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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)): Good afternoon. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 21 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 23, 2025, the committee is studying the operation of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Taiwan Strait.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. From the Department of National Defence, we have Major-General Travis Morehen, director general, international security policy. From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have Eric Laporte, executive director, regional security and defence relations division; and Ryan Baerg, executive director, greater China political and coordination division.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions from members.

I now invite Major-General Travis Morehen to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Major-General (Retired) Travis Morehen (Director General, International Security Policy, Department of National Defence): Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

[Translation]

The Indo-Pacific region is at the epicentre of a generational global shift. Developments in this region will shape Canada's security, prosperity, values and economic future for decades to come.

A strong defence presence in the Indo-Pacific positions Canada as a reliable, long-term security partner and helps create the stable conditions—open sea lanes, predictable rules and regional security—that underpin shared prosperity.

Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy advances our national interests by contributing to a more secure, prosperous, inclusive and sustainable region, while strengthening Canada's national and economic security at home.

[English]

The Chair: My apologies, Major-General, but I would like to have a quick pause, because one of the members, Mr. Aboultaif, is not receiving any audio.

• (1530)

(Pause)

• (1530)

The Chair: Please continue.

[Translation]

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy advances our national interests by contributing to a more secure, prosperous, inclusive and sustainable region, while strengthening Canada's national and economic security at home.

Through this strategy, Canada has increased its defence presence in the region, allowing for more engagement, co-operation and collaboration with allies and partners.

[English]

As regional tensions continue to rise we remain committed to a sustained defence presence to ensure Canada remains a reliable, credible and trusted partner on regional defence and security on an enduring basis.

Under Operation Horizon, we've increased Canadian Forces' participation in regional and multinational exercises and activities, and tailored defence training to strengthen our collective resilience and interoperability.

Through Operation Neon, Canada, alongside regional partners and allies, contributes to monitoring and upholding UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea. We deploy three Royal Canadian Navy ships to the Indo-Pacific annually, increasing opportunities to work with allies and partner nations and enhancing military co-operation, including port visits.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Our Royal Canadian Navy ships conduct various activities, such as multilateral maritime co-operation activities as well as exercises with our partners in the region, such as the U.S., Australia, Japan and the Philippines.

During these deployments, the Royal Canadian Navy also conducts routine transits through the Taiwan Strait. The Taiwan Strait is indispensable to the security and prosperity of the international community. It is one of the busiest global shipping routes, carrying over 20% of global maritime trade each year. More than a thousand commercial vessels cross the strait each week.

It is therefore in the interest of all sides to maintain the peaceful and accessible nature of this waterway. From an operational perspective, sailing through the Taiwan Strait is almost always the most practical and efficient route for our ships to move between ports in the region.

[English]

These transits are conducted in full accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, UNCLOS, and in the waters beyond territorial seas where high seas navigation rights apply.

Since 2018, well before the implementation of our Indo-Pacific strategy, we've conducted 13 Taiwan Strait transits, including under Operation Projection, the predecessor to the current Operation Horizon, as Canada regularized its presence in the Indo-Pacific.

Since the launch of the IPS in November 2022, we have conducted seven such transits, with the most recent one occurring in September 2025 in company with a ship from the Royal Australian Navy. These activities reaffirm Canada's commitment to peace and stability, to upholding international law including UNCLOS and to opposing unilateral actions that threaten the status quo across the Taiwan Strait alongside our allies and partners.

Additionally, they offer significant opportunities to build trust, advance defence initiatives and deliver tangible results with key regional partners. Canada's approach is aligned with our closest partners and allies. The navies of Australia, France, Japan, New Zealand, the U.K. and the U.S. also transit this strait. We continue to conduct these transits in full accordance with Canada's one China policy. As an active defence and security partner in the Indo-Pacific, our key focus will remain the delivery of such meaningful defence contributions on an enduring basis.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your remarks.

I will now open the floor for questions, beginning with member of Parliament Michael Chong.

You have six minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills North, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing today.

I have a couple of quick questions to start. When the U.S. Navy transits through the Taiwan Strait, they call that operation a “freedom of navigation operation”.

Does the Government of Canada use similar nomenclature? Why or why not?

Eric Laporte (Executive Director, Regional Security and Defence Relations Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade

and Development): The member is correct in highlighting that the U.S. Navy uses the terminology “freedom of navigation operations”, FONOPs, for some of its operations in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere in the world. Those are based on sort of challenging baselines and challenging territorial claims but also on prior notifications.

The Canadian navy's operations, as General Morehen mentioned, are all always under international law and UNCLOS. We do not conduct FONOPs per se. The only instance where we will push back against another country is on the prior notification for transits, but we do not conduct FONOPs, as in the case of the U.S. Navy.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for that answer.

When the Canadian navy frigate HMCS *Ottawa* transited through the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan's foreign ministry welcomed the transit and indicated that it was a demonstration of Canada's firm position that the Taiwan Strait is international water. At the same time, the People's Liberation Army released a statement accusing Canada of undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

When Canadian naval vessels have transited through the Taiwan Strait, have they ever been met with activity from vessels that would be considered dangerous or unsafe?

● (1540)

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: In the 13 transits, we have had no unprofessional or unsafe interactions with elements of the Taiwanese navy or the PLA navy.

Hon. Michael Chong: That's helpful.

You mentioned in your opening remarks that Canada has increased its defence presence in the Indo-Pacific region. You mentioned as well that three Royal Canadian Navy ships are sent to the Indo-Pacific region annually.

Can you tell us exactly how we have increased our defence presence? Have we gone from one navy frigate to three frigates a year? What specifically have we done to increase our military presence in the Indo-Pacific region?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: We've gone to a more regularized three Canadian warships in the Indo-Pacific region as a means to demonstrate that Canada is a reliable and stable partner in the region. We have Euro-Atlantic interests, Arctic interests and Indo-Pacific interests. Those ships are a demonstration of Canada's resolve in the region.

