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# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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Chair: Ahmed Hussen





# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Thursday, April 16, 2026

• (1530)

[English]

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

Colleagues and friends, welcome to meeting number 30 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 Thursday, February 12, 2026, the committee is meeting on the review of Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Members are attending in person and also remotely using the Zoom application.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have Weldon Epp, assistant deputy minister, Indo-Pacific; Valérie Samaan, director general, Indo-Pacific strategy planning, policy and operations; Darren Smith, executive director, Indo-Pacific trade policy division; and Aly-Khan Rajani, director, Indo-Pacific regional coordination, policy and planning division. From the Canadian Armed Forces, we have Colonel Jérôme Patry, J35 expeditionary, future operations, Canadian joint operations command. From the Department of National Defence, we have we have Inderjit Nijjar, deputy director general, international security policy.

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

I now invite Mr. Epp to make an opening statement.

Welcome.

**Weldon Epp (Assistant Deputy Minister, Indo-Pacific, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you very much for inviting us to speak today about Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy and the region as a whole.

Let me begin by saying that the Indo-Pacific remains the world's fastest-growing economic region and the primary driver of global growth. It comprises more than 40 economies, over four billion people and roughly \$50 trillion in economic activity.

[Translation]

As a peaceful nation, our prosperity, security and long-term resilience are increasingly influenced by the development of this re-

gion. However, while there are ample economic opportunities, geopolitical risks also increase.

According to the government, this new context only reinforces the relevance of the Indo-Pacific region for Canada. The five-year funding of Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy continues to support this central policy instrument to advance Canada's interests and objectives in the region. It's important to note that the strategy was designed as an adaptive framework with an integrated review process to react to an evolving regional context.

[English]

As we update the Indo-Pacific strategy—by “update” I mean both in action and in terms of policy advice and decisions taken over the past year—we are increasingly focusing on accelerating our trade diversification efforts, on building strong partnerships that reinforce economic resilience and strategic autonomy, and on developing variable geometry co-operation that draws on Canada's strengths in energy, critical minerals, technology, defence production, AI and other sectors. A concrete example of this is the new Australia-Canada-India technology and innovation partnership.

[Translation]

Let me say a few words about what Canada has accomplished since 2022.

First, Canada's commitment to the region has been reinforced through sustained engagement at the highest level. We had more ministerial and Prime Minister visits to the region between 2022 and 2026 than in any other comparable period in recent history.

Second, from a security standpoint, we've increased our naval presence in the region through Operation Horizon, our participation in multinational exercises, as well as sanctions monitoring through Operation Neon. We have new defence and security agreements with Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. Our partners appreciate the reinforced and regular nature of our engagement and recognize our contributions.

Third, trade and investment diversification remain at the heart of Canada's approach. Since 2023, Canada has led team Canada trade missions to nine Indo-Pacific markets, including six member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN. Canada also concluded negotiations on the Canada-Indonesia comprehensive economic partnership agreement last fall, and we continue to advance trade negotiations with ASEAN, the Philippines, Thailand and India.

• (1535)

[English]

Canada has also strengthened its commercial presence through expanded Export Development Canada offices across the region and increased regional engagement by FinDev Canada and the Asia Pacific Foundation, among others. I'll also point to the new office of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Manila, which is supporting market access, food security and supply chain resilience across the region.

Let me take a moment briefly to talk about some of our major regional partnerships.

Canada's strategic partnership with ASEAN, established in 2023, is elevating our engagement across Southeast Asia through deeper co-operation on the digital economy, energy transition and food security. These efforts advance our diversification objectives and strengthen Canada's supply chain resilience by positioning us as a long-term economic partner in the region. Following the Prime Minister's participation in last October's ASEAN summit, both sides are committed to completing negotiations on a Canada-ASEAN free trade agreement by the end of this year.

Separately, we've built dynamic, bilateral relationships with partner governments across the region. Canada's strengths in both conventional energy and clean energy across the subsectors position us as a reliable partner for countries across the region, including Japan and South Korea, as they navigate their energy transition or seek to enhance long-term energy security.

