of war. A few years ago, it would have been, because it's the same as being bombed.

I agree entirely with what the General was saying, but I think we—this country and the west—have to develop a more comprehensive definition of what the first shot is. The Russians certainly had a number of first shots in the cyberworld, and it facilitated their kinetic invasion.

• (1745)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gallant.

You have the final three minutes, Madam Lambropoulos.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here to answer some questions.

I'm going to take us back to an earlier part of the conversation.

You both said in your testimonies that we need to do more, that we can do more and a lot of our allies are doing more, that, regardless of what it is we decide to do, we shouldn't do it on our own. We should do it along with our allies.

Can you give us some concrete examples of what they are doing that is not stepping too far or setting off too strong of an alarm with China?

Mr. Richard Fadden: I'm going to exclude the United States, because they're in a category of their own. They do a whole raft of things, from purely military to all the way off the spectrum. We can put them aside.

The Australians and a number of others, for example, promote high-level visits. I know that sounds childish, but in terms of international relations, it sends a message that they're supportive.

A couple of countries have better trade deals. We've been working with Taiwan for a while to improve our trade arrangements. I think we could probably do more. General Thibault suggested we could do a variety of things at the staff level with the military. We could promote that. They have an indigenous population. They're very keen to learn how we're dealing with our indigenous population, so we're doing a bit on that. Maybe we could do more.

I suspect this is the sort of thing where, if you ask, the Library of Parliament could give you two or three pages of examples. What's lacking, I think, is an acceptance on the part of ministers that there is going to be push-back in how much they're prepared to take before they say no. I argue we should do more, but there's a balancing act there, somewhere.

I don't know, Guy, if you want to add to that.

LGen (Ret'd) Guy Thibault: I must admit that we didn't have the opportunity to get a sense of what all the rest of the partners are doing with Taiwan when we were there.

In the security and defence domains, clearly our policies have been restrictive rather than permissive. I think we should be moving in a direction where, if peace, stability and security in the Taiwan Strait and the Indo-Pacific are the first objectives of our Indo-Pacific strategy, we should think about the relationship we have with Taiwan from that perspective. I can attest to the fact that, at Defence and in the Canadian Armed Forces—at least when I was serving—we had no relationship with Taiwan, and no intersections with them.

That's where I would start with our engagement, at least in the defence and security sectors. Look at policy and military staff connections to identify opportunities we might have with them. I can

think of all kinds, whether it be for humanitarian assistance, disaster relief or military conscription. They're having struggles with their training. They're not an operationally experienced military. They are defensive and reacting to the probes they've gotten. Ultimately, in the conduct of operations, they would benefit from partners other than the United States helping them with their institutional development and the strengthening of their armed forces.

There are many things that could be done, but we have to start talking to them before we can identify what the real issues are and where we can add some real value for them.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

Unfortunately, this brings it to a close. I say “unfortunately” quite sincerely because I think we have benefited mightily by the wisdom and insights from both of you. I know it's trite to say thank you for your service, but to both of you, thank you for your service to Canada over many, many years. We really appreciate your coming to the committee and talking to us.

Interestingly, I was just thinking of our trip to Taiwan a year or so ago with Ms. Mathysen. Christine, were you there? No. That's right. Was it James? No, it was Cheryl. Okay.

Many of the things you said were observations that we had made.

Mr. Fadden, one that kind of caught my attention was that we should take three or four departments over to Taiwan to see how they deal with cyber-attacks, misinformation and disinformation. If you want to enhance your defence and security, the Taiwanese can actually teach us about misinformation, disinformation and the millions of attacks they have on a daily basis. That is something we could really learn.

Unfortunately, I have to bring the gavel down and call this meeting to a close, but we really do appreciate it.

Colleagues, next Thursday, there will be a briefing on the Middle East. On October 29, we're going to do space defence. On October 31, the Finnish speaker will be here for the first hour, and space defence will be for the second hour. On November 5, we're anticipating the presence of Minister Sajjan.

You might speak to me as well, because the Finnish ambassador is inviting people for supper, I think, one night, for those who might be interested in that.

The other thing is, our colleague, Andy Fillmore, won. I thought we would send him a letter on behalf of the defence committee congratulating him. I'm sure the enthusiasm may be somewhat less on that side, but the enthusiasm over here will be wild.

● (1750)

Thank you again.

The meeting is adjourned.

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