We also have other activities, multinational maritime co-operation activities, that we conduct with other navies. We also have, indeed, spare-time training activities with our allies. We also have co-operation and training activities with other nations. I can get into a lot of detail if you wish, Chair, but it's the conglomeration of these activities, senior leaders' engagements and port visits that allows defence diplomacy to take place. It's not just the ships. There are air activities and there are ground activities through additional exercises.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

When we transit through straits like the Taiwan Strait, is the government of the PRC notified in advance of the transit, or is this considered international waters such that no notification is necessary?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: In accordance with our interpretation of UNCLOS and international law, we don't provide notification. This is also for reasons of operational security. Because we deem these to be international waters, we don't advise them of our transits ahead of time.

Hon. Michael Chong: The Indo-Pacific strategy identifies the PRC as a disruptive power in the Indo-Pacific region. I believe that's the terminology. Can you tell us what sorts of disruptions you're seeing from a defence point of view from the PRC in the region?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: The PLA has sought to modernize its capabilities and improve its proficiencies across all warfare domains to become a joint force capable of the full spectrum of operations through air, maritime, nuclear space, counterspace, electronic warfare and cyberspace operations. We believe that they have set a modernization milestone for the PLA military to be ready for any actions required or demanded by that government. All open-source indications show a positive trend to be able to achieve this goal.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

The Chair: We next go to MP Rob Oliphant.

You have six minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Chong. Those were good questions that got me thinking, too, so they were helpful as well as the answers.

Leading off from some of those questions, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and the advancement of peace and security through a variety of ways is sometimes perceived differently by different partners. I believe strongly that the Department of National Defence, CAF and Global Affairs are genuinely concerned about peace and maintaining stability to ensure transit, trade and all of those things as well as keeping the status quo. That's not always perceived that way by everyone.

I want to talk about that difference of perception that the People's Republic of China has with respect to our engagement either in the South China Sea or transiting through the Taiwan Strait and our goals.

Are there things from the foreign policy standpoint that we can do to show that what we are doing is, indeed, absolutely within the

one China policy and promotes peace and stability in the region? I follow up on that because Mr. Chong was asking whether we give advance notice. Because we deem them to be international waters, we take the route you said.

What can we do to ensure that this is seen as a positive enhancement for our bilateral relationship with China as well as for peace and stability in the region? It's a long question, and you can riff off it how you want.

• (1545)

Eric Laporte: Maybe I can start and I'll let my colleagues jump in.

There are, as was highlighted, a lot of activities that DND and CAF are doing in the region. A lot of it is defence diplomacy, a lot of it is exercise training, co-operation with partners and allies, and then there are a number of other things that are not so much in the military sphere but things like co-operating with partners on things like the dark vessel detection program.

All of that is intended to help build maritime awareness, domain awareness, pictures and understanding, and that is also helpful for all countries to understand what movements are happening and what things are happening. We don't give advance notification to China for transiting the Taiwan Strait because, again, under UNCLOS that is not required, and is not a requirement for us.

When our ships are transiting they will be followed, when our ships or aircraft are doing activities they will be followed. There are at least the interactions of being able to see each other in action and have lines of communications that are then allowed to grow, and to be able to explain each other's positions.

Certainly, when we do transits, and General Morehen is often on the receiving end of this, the Chinese embassy here, for example, will *démarche* us or our embassy in Beijing. At least we can have those frank discussions, which allow us to explain our position and allows the exchange of information.

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: Maybe just a follow-up, Mr. Chair, is that I would describe our defence military-to-military relations with China as positive but limited.

The recent engagement was with the commander of the Royal Canadian Navy in the spring of 2024. He went to a Western Pacific Naval Symposium, a multinational forum in China, where he met with his counterpart.

Since then, the minister went to the Shangri-La Dialogue in the May afterwards, and my predecessor and I went to the Xiangshan Forum in China in September. We've met with our colleagues from the Office for International Military Cooperation at the major-general rank, so that we can have dialogues to understand where we have frictions and how we communicate displeasure with each other's actions.

In my interactions with the Office for International Military Cooperation, plus the defence attachés here, they've always been courteous and respectful interactions. They allow us to have those frank discussions where they can express their displeasure as we can express our displeasure with their actions.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

I will regret asking this question, but in terms of defence procurement, in terms of what you need to do your work—we're not the defence committee, we're the foreign affairs committee—is there a message you want to give us as parliamentarians with respect to your capacity, your capability, to do this to engage peacefully?

Our goal in foreign affairs is to make sure we have peace in our world. Are there things that would be helpful for you to procure that you think we should be doing?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: I'll defer that overall to my minister. Certainly the acquisition of the 12 submarines and the 15 River class destroyers goes a long way to enabling us to extend our influence in the maritime domain, not only in the Indo-Pacific, but also in the Euro-Atlantic and in our north.

• (1550)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Something I need to explain to my constituents is that we procure for our military to ensure peace. They don't always get it.

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: I would suggest that all of us in uniform want peace.

It's the last thing that we want to....

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

The Chair: We next go to MP Duceppe for six minutes.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

This is a really interesting study. Indeed, the questions from all parties are extremely interesting.

I'd like to know whether National Defence has analyzed the risks of regional escalation following the transit of the Canadian ship, the various transits, through the Taiwan Strait.

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: My answer has to have some nuance, I imagine.

I'll continue in English, sir, if that's okay.

[English]

The way we approve these operations is that the maritime component commander represents to Lieutenant-General Steve Boivin, who's commander of our joint operations command. That is done in conjunction with allies. That concept of operations is brought to the chief of the defence staff and the deputy minister, for approval and recommendation to the minister, based on the inherent risks that are involved in that.

There's a delegated authority matrix based on the risk, but, certainly, in all the concepts of operations that I've seen, we go through a process of identifying what the actual risk is, assessing how bad it is and the probability versus the severity. We then go through mitigating actions: How do we reduce that risk? We assess what the resulting risk is, and, then, compare that against the authority matrix for who can approve...at what risk level. If it's an acceptable level of safety, then that's delegated lower. The higher risk operations have a higher level of authority.

I want to reassure the chair and the committee that this is looked at in great detail for every deployment we undertake.

[Translation]

Eric Laporte: I can add to that. What the general said is absolutely correct. In all cases, there is interdepartmental consultation to ensure that what's proposed takes risks into account.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It's really your two departments that are pursuing these discussions. There aren't any others. It's just Global Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence.

Is that correct?