[Translation]

Let me say a few words about India. Over the past year, we've made significant progress in renewing our bilateral relationship, guided by a clear and pragmatic approach based on two complementary pillars: security and diplomacy. This two-track approach has allowed us to rebuild trust, restore regular channels of communication, and refocus co-operation as pluralistic democracies on shared responsibilities and interests.

As one of the world's fastest-growing economies, India is a critical component of Canada's trade diversification efforts. To this end, Prime Minister Carney and Prime Minister Modi have also agreed to start negotiations on an ambitious Canada-India comprehensive economic partnership agreement. We have concluded the first round of negotiations and are preparing for the next one. This reflects India's growing importance as a strategic and trade partner, as we are now ready to advance bilateral co-operation on a new Canada-India road map.

[English]

Beyond India, in South Asia, we are also actively deepening our engagement with Bangladesh and Pakistan. They're both poised to play an increasingly important part in our future and in the region's future, given their large populations and growing economies. We very much welcome Pakistan's recent role in helping mediate the recent ceasefire in the Middle East.

I have a couple of words about China, and then I'll wrap up. China remains an important commercial market for Canada in the Indo-Pacific. The Prime Minister's visit in January deepened high-level contact and improved predictability for both Canada and China through a newly refocused strategic partnership that emphasizes pragmatic and constructive co-operation in a few areas, such as energy, food security, trade and people-to-people ties. This recalibration of the relationship reflects the government's commitment to engaging with Beijing where it advances our interests, while remaining clear-eyed about areas of disagreement and concern and putting appropriate guardrails in place to protect our economic and national security.

• (1540)

[Translation]

In conclusion, my main message is that Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy is delivering real results for Canadians. It strengthens the country's economic resilience, fosters trade diversification, strengthens partnerships and positions Canada as a trusted partner.

[English]

Thanks for your attention. We look forward to answering any questions you have.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your remarks.

I now open the floor for questions, beginning with MP Michael Chong.

You have six minutes.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing today.

You mentioned an update to the Indo-Pacific strategy. Does this update include a new document, or are you not coming forward with a new Indo-Pacific document? The original one was introduced some time ago.

**Weldon Epp:** Mr. Chair, as members of this committee are well aware, the minister committed to updating the Indo-Pacific strategy when she met with the committee last fall. Since then, a lot of work has been under way. To directly answer your question, we've provided advice to the minister, so I won't speak about the details of it because it's still in that context, but there are two things I'd like to emphasize.

One is the intention of the original document. If you look at the strategy, including funding—it's more than just a document, as committee members know well—it was done in a way that we would make course corrections and update it as we go. It's my full expectation that the update is as much in the action set as it is in new documents.

With that said, the minister has been very busy consulting across the country—she was Vancouver last week with her colleagues in the region—with a range of stakeholders. I know this committee can expect to hear more about the format and the form of the update to come.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** We will be getting an updated document at some point. Is that fair to say?

**Weldon Epp:** I won't presume the format of an update and whether it will be a document, a speech or some other form. I'll leave that to the minister.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Thank you for that clarification.

My next question concerns Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific strategy. It makes reference to Taiwan more than half a dozen times, and a couple of those times, at the very least, it references strengthening economic ties with Taiwan. Reports indicate that the Canada-Taiwan bilateral trade co-operation framework agreement has been fully negotiated and initialled, but it's awaiting signature.

Can you tell us when the treaty will be signed and tabled in the House of Commons?

**Weldon Epp:** That's an excellent question. I will take the opportunity to clarify a couple of pieces.

The arrangement, as negotiated, we don't expect it to be tabled as it's not a treaty. It's not an FTA in the traditional state-to-state sense. The actual implementation of it will follow signature. What I will say is that since the Indo-Pacific strategy was launched, it is correct that we have strengthened in a number of ways, including economically, our engagement with Taiwan. That includes getting a FIPA, a foreign investment protection arrangement, across the finish line.

The arrangement the member refers to is an important opportunity for us to increase access for certain aspects of our economy. It is with the government. The government is considering the timing and the nature of moving forward on it.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I see. I stand corrected. It is an arrangement, not an agreement. I see that here. Thank you for clarifying that for the committee.