Eric Laporte: It's mainly Global Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence, but, in certain circumstances, other departments are invited to take part in the discussions.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You mentioned the submitted concept of operations. I imagine that the objective of such an operation is at the core of this concept.

In the case before us today, what was the main objective of the operation that sailed a Canadian ship in the Taiwan Strait?

[English]

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: Often the deployments start in Halifax and end up in Esquimalt. They travel around the world, conducting various operations. We never just send one warship to sail through the Taiwan Strait.

Just to reaffirm, the exercises we partake of—the multinational, multilateral co-operation activities with New Zealand, Australia and the Philippines—are in the south. Then we transit through the Taiwan Strait to conduct a similar exercise with Japan and South Korea. That is the most direct route. It's about 200 nautical miles and a 13-hour transit. We don't conduct any other provocative activities while we're on that transit. Although we could fly helicopters and do boat drills, we just sail at an economic speed through the Taiwan Strait so that we can get to the next operating area.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: There are still reactions from the Chinese Communist Party every time such operations are conducted.

How do you receive those reactions? How do you analyze them when they're published or broadcast publicly?

Eric Laporte: Thank you for the question.

When we carry out a transit, we're interested in what the Chinese ministries of foreign affairs and defence will say. We examine the actions that will take place during the transit. For example, we look at whether the Chinese navy decides to follow the Canadian navy, in other words, shadow it.

There are often situations where the Chinese military attaché or Chinese diplomats based in Ottawa will approach us in Ottawa. They may call our Canadian diplomats or military based in Beijing to ask them to present themselves to the Chinese ministry of foreign affairs or ministry of defence and explain Canada's actions.

As we mentioned a little earlier, those are frank conversations in which we explain our position and they explain theirs. It doesn't mean that we're going to change our mind or that they're going to change theirs, but we explain ourselves. We communicate that way.

• (1555)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You have the right to answer or not answer my next question.

Recently, Xi Jinping launched a purge within the military commission. Today, an extremely important figure has been accused of corruption. Out of the six or seven people who sat on the committee, only one person is left: Xi Jinping.

What's your analysis of that purge? People are being appointed; new people are sitting on the commission. If there were eventually another Canadian operation in the Taiwan Strait, do you think the reaction would be more virulent?

What's your analysis of that purge?

What do you think are the long-term consequences?

[English]

The Chair: Give a brief response, please, because we're running out of time.

[Translation]

Eric Laporte: I think it's still a bit early to see the implications. Issues of corruption in the Chinese military system are certainly nothing new.

The fact that President Xi Jinping is taking charge is nothing new either. As it stands, we're still in the early stages of analyzing the longer-term implications.

[English]

The Chair: I'll go to MP Aboultaif, who is starting the second round.

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thanks for appearing before the committee.

How often do Canadian warships transit through the Taiwan Strait?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: Through the Indo-Pacific strategy, we've regularized the Canadian warship presence to three times through the year. It may be off a little, depending on the actual calendar date. It depends on where our operations fall. If we are going to maintain operations just in the south or just in the north, it won't require a transit.

We have Royal Canadian Navy ships sailing literally halfway around the world to try to maximize the training opportunities we have with our Indo-Pacific partners—Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand. I would suggest that, because of transit between those operational areas, if required, there will nearly always be transit through the Taiwan Strait.

Ziad Aboultaif: After each passage, we hear condemnation from the PLA.

You've probably been following their tone throughout the years. Do you see any change in their tone from the last time we crossed compared with the ones before?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: The *démarches* I've received since being in this job since August have been consistent. Once again, they state their position, the defence attaché to me here, representing their concerns.

The response for my testimony before you today is that we conduct transits in accordance with international law and through our understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Ziad Aboultaif: Our movement there, along with that of our allies, is to somehow stand for democratic principles. At least, that's what we believe we're doing.

Is there any other strategic interest that you believe we have in going through the Taiwan Strait?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: I'll speak for the military before passing it over to my Global Affairs colleagues, Mr. Chair.

Our presence in the Indo-Pacific region is meant to demonstrate that Canada is a reliable and enduring partner in the region. We believe our defensive activities there are some of the strongest expressions to our partners and allies in the region that we are there. This can open up defence co-operation agreements with other countries that allow us to advance Canada's interests.

Ziad Aboultaif: Mr. Baerg and Mr. Laporte, I have a question for you both.

The Prime Minister recently visited China. That relationship with China could affect us either way. It could affect our relationship with Taiwan in a positive or negative way.

How do you read that? Do you see a change of attitude in the Chinese government toward our passage through the strait? Do you also see a change in our relationship with Taiwan?

• (1600)

Ryan Baerg (Executive Director, Greater China Political and Coordination Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Maybe it's too early to say. The visit just happened very recently. I think all indications point to a willingness or a desire on the part of the Chinese to re-engage with us. They're sending very positive signals. They're happy that we seem to be moving forward with a pragmatic approach to co-operation with China. I've noticed, in my *démarches*, a shift in tone.

Specifically related to the strait and transits, we haven't done any since that visit, so I couldn't really speak to that yet.

Ziad Aboultaif: Mr. Laporte, would you like to weigh in on the same question?

Eric Laporte: I think Ryan answered it perfectly fine.

Thank you.

Ziad Aboultaif: Let's talk about Chinese interests.

We're sailing through international waters, so we're not going through any waters that belong to countries in the Indo-Pacific, including China.

What do you see China's interest being in this thing? When they complain about our country's passage, what do you see? How do you read this politically?

Ryan Baerg: Mr. Chair, China's interest in this is the fundamental position on Taiwan, since the establishment of our diplomatic relations in 1970, via joint communiqué. That's when we established our one China policy. I think that's the important piece here.

It's very similar to the majority of countries around the world in terms of how they approach and engage with China. Basically, our one China policy “has recognized the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China, noting”—and this is the important part—“but not endorsing or challenging” the Chinese government's position on Taiwan.

The Chinese government has a very clear position on Taiwan. We note it, as do a lot of—I'd say, most—countries in the world, but we haven't agreed to it. I guess I'd classify that as what we call strategic ambiguity. That has allowed us to maintain official relations with China and at the same time have unofficial relations with Taiwan. Our relations with Taiwan are deep across many areas. It allows us to basically agree to disagree.