When can we expect this to move forward? Our understanding is that it's being held up at the senior levels of the government.

**Weldon Epp:** I'm not going to presume to predict that. There's a range of activities under way. I've never seen our trade negotiators as busy as they are now. There's also some due diligence to work on in terms of our stakeholders.

I fully expect that there will be decisions taken before too long on moving forward.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** We encourage the government to move on this expeditiously. We're very supportive of the arrangement. We think it will strengthen two-way trade between Canada and Taiwan,

which is one of the intentions of the purposes and priorities in the Indo-Pacific strategy, so we encourage the government to do that.

I have a question concerning the Prime Minister's clear statement at the ASEAN summit last year that Canada is an energy superpower, that we have the third-largest reserves of oil and that we are the fourth-largest natural gas producer in the world. Minister Anand indicated that this would be incorporated into the Indo-Pacific strategy.

When will we hear further details about how that will be prioritized as part of the strategy by the department?

• (1545)

**Weldon Epp:** Again, without prejudging any decision about the format of an update and whether you will get details in a speech or a document, what I can tell you is that the importance of the energy sector is one of a number of areas that the current government updated its approach to in the region in the last year.

I would mention that a couple of others include much more focus on defence industry sector partnerships. In energy, in particular, the nuclear sector has come into much more relief as a priority. You will see that already reflected in the results of the visit to India and in discussions on the ground with partners like the Philippines and Indonesia. There's a lot of work in that sector, whether it's in nuclear or LNG.

The agenda is very much reflected in the bilateral commitments and outcomes that have come in since the government's involvement.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I'll note that there's somewhat of an urgency about this, because while we've been largely insulated in North America and, to a lesser extent, Europe against the consequences of the war with Iran, it's Asia that has been really stressed when it comes to access to oil and gas. This dovetails nicely with the Prime Minister's commitment to expedite oil and gas exports to the region.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to Anita Vandenberg.

You have six minutes.

**Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the officials for being here.

When the Prime Minister gave his speech in Davos, he talked about finding, depending on what the issue is, those economic and security partners. We know that a lot of those middle powers and partners are in the Asia-Pacific region. We also know that democratic countries where there is a robust civic space, the rule of law and human rights make better partners, both for economics and for security. I note that the NATO Parliamentary Assembly has tied open democracies to security, and that democratic resilience is a security issue.

I wonder if I could first go to the CAF and DND officials to talk about whether, in our Indo-Pacific strategy, we are looking at that link between open societies and security. I'd then like to hear from the GAC officials.

**Inderjit Nijjar (Deputy Director General, International Security Policy, Department of National Defence):** Thank you very much for the question.

On the defence side, it is very much part and parcel in support of the overall objectives of the Indo-Pacific strategy writ large. We see it as an extension and an enabler.

To your question about enhancing peace, resiliency and security in the region, one of the areas of capacity building that I would point to, and a pillar of the IPS, is enhancing military training partnership efforts, especially in the area of women, peace and security. For instance, since 2023, we've trained nearly 1,000 personnel from key partners such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia, including in the area of WPS. I emphasize it only because this type of work is so important in enhancing gender integration and perspectives into military operations.

I'll turn it over to my GAC colleagues.

**Weldon Epp:** The premise of the question is exactly correct in that, as the Prime Minister has discussed and as our ministers are implementing, we are able to move faster in achieving Canadian interests with reliable partners. One definition of a reliable partner is, indeed, one with democratic, transparent politics so that we know what we're working with.

It speaks to our confidence in moving forward, for example, with a status of visiting forces agreement with the Philippines, and it speaks to our confidence in moving forward with intelligence-sharing agreements with Japan and Korea, to give just a couple of illustrations.

**Anita Vandenbeld:** Can we go to the GAC officials?

**Weldon Epp:** I should have clarified that that was on behalf of GAC.

**Anita Vandenbeld:** Could you elaborate a bit on how, in our diplomacy, we are engaging on things like human rights, women, peace and security? Perhaps you could give us some examples.

• (1550)

**Weldon Epp:** It's an excellent question. I would complement the comments from my colleague from DND by pointing out that one of the priority areas for ASEAN, as a community and in working with Canada, is to be quite concrete around issues of inclusion and rights. One of the areas they've prioritized for the last several years, which we continue to work on very closely with them, is the area of

women, peace and security. That is very concretely related to their concerns about inclusion and better outcomes in the training of the armed forces for a variety of things they would do.

I would say separately that we are very much committed to working with partners that share our values to address some of the more egregious and concerning human rights problems in the region. Some of them, the most acute, come to us through the civil war in Myanmar. We have been working with humanitarian funding, but also with tools to support NGOs that are strengthening civil society and strengthening their capacity to report, document and work towards justice and a conclusion to the civil war in Myanmar. None of that goes very easily, and it requires close partnerships with countries on the ground that know the region and know the relationships much better, so we have very active discussions with the broader ASEAN community.

**Anita Vandenbeld:** As we're seeing more geopolitical competition and authoritarian countries sharing their strategies with other countries, why is it important that we engage with countries that may be more likely to fall into that democratic backsliding? Why is it important that we have that economic and diplomatic engagement with those countries?

**Weldon Epp:** I would speak to one particular example close to my heart. I think Canada has had a very important, long-standing, meaningful relationship with the people and the Government of Mongolia. That country came out of the Cold War as a kind of hard authoritarian state, evolving into a very vibrant democracy but one in a small country with some economic constraints—not least of which is being surrounded by two countries with a very different view of politics and of accountability to their people. Over the years, Canada has been able to work very closely with a partner like Mongolia.

I would say that the example Mongolia provides, the evolution towards democracy Taiwan provides and the examples places like the Philippines provide I think give lie to the fairly facile thesis that economic development in Asia can only happen in the context of authoritarian hard-state politics. That's just not the case. We've seen incredible growth stories across the region from very diverse governments. We engage with all of them, but we very much engage to reinforce those that are accountable to their own people. That makes them much easier for us to work with in a broad range of interests.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next, we go to MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

You have the floor for six minutes.

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

Welcome, witnesses, and thank you for joining us.

As my friend Michael Chong so aptly put it, Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy that the government launched in 2022 specifically provided for the continued development of economic and personal ties with Taiwan, which is referenced several times.

Mr. Epp, in your opening remarks, you named many countries, but not once did you mention Taiwan. Your department has clearly changed direction regarding Taiwan.

We talked about the agreement reached in 2025, which just needs to be signed. That agreement covered important economic sectors for Quebec, such as AI and green energy. On top of that, last February, Radio-Canada revealed Taipei suspected Ottawa was delaying signing this agreement to preserve its relationship with China.

Has the government given your department any explanation as to why this agreement still hasn't been signed?

**Weldon Epp:** Thank you for the question.

The answer is no. We're waiting for more details regarding next steps. To date, we haven't received any instructions—

• (1555)

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** You're saying the government has yet to give you any explanation on this. Therefore, it didn't consult departmental experts on its reasons for signing or not signing this agreement.

**Weldon Epp:** I can say that on a number of occasions, we've had discussions on a range of opportunities and tools with respect to our engagement with Taiwan. However, to date, we haven't received any specific direction on that.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Has your department assessed the economic impact for Quebec of signing or not signing this agreement, for example?

**Weldon Epp:** Yes. I'll let my colleague Darren Smith answer. He was a negotiator on that.

**Darren Smith (Executive Director, Indo-Pacific Trade Policy Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you, Mr. Epp.

Honourable member, the quick answer to your question is no.

[English]

It's necessary to understand what this trade co-operation framework arrangement is. First and foremost, it's effectively a modalities document. For easy comparison, you can take a look at what the U.K. and Taiwan accomplished. It's a very similar kind of structure. It basically sets out process, architecture, contact points and those kinds of elements. The arrangement, similar to what the U.K. did, sets out to articulate a vision for basically the commencement of supplementary arrangements that could move forward.