The cases of the strait transits are another example of that. We'll disagree with positions. The major and colleagues here have talked about our view in terms of international waterways. The Chinese position is different. They will *démarche* us. They'll give their position, we'll give our position and we'll move on.

I think the most important thing to the Chinese now is that we... They understand that we'll agree to disagree. They just want us to reaffirm our commitment to our one China policy—and we do that. We've been reaffirming our position since 1970. Then we move on and we're able to have relations with China and we're able to have unofficial relations with Taiwan.

The Chair: We go next to Monsieur Guilbeault.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge Mr. Chong's statement today.

I think all members on this side of the room agree with you. The safety of Canadians and members of Parliament is an absolutely critical issue for all governments.

I'd like to ask you a question that may seem a bit philosophical to begin with, but it has very concrete implications.

On the question of diplomacy, there are different schools of thought. There are schools that say we should work less with governments that are different from us and have values that differ from ours. At the opposite end of the spectrum, there are other schools of thought that say no, on the contrary, we have to work with them.

I'll give you a few examples of situations I've experienced. At COP15 in 2022, Canada hosted the United Nations. Canada had to do that hand in hand with China, a country with which, at the time, it had virtually no diplomatic relations any longer. However, we managed to make a deal that's been internationally acclaimed as a historic success.

Mr. Laporte, in your opinion—I believe MGen Morehen already talked about this—can we sit down with these people even though we don't agree on everything?

Can we also work with governments like that on issues where we can find common ground?

I'd like to hear your comments on that.

• (1605)

Eric Laporte: Thank you for the question. It's a very good question. It's a bit philosophical, yes. That said, it's also based on elements of real life.

We can look at efforts that have been made to work with certain countries to move them in a certain direction. We can look at Russia, for example. Considering the current situation with the war in Ukraine, we can say that it likely hasn't worked. There are other examples where it has worked. There can be a middle ground.

Since last year, with regard to China, the government has wanted to recognize that relations were quite strained owing to the two Michaels affair. It made things harder for us, and it was complicated to have relations and discussions on very important issues. We saw the same thing happen with India.

Therefore, this government has really made the decision to co-operate when it's in our interest to do so and wherever it's possible to co-operate. However, we recognize that we will continue to have our differences. I think that with China, certain differences will persist.

I don't have a precise answer, but, in my opinion, we're living in a world where we have to try to talk to all the players, to see where there are common areas on which we can work together. However, we need to be clear about our interests. We need to draw a line.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: That somewhat applies to certain things that we're doing but are not common knowledge. For example, there's an environmental co-operation council with China that celebrated its 30th anniversary last year. Together, Canada and China are developing public policy on environmental protection that, over the past 30 years, China has tended to implement, whether on water, climate or biodiversity. Against all odds, the co-operation council has continued to work together for the past 30 years.

This is one example among others that shows that, despite the differences we may have on certain subjects, there are situations where we're all in the same boat. We're not going to solve the climate issue without talking to China. We're not going to solve the biodiversity issue without talking to China. In fact, Canada and China co-chair the Nature Champions Network, an international committee devoted to implementing the goals of COP15.

So that's more or less what you're telling us. There are cases where it will be difficult. I have participated in meetings where, for example, in 2022, I told my Chinese counterparts that we were very concerned about the rising tension in the Taiwan Strait. As a number of you mentioned, we agreed to disagree. However, at least we can talk to each other even if we don't agree.

[English]

The Chair: Give a very short response, if necessary.

Ryan Baerg: I can respond briefly. Thank you.

I know the honourable member has great experience on some of those files that he spoke about, and I also believe that that's a great example of where we were able to work with China, even when we disagreed on a whole lot of things. We'll continue to disagree on many areas, but having the lines of communication open has been a clear priority as we move forward.

I'll just give a couple of examples. In December, we held consular consultations. Those haven't happened in the past eight, I believe, years. If we want to protect our citizens and if we want to have those discussions, even on areas that we disagree on, it's important that we have the tables to get together with the Chinese to talk through these things. We do see some progress. Sometimes we will continue to agree to disagree, but having those channels of communication allows us a means to raise our concerns, understand each other's positions better and hopefully find some common ground out of it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would appreciate it if you could give me another 20 seconds, because Mr. Guilbeault spoke about Michael Chong's statement, and I also want to say that we support Mr. Chong's statement. I myself am subject to sanctions, because I've been vice-chair of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development since 2019. I think we all agree around the table about Michael Chong's statement today.

I'd like to know if the government is committed to planning other operations similar to what the Canadian Armed Forces did in the Taiwan Strait.

• (1610)

[English]

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: As a continuance of our Indo-Pacific strategy, the Royal Canadian Navy will continue to exercise through collaboration, representing Canada's desire for a peaceful and stable region. With regard to the other activities that we do in the region, I'd like to highlight a recent exercise with Australia, Exercise Talisman Sabre, where we had our largest participation of Canadian Armed Forces under Op Horizon, which was 600 CAF members through all domains. We will continue to operate through the Indo-Pacific strategy. As mentioned before, if we need to transit between operation areas in the north and south, we will likely continue to use the Taiwan Strait as the venue.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Laporte, Mr. Guilbeault said that we can indeed discuss certain topics whenever we're able to do so. However, should we refrain from having discussions and taking measures that would offend the Chinese Communist Party?

Take, for example, the public statement by the ambassador, or rather the representative of Taiwan in Canada, very recently, yesterday or the day before, in which he denounced the fact that Canada had had a trade agreement with Taiwan on the table since April and that all that was left to do was sign it. That trade agreement was set aside, essentially to keep from offending Beijing, it seems.

Don't you think that's a mistake, if we want to continue supporting Taiwan and its autonomy and if an agreement was all set to go? Are we stopping ourselves from entering into that agreement so as not to offend Beijing? If so, don't you think that's ill advised?

Eric Laporte: I can turn it over to my counterpart Ryan Baerg, who is more up to date on the facts.

[English]

Ryan Baerg: It will always be a balancing act, and I think the most important thing is that we'll have to move forward with Canadian national and economic interests at heart. As I mentioned, we have deep ties with Taiwan. The core of those ties is economic, people-to-people ties, and I believe that will continue.