In that regard, some of the interest you expressed with respect to *l'économie verte*, digital and issues like that—I think you specifically mentioned artificial intelligence—could very much be captured in our work with Taiwan, and it has been a part of our work anyway. Weldon could probably articulate more in terms of the CTEC process. It's a long-standing arrangement we have with Taiwan to look at these types of issues.

I would say our work with Taiwan has continued all throughout 2025 and 2026. We've been talking to them about issues pertaining to the global trading environment. We ourselves are very much cognizant of some of the issues related to supply chain resiliency and their agreement with the U.S., which was just concluded in February. All of these issues are part of the same mix.

[Translation]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you.

I hear what you're saying, but this is a risk-free agreement. There are no tariffs at stake. It's a framework, as they say. Great Britain already has a similar agreement. There's no good reason not to sign this negotiated agreement. Both parties agreed to all the details. The only thing missing is the signature. Unfortunately, looking at this very objectively, the only valid reason not to sign this agreement is that we don't want to offend Beijing. I think any international expert would tell us that. There's no other valid reason, unless you can give me one.

Your silence tells me I am absolutely right. Through its department, the Canadian government is telling us that we're not signing a risk-free agreement with Taiwan, because we don't want to offend Beijing.

Regarding Beijing, you talked about resilient supply chains and human rights. A study by the University of Sheffield very clearly shows that forced labour is used in the production of Chinese electric cars, particularly in Xinjiang, where there are a lot of mining and aluminum industries. We have those studies. We have a number of studies showing forced labour is used in the Chinese electric car production supply chains, yet the government signed an agreement to lower tariffs on canola in exchange for 49,000 Chinese electric cars.

You said we need to pay attention to supply chains. Here, you have proof that forced labour is involved in these supply chains. It's been shown. Isn't that a bit contradictory?

**Weldon Epp:** I think you'll agree supply chains are quite complex in any sector. There's a lot of complexity, even in China itself. There are several global brands, such as Chery or BYD. It's very important to look at each case and each project specifically.

We use a series or a range of tools that allow us to keep track of products made from forced labour. They've been around for a few years. The Prime Minister recently strengthened our internal vigilance capabilities by investing in the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency.

Also, we'll continue to share the responsibility with Canadian companies. In fact, we require Canadian companies themselves participate in an oversight process, especially when it comes to Xinjiang. We have a statement we ask our companies with investments on the ground to adhere to. All of these tools will evolve when necessary so we can have strategic partnerships that make sense for Canada's interests. At the same time, we won't ignore the possibility that there are goods or supply chains linked to forced labour.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Weldon Epp:** I don't think it's a contradiction, but it's quite complex.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We go next to MP Rood.

You have five minutes.

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

Thank you very much, witnesses, for being here today.

Back in October 2025, the Liberals promised an updated Indo-Pacific strategy as soon as possible, and here we are in April 2026 still waiting. I'm curious. Do you have any idea why the government missed yet another self-imposed deadline while Canadian families continue to pay the price for delayed economic security?

**Weldon Epp:** Sitting where I am, as an official responsible for the Indo-Pacific, I would say that I have a lot of sympathy for colleagues who have been working on Europe and who have been working on the Middle East. It's been a busy year. I know that our minister is on the road almost constantly, with a very heavy list of objectives but also reacting to the world as it is.

I think it's very clear that she has not self-imposed any kind of deadline, but she has made it very clear that she would like to come back with an update. We've been active in providing advice. She has been active in consulting stakeholders, organizations and foreign governments. There's a lot of work under way, but there's also a lot happening in the world.

In the meantime, I think what should be understood—I hope—by the members of this committee or the public is that this is a five-year funded strategy. The funding is across 17 departments. That funding, those tools and those initiatives continue until they don't. There's a lot of work that will continue. I think it's reasonable to expect that the original objectives of the strategy—like diversification—will continue, and the government is doubling down on those.

I would just caution the members of the committee on seeing some kind of major before-and-after moment. This is an evolution of a strategy that the government, in its own activity today, continues to double down on, be it in trade diversification or economic security partnerships.