As I mentioned, we will agree to disagree on the situation of Taiwan. China will push back on any and all engagement with Taiwan at all levels of provincial, municipal and federal governments when collaborating in virtually any areas, because that's their position, and it's always been like that.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Why hasn't this agreement been signed, when everything was ready? Global Affairs Canada had checked it, all the legal aspects had even been checked. All that was left to do was sign. There was the election, Mr. Carney came in and, suddenly, no one talked about it anymore, when everything was set up.

[English]

Ryan Baerg: I can tell you that the co-operation with Taiwan continues on the economic files. I know that there was an arrangement. I'll clarify, as well, that it's not a free trade agreement. We have unofficial ties with Taiwan. The trade co-operation framework arrangement is a non-binding arrangement to begin with—it's not an official free trade agreement—and it sets out broad trade and economic principles to facilitate this trade policy engagement with Taiwan.

My understanding is that, essentially yes, this arrangement has been agreed to and discussions are under way to consider next steps.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll next go to MP Rood.

You have five minutes.

Lianne Rood (Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you all for being here today on this very important topic.

To Global Affairs, I'm wondering if the Prime Minister's decision to stall or to ignore a Taiwan trade agreement has been influenced by concerns about retaliation from Beijing, including risks to Canada's naval transit and operational posture in the Taiwan Strait.

Ryan Baerg: I can't really speculate in terms of exact considerations taking place at the ministerial or prime ministerial level. I think that the Prime Minister has been very clear in terms of our desire to diversify our markets, and I think Taiwan is an important economic market for us. That's why we were engaged in terms of seeking this framework arrangement with Taiwan, but we collaborate with them and have an S and T agreement with them. We have arrangements around foreign investment, etc.

Discussions are taking place, but I can't really speculate in terms of a timeline on those or when that will come through. Obviously, the Prime Minister has been very focused on some very big challenges in our relationship with China. That was clear with his visit to China and what he was able to accomplish out of that. Is that part of the considerations? I can't really speak to that.

• (1615)

Lianne Rood: Has the department provided a formal risk assessment? Would the department recommend moving forward with the Taiwan agreement?

Ryan Baerg: I think that would fall in the area of advice to ministers, so I don't think I'm able to speak to that.

Lianne Rood: Thank you for your answer.

In your department's official threat and stability assessments, is Taiwan regarded as a more stable, rules-based, democratic and reliable partner for trade and regional security co-operation than the People's Republic of China?

Ryan Baerg: I think we've been clear. Taiwan is a vibrant democracy. It would be fair to say that we probably see eye to eye with them on a lot more issues than others perhaps. It's been a very strong economic partner for us, with unofficial ties, and I think it will continue to be so.

Lianne Rood: Why is the government hesitating to deepen economic ties with Taiwan while still expecting the navy to keep defending freedom of navigation in the same region?

Ryan Baerg: I think that we can do two things at once. We can have diplomatic relations with China, and we have since 1970, when we established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. We can also have unofficial relations with Taiwan. I think that we can continue to do so.

Lianne Rood: If the government agrees that Beijing's escalating posture raises the risk of miscalculation, will it commit to a renewed Taiwan strategy that includes deeper coordination with democratic partners and clearer contingency planning for Canadians and Canadian businesses in the region?

Ryan Baerg: Mr. Chair, I'm not sure I have the answer to that, to be honest.

I can say that we do co-operate with many like-minded nations on a variety of issues, including Taiwan. We share best practices and we discuss with them our respective approaches to Taiwan. We've been involved in projects such as the Global Cooperation and Training Framework, GCTF, where we support and work with Taiwan.

Lianne Rood: Thank you very much.

China has escalated tensions with large-scale drills around Taiwan.

Is Canada taking a clear position on peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and condemning these intimidation efforts?

Eric Laporte: Maybe I could take that one.

Obviously, we've seen the large-scale drills by the Chinese air force and navy around Taiwan and other exercises in other parts of the South China Sea. In those instances, we certainly call and condemn those actions.

The point is we are calling for peace, stability and maintenance of the status quo to avoid heightening tensions unnecessarily.

Lianne Rood: Thank you.

When a Canadian warship transits the Taiwan Strait and Beijing reacts with predictable outrage, what specific rules of engagement, de-escalation protocols and force protection measures are in place to keep Canadian sailors safe from reckless harassment by the People's Liberation Army?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: All Canadian Armed Forces members, even here in Canada, have the right to self-defence. As we execute all operations around the world, we develop the rules of engagement consistent with international law. The force protection measures are standard for any sailing configuration, and we have great confidence in the captains of those ships to be able to de-escalate the situation as quickly as possible.

If called upon, as we all are, we're prepared to defend ourselves, but we hope that will never have to be the case. We're sailing in international waters under international law in a non-provocative manner.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll next go to MP Mona Fortier.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I would like us to explore a bit how we're working with our partners in the region, meaning the other countries that are present.

Mr. Morehen, you touched on this in your opening remarks, but how are we working with them? In this case specifically, how are we working with partners in the region, but also with our allies, such as the United States, which you mentioned, and other allies?

• (1620)

[*English*]

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll present it purely in terms of military co-operation, and my colleagues may want to jump in on this.

Predominantly, we conduct multinational maritime co-operation activities. Through these activities, we conduct various elements of training such as communications, officer of the watch, boat transfer exercises, cross-deck, moving cargo from one ship to another via helicopter, basic air defence and basic anti-submarine warfare. We do all this in a manner that's consistent with international law and host nation consent if we're operating within territorial waters.

This gives us the confidence to be able to work with partners in the region if elements were to escalate, but it also gives great training for our young sailors, aviators and soldiers who have joined the Canadian Armed Forces for an incredible experience to see different parts of the world.

CFB Halifax and CFB Esquimalt are in continuous operations all the time, and I imagine that can get quite boring, so these activities allow us to share Canadian values through port visits when we support heads of mission. There is a whole gamut of opportunities we can conduct with the Royal Canadian Navy that satisfy all those diplomatic defence and communication concerns.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Do you want to add anything from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development?

Eric Laporte: Yes, certainly.