**Lianne Rood:** Thank you.

The 2022 strategy labelled China as “an increasingly disruptive global power” that seeks to “shape the international order”, yet Canada remains dangerously dependent on Beijing while our oil and gas sit idle. Why hasn't the department used Canadian LNG and crude exports to give our Indo-Pacific allies a reliable, ethical alternative to adversarial suppliers?

**Weldon Epp:** I can agree with the member on the premise of the question, in the sense that Canada has a lot on offer for partners in the Indo-Pacific. We are very much in demand. The question came up earlier with respect to recent events in the Middle East putting pressure on a lot of economies for energy supply.

Some of the investments that began under the Indo-Pacific strategy now need to continue at pace, linked to the current government's major projects strategy. I would point to things like engagement across the region to encourage more investment in LNG. LNG Canada phase two is coming to decision points very soon. Across the previous government and the current government, a lot of work has gone into trying to engage the private sector in the region to invest in those opportunities.

Lastly, these countries, whatever we think about their governance, have economies that are some of the biggest in the world and have an impact on climate change and pollution, the pollution we breathe. The possibility, then, of pivoting towards cleaner energy for countries like China is of interest to Canadians and something that we're going to continue to promote.

• (1605)

**Lianne Rood:** On that same point, nearly four years and \$2.3 billion later, the first LNG cargo left Kitimat for Asia only in 2025, after years of lots of what I would call Liberal red tape. The goalposts keep changing.

I'm curious. Do you know if the goalposts will keep changing for the government before Canadian energy finally becomes the cornerstone of our Indo-Pacific strategy?

**Weldon Epp:** I can say that I've travelled a lot, in my own role and with various ministers, to the region. Energy is one of the inescapable and key talking points for our partners in the region. They are responding very positively to decisions taken by the government to work at reducing permitting times to put more predictability into new projects. Those priorities of the government have landed with an incredible welcome in audiences across the region.

Also welcomed has been the mark of trust building or confidence in having LNG Canada phase one come online. I take the point that this was recent, but having the proof point of LNG shipments to the region from the west coast of Canada has been a major confidence boost, as has been the offtake for oil coming through Trans Mountain. I take the confident view that we have something the region wants. We have a bit more confidence that Canada can deliver, and the government has made it very clear that it wants to move even faster.

**Lianne Rood:** The Prime Minister has called Canada an energy superpower, yet the Indo-Pacific strategy barely mentions our oil and gas potential. Why has the department failed to prioritize Pacific LNG and crude infrastructure when Asia's allies are desperate to secure non-Russian, non-Middle Eastern supply?

**Weldon Epp:** I think that points to the value of the update, and the minister has spoken about that.

Regarding the legitimate questions about what was or was not in the original strategy, I would say that, since the strategy was launched, a lot has changed in the world, and some things remain the same. What has changed is that energy has become an even more critical issue for national sovereignty and supply chain security. I expect the update to be—as the government's actions have been—very focused on that, among other areas where we're refocusing our efforts under the strategy.

**Lianne Rood:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much

We'll go next to MP Mona Fortier.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

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

I especially want to thank the witnesses for joining us in the first meeting of this review we've just begun. I also thank them for their hard work. We don't tell them often enough. They put a lot of effort in their work, and we know they support us in this task.

The first thing I'd like to do is invite committee members to participate actively. We have a forum to participate in this review, and we must seize this opportunity.

If I understand correctly, the minister referenced this when she said: The world has changed since the Indo-Pacific strategy was published, and we have to make sure our foreign policy now meets the needs of Canada.

I think this forum gives us a perfect opportunity to ask the witnesses questions and perhaps contribute to how this review and up-

date of Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy are perceived. I therefore invite my colleagues on the other side of the House to do this exercise with us.

Mr. Epp, you said the minister is also undertaking consultations with stakeholders. Could you tell us, and those watching our proceedings today, how we can participate in this review as Canadians or as parliamentarians?

**Weldon Epp:** Thank you for the question.

I completely agree with you. We'll take into account the comments made during today's meeting and at future meetings on the committee's current study when we advise the minister on the next steps and the renewal of our strategy. Also, MPs have a role to play, because they have contacts and ties and are part of parliamentary groups, such as the Canada-Indonesia group.