Indeed, what MGen Morehen said about the tactical operational side of things are all benefits. As he said towards the end of his comments, engagement with the country becomes strategic, military and diplomatic engagement. Often, the continued presence of the Canadian Armed Forces or the Royal Canadian Navy in the region helps to advance relationships in certain areas. For example, there were advances in the security and defence relationship with Japan following the signing of an equipment and technology transfer agreement, or ETTA. There have also been advances with South Korea, through a security and defence partnership, and with the Philippines, with whom we have a partnership through the Status of Visiting Forces Agreement. These activities yield broader and more strategic outcomes than mere co-operation with the country.

Hon. Mona Fortier: During your observations, have you seen any best practices from our partners or allies that have inspired you and that we should adopt or explore further? If so, what are they?

[*English*]

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: Mr. Chair, I don't have concrete examples for you. I'm not a naval spokesperson.

What we do find when the crews come back is that they do find the deployments very rewarding professionally and also personally from their experiences. That's not only in seeing other cultures, but also, they have a sense of pride in what they've trained to do and have accomplished and in why they've joined the Canadian Armed Forces. Also, of course, we're always open to learning best practices from other countries.

While I didn't mention it in my initial response, we're working with Japan, the Philippines, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea. This gives us a wide variety of perspectives in the region. I think that in the typical Canadian way we're able to synthesize these various perspectives to be inclusive of other people's views and that gives us a much better sense of what's happening in the region.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: We're seeing a lot of changes and we're hearing a lot of talk. Looking at what's happening in the world right now, do you have any concerns? Do you look at things from a different perspective, in this case, given that certain countries are taking certain positions?

Eric Laporte: There are a lot of things happening in the world these days. I would say it's a more complex and dangerous world.

As far as the Indo-Pacific region is concerned, it has always been a place where you could observe things in advance, particularly when it comes to the issue of Taiwan and the issue of security in the South China Sea, and that remains the case. We see that the United States is somewhat repositioning its way of seeing things and its approaches. We'll have to see what that means and how it translates in the Indo-Pacific region itself. That could leave more room for some other countries and allow them to expand. So that remains to be seen.

• (1625)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next is MP Michael Chong.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the answers.

I'd like to talk a bit about the disputed seas just beyond the Taiwan Strait. In particular, I know that the Government of Canada doesn't recognize the PRC's nine-dash line claim over the South China Sea. I note as well that the Government of Canada does recognize the Philippines' sovereignty over rights and jurisdictions in its exclusive economic zone.

Does the Government of Canada consider the Scarborough Shoal part of the Philippines' EEZ?

Eric Laporte: I'm not going to answer specifically on that, because I don't know the answer myself, but I do know that we are opposing what we have called the "militarization" of disputed features. We're seeing naval, coast guard and maritime militia vessels intimidating and threatening ships of other states.

In 2016, there was an UNCLOS arbitral decision tribunal ruling brought forth by the Philippines, which is binding on all the parties, including China. We're calling on all the parties to abide by that.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

If I recall correctly, I think that 2016 tribunal ruling concluded that there was a 12-mile nautical sea centred on the Scarborough Shoal. Canada recognized and supported that ruling.

The reason I ask this question is that several months ago Minister McGuinty signed a status of visiting forces agreement between Canada and the Philippines. The treaty provides for joint military exercises and operations between Canada's military and the Philippine military. Will these joint exercises and operations include naval ones?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: We expect the upcoming exercises and co-operative framework with the Philippines to include all elements and all domains of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Hon. Michael Chong: The reason I ask this question is that there's been a lot of kinetic conflict between elements of the Philippine state—naval vessels of the Philippine state—and naval vessels of the PRC state in those disputed waters. Last summer, there were collisions between ships of the PRC and the Philippine coast guards.

If we're going to be participating in joint exercises and operations, what measures are being put in place to ensure there's not a kinetic conflict between a NATO member and the People's Republic of China?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: I believe it's the process that I described earlier about how we come up with the concept of operations at the maritime co-operation level. We run it through the foreign policy risk assessment. That's the name that we use for the joint consultation process between the Department of National Defence and Global Affairs Canada. That will really drive the measure or level of risk that we intend.

We also have to be very careful that we're not doing this in a provocative manner because we are intending to have exercises and co-operation respecting international law and UNCLOS. The first exercise that will be coming up is Exercise Balikatan later this summer. We're just waiting for the ratification of the status of visiting forces agreement through the Philippine parliament system.

All those considerations are taken into account for where we should go and where we should not go.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you. I have no further questions for this round.

The Chair: You still have 32 seconds.

• (1630)

Hon. Michael Chong: I'll wait for the next round.

The Chair: We go next to MP Oliphant.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I will be brief. I will turn to Mr. Louis after one question.

At Global Affairs right now, there's a big conversation about the nexus between development and trade. That is a constant conversation about how we advance our commercial and domestic interests with development.

Do you see our work in the Indo-Pacific as a nexus between security and trade? Is there a part of it that is that? If not, that's also fine, but I'm wondering if there's another nexus we should be talking about.

Eric Laporte: I can start and I'm happy to have others join in.

I would agree with the member that there is a security and trade nexus, as we highlighted at the beginning of this presentation. For example, the Royal Canadian Navy's transit through the straits is oftentimes to move from one operational area to another, but it's also to demonstrate freedom under UNCLOS. It's not freedom of navigation in the U.S. FONOPs kind of way, but it's the ability to work and operate in international straits.

Openness to maritime transit is key for trade. Those are the routes that are being used. For the Taiwan Strait, 20% of global trade goes through there, but there's also the Strait of Malacca. There's also the South China Sea. There are also areas where there are natural resources and fishing, etc. Those are all trade related.

I would tend to agree with you that there is a trade-security nexus to be had, particularly in the maritime domain.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: We heard it here first.

Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you for sharing your time.

Thank you all for being here and for your service to our country. It strikes home because a good friend of mine has two children in the armed forces, one of whom has been on ships in the west coast and comes back. I get stories anecdotally.

You mentioned that Canada interacts with all sorts of allies. It does joint exercises and lands in countries. What are our allies' perceptions of the Canadian Armed Forces?

I hear the stories anecdotally, but what are we hearing? What lessons can we learn from that? How do people perceive Canada's armed forces?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: If you've heard the stories, they're probably closest to the source of what the sailors hear while they're visiting ports. What I hear is that, through our Indo-Pacific strategy, we have shown up and we've stayed. That makes us a reliable partner within the Indo-Pacific region.

Wherever we go, when I've travelled with the chief of the defence staff or with the minister, there's always want for more of Canada. I think that speaks well to the competency, professionalism and the way the Canadian Armed Forces presents itself. That's my understanding, as the stories are relayed to me from allies.

Tim Louis: I appreciate that. Some of the stories from the younger people might use a bit saltier language.

You also mentioned the importance of having a dialogue with adversaries as well. What's working? What can be improved? How can the dialogue make sure that stays? The first line of defence is diplomacy.

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: I think it's super important to be able to have that dialogue. When the moment of crisis comes—we're trying to defuse tensions or make sure that we have a common understanding of what transpired—we need to revert to dia-

logue as the first course of action rather than escalation. They may be difficult conversations, and we may feel uncomfortable, but at the end of it, we need to be able to represent the interests of our government and the people of our nation.

Certainly, in my interactions with my PLA counterparts, even though there's been strong messaging, it's always been done in a respectful and courteous manner, notwithstanding the depth and gravity. I think that goes a long way to...I wouldn't necessarily call it trust, at this point, but a mutual respect that we're representing the positions of our government and we're doing so in a professional manner.

Tim Louis: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] grateful nation. I want to thank you for that.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go to MP Brunelle-Duceppe for 2.5 minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've consulted many experts in the region, as well as individuals representing people who have been threatened by the Chinese communist regime but who are familiar with the inner workings of the Chinese Communist Party and its internal power struggles.

I want to quickly come back to the purge, because it's related to today's study. Everyone tells me that this is directly related to the Taiwan issue, because the people who were removed were rather cautious about a military operation against Taiwan. People are also saying that President Xi Jinping might want to put new people in their place or even not want to replace them, so as to have free rein to potentially conduct a military operation against Taiwan, whatever its size or form.

You talked about Japan and our Indo-Pacific allies. We did see a rather virulent outburst from the new prime minister, Ms. Takaichi, about a possible intervention by China in Taiwan.

If we care about it, talk about it and are aware of it, I imagine that you and your various departments are certainly more informed than we are about it. I imagine that there are various scenarios on the table should a Chinese military operation against Taiwan ever happen. Could you not give the committee the details of the scenarios, obviously, but tell us whether there are any scenarios and, if so, whether Canada will respond in the same way as the Japanese prime minister plans to respond?

• (1635)

Eric Laporte: That's a very good question. I'd just like to say that we are still studying all contingencies and possibilities. In terms of what Canada's response would be, I can't comment on that at this point.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understand that we don't want to go into detail. I imagine, however, that you're keeping an eye on everything that's going on, as we all are. We're all concerned.

At the end of the day, would it not be appropriate for the Government of Canada to send a strong message? I understand that this isn't a free trade agreement, but shouldn't we ratify the agreement that was negotiated in April between Taiwan's and Canada's representatives? Wouldn't that be a good message to send, especially since the agreement provides for investments in sectors like artificial intelligence, clean energy and ethical supply chains? Wouldn't we be sending a message of solidarity with Taiwan, while also making sure that we don't break our ties with Taiwan for fear of offending Beijing?

[English]

The Chair: Please make it a very brief response. We're over the time.

Ryan Baerg: Again, I don't know how much more I can say on that besides the fact that I know that discussions are under way. I think trade with Taiwan is an area that historically.... There's no reason we can't trade with Taiwan. It's been the core of our relationship. We have a Canadian trade office, CTO, in Taipei. Taiwan has the Taipei economic and co-operation office, TECO, here too. It's fundamental to our relationship.

That's why we were engaged in those discussions. We have an annual consultation group with Taiwan, called CTEC, where we talk about trade issues and related co-operation. As I mentioned, discussions are under way in terms of next steps for that arrangement.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have MP Michael Chong for five minutes, please.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

I'd like to go back to the Taiwan Strait. We were saying earlier that the Canadian navy has transited down the median line of the strait in international waters.

I'd like to talk about the airspace above the strait, as has been referenced earlier in this committee. We are seeing increased frequency and number of flights by the PLA into Taiwan's air defence identification zone. They seem to be increasing in tempo and in scale. How concerned should Canadians be about that turning into a kinetic conflict?

Eric Laporte: I would agree with your assessment that we've seen an increasing tempo of Chinese air and maritime activity in and around Taiwan. There have been a number of exercises. As I mentioned earlier in this testimony, we are obviously very concerned about that, about the risk of escalation, the risk of an actual conflict or even the risk of an incident spiralling and arriving at unfathomable consequences. In those instances, we continue to call to

resume the status quo, to be peaceful and to de-escalate. That is our approach.

• (1640)

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: Mr. Chair, I will just add not that I'm condoning those actions but, in international law, the air defence identification zone doesn't represent an illegal act or an act of war. It's 12 nautical miles, which is a firm line. The air defence identification zone is there to alert other nations that, when they enter there, they're most likely going to be positively identified. I just want to make that clear, sir.

Hon. Michael Chong: That's understood, and I appreciate that clarification.

Speaking of the 12-mile nautical zone and the sovereign territory of nation states, how do we as Western powers differentiate between PLA exercises above the Taiwan Strait and in the air defence identification zone and the beginning of an actual invasion or conflict?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: From a military perspective, what we're seeing could be construed as rehearsals to be able to conduct those activities, which is concerning. Our position from a military point of view is that this needs to be solved through means other than military confrontation. It has the possibility to disrupt security and stability in the region.

Hon. Michael Chong: The reason I ask this question is that all of us around the table read almost weekly and certainly monthly about these PLA operations in the air defence identification zone, and we have been now for years. At what point should we become concerned about it? It's happening at such a frequency that it almost seems like a weather update when another news article pops up about Taiwan's air defence identification zone. At what point should our constituents, Canadians, be concerned about this and not treat it as just a regular occurrence that's been taking place now for many years?

Eric Laporte: As the member points out, yes, there has been an increase in tempo. I think that some people could argue that the status quo has kind of changed as a result of that, because it normalizes Chinese air activity around Taiwan. I would say that, as a result of that, the indicators and warnings become a lot harder to track in the shorter time frames. There are other indicators and warnings that are also looked at, including things that are happening in mainland China, for example, that would be looked at as a more determinative factor to an actual activity.

Hon. Michael Chong: President Xi Jinping has established the goal of achieving the great reunification of the Chinese nation by the centenary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 2049. As part of that goal, he has established military goals in the shorter term, particularly a 2027 military goal and a 2035 military goal.

How should we interpret China's goal of national rejuvenation, particularly with respect to the 2027 goal and the 2035 goal in the context of Taiwan?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: As I mentioned earlier, the People's Republic of China and their development of military capabilities across the entire spectrum lead us to believe that they're developing a capability that would be close to achieving that goal.

There's obviously more reporting at levels above what we can talk about here, sir, but it's an incredible buildup of military capability that would be counterproductive for international peace and security in the region.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay, thank you.

Chair, I have no further questions.

The Chair: I understand that Mr. Ziad Aboultaif would also like a final opportunity for questions.

You have five minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Chair, for that generous time.

Canadians are watching us, and I think there are some obvious questions about how we go about those trips or missions in the Taiwan Strait. We know the Chinese do their drills. They show us that as an example that at one time they may want to invade the island, and that could be a trigger for a bigger war.

How do we go about the Canadian mission? Do we do it alone? Do we do it in conjunction with our G7...? I think it would be nice to explain that to Canadians, since they're watching.

• (1645)

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: I'll just go very quickly into the breakdown of transits that we've done with the nations we've done them with.

We've done 13 transits since 2018, seven since the introduction of the Indo-Pacific strategy in 2022. Of those 13 transits, six of them have been by ourselves and seven have been with bilateral partners. Six of those bilateral transits have been with the United States, and sometimes on one operation it's to go north and to go south, because of the training activities. The last one that we conducted was with Australia.

I'm prepared to provide the exact breakdown afterwards, so we don't take more time here in committee, but all of those are coordinated through joint objectives for training for those exercise areas, north and south.

Other countries that conduct transits are the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Turkey and the Netherlands. We're not the only Indo-Pacific or Euro-Atlantic country that is conducting those transits.

Ziad Aboultaif: An escalation could be an option. That's the way things are. Do we have a capacity constraint as far as Canada is concerned?

MGen (Ret'd) Travis Morehen: I'm not sure what you mean by escalation as an option. Certainly, the Government of Canada, through the Department of National Defence, would not look to escalate our activities.

The Canadian Armed Forces do have finite resources to meet all of our commitments through the defence of the homeland as our first priority; with our own Arctic binational command through

NORAD for maritime warning, aerospace warning control; and we have our operations with Operation Reassurance in Latvia and environs. Then, also equally important, is our Indo-Pacific...

At this time, there are finite resources for us to be everywhere.

Ziad Aboultaif: Mr. Baerg, can we say that our mission in the strait is a reminder to China about our historical position when it comes to the dynamic of this region?

Ryan Baerg: I'm not sure how to answer that—a reminder of our historical position.

I think what's most important when we're dealing with the PRC—what they want to see, and what we're happy to provide—is a reaffirmation of our one China policy; to be able to have those channels of communication and be able to explain to them what that means and why we believe these transits are in accordance with our position. Reaffirm that we aren't changing our position, our one China policy hasn't changed, that we're not escalating...as we talked about.

In a sense, I guess what you're getting at is the same kind of thing. Yes, it's a reaffirmation of our one China policy.

Ziad Aboultaif: The G7 is asking for peace and stability in the region. That's an obvious position because, as I said earlier, the last thing anybody wants is a major war around this issue. How do you see China responding to that?

Ryan Baerg: Mr. Chair, how they respond to it is how we've talked about already—a *démarche*. Every time a transit happens or a statement is released, whether that be the G7 or whether that be an individual country, they raise it as an issue. Just like our reaffirming our position, they will reaffirm their position and put it on the table. That's how they respond to it.

Ziad Aboultaif: Where does the international law fit in this whole dynamic? China tried to reaffirm its position, as far as Taiwan...or its policy. It is the same on our side. We try to remind China that this is our position. How do you see the international law at play here?

Eric Laporte: Unless it goes to an actual tribunal as a court case, international law is depending a bit on what is meant by “the eye of the beholder”, in some instances. In this case, a vast majority of countries believe that the Taiwan Strait is one of the international straits under UNCLOS. China recognizes that it is. It actually says it is an international strait, but it opposes having foreign military transits without, at least, asking for notification, etc. It is, in a way, how China interprets its position over the strait.

• (1650)

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chair: We have a brief intervention from Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I just have a quick question that came to mind. We recently saw two Liberal MPs on a mission to Taiwan, who had not yet completed their mission, being quickly recalled either by Prime Minister Carney or the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We don't know where the decision came from. Do you think that—

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe, I'm sorry, but I don't think that's relevant to the topic at hand.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We talked about the environment and COP, so I think I can talk about—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: That was in the context of negotiations and diplomacy.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll allow some leeway, but please come to a.... Continue.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm referring to China-Taiwan relations.

I'd like to know if, in your opinion, these missions by Canadian MPs will be affected by the new relationship that the government appears to have with the current regime in China.

[*English*]

Ryan Baerg: In terms of what I mentioned—our position on and our unofficial engagement with Taiwan—in line with the indepen-

dence of Parliament, MPs have been travelling to Taiwan for a very long time. I imagine that would continue.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes our questioning.

Thank you very much, officials, for your appearance before the committee and for your testimony today.

I have some general information regarding next week. I'd like to inform members that our subcommittee on agenda and procedure will meet on Tuesday, February 10, to discuss the future business of this committee. Our next regular committee meeting will take place on Thursday, February 12. The notice of the meeting has already been distributed.

I would also like to inform members that the Subcommittee on Committee Budgets of the Liaison Committee will meet on Wednesday, February 11. At that time, I will present our various travel requests to that committee.

Having said all of that, is it the will of the community to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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