Global Affairs Canada encourages you to take advantage of these ties, contacts and platforms to strengthen our relations in the Indo-Pacific region. One of the first objectives of the strategy was to increase our presence and be more reliable in the region. This is an objective not only for the government, but also for Canadians, whether we're talking about businesses, organizations, or members of Parliament.

• (1610)

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** In your frame of reference or in the exercise that you're carrying out and that we can take part in, are there any results that we need to achieve? How can we achieve them? Can we take any winning conditions into account in order to carry out this review properly?

**Weldon Epp:** I'll give you a two-part answer. The first part is a bit more technocratic and it relates to the work of our officials. We're embarking once again on a whole horizontal evaluation process for all the initiatives, funds and tools involved in our work in the Indo-Pacific region. We need to assess, in a slightly more technical manner, the results directly tied to Canadians' investments. This plays a key role in informing the government's next steps, especially if it decides to renew the strategy for another five years with additional resources.

Regarding the other part of the question, we already have a good idea of the diplomatic responses to our strategy. We have a good idea based on feedback from our heads of mission in the region, in particular through meetings with the minister, Ms. Anand. This feedback gives us a good idea of what works and of what topics and engagements matter and affect our interests in the region.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** I don't have much time left.

I see that we've already opened new diplomatic and trade offices in Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam and Fiji. We also have the Indo-Pacific Agriculture and Agri-Food Office in the Philippines. Are there any plans to open other offices? If so, how will we assess the need for them? Do you have any comments to make in this area?

You probably won't have time to answer right away, but maybe you can do so later in the meeting.

**Weldon Epp:** That's exactly right. We're actually preparing an opinion that includes some aspects that you pointed out.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

MP Brunelle-Duceppe, you have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Epp, I would like to pick up on Ms. Fortier's comments. I want to highlight the work that you do. You obviously carry it out with the utmost professionalism.

By the way, Mr. Smith, I gather that you took part in the negotiations on the much-touted agreement with Taiwan that I referred to. Can you tell the committee how long it took to reach the agreement in principle in March 2025? Did the negotiations take hours, days or weeks of work? Can you give the committee a timeline?

[English]

**Darren Smith:** In terms of our work with Taiwan, it's difficult for me to put a specific number on it. As I've said, we've been working with Taiwan since I took over my position in about 2024-25. We haven't actually had a break in that work. It's just been a continual engagement with Taiwan. As I said before, we did have an opportunity to do some work where we had a sense of modalities that we wanted to utilize once this process continued and where we could get into more of a substantive discussion on these matters.

With respect to the work that was referenced in terms of last spring, it's a milestone. It's important to understand, as well, that there's been a lot of dynamic activities in the international trading system over the course of 2025-26. As trade negotiators, we're trying to figure out ways in which we can take into account all these changes that have taken place in the global trading environment, especially on supply chains with Taiwan, which play, of course, a very important role with respect to the semiconductor space, etc.

In that regard, it's also a reality that there have been activities between Taiwan and its trading partners, including the U.S., that we have to take into account as we look forward to how we operationalize the TCFA.

This is information that we provide to the minister's office on an ongoing basis. That will be part of the decision-making construct. This is an evolving space. As I said, the deal with the U.S. just came on board a couple of weeks ago. You have to understand that the work from last spring is just simply on the modalities function and not really on substance.

• (1615)

[Translation]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I understand. However, when Taiwan's deputy minister of foreign affairs and Taiwan's representative in Canada are asking us to sign, I assume that the agreement is in place and that no further work is needed. It's done and settled.

[English]

**The Chair:** Please give a very brief response, because we're out of time.

**Darren Smith:** I very much respect the head of the Taiwan office here in Canada, but there is actually a lot more work in front of us.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to MP Ziad Aboultaif for five minutes.

**Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC):** Thank you all for doing what you're doing for Canada. I know that it takes a high level of professionalism and knowledge to do what you're doing.

Mr. Epp, during the negotiations with the Chinese government, there were things that we definitely hold against China, for example, some human rights values, child labour and interference in our electoral systems.

Were these items on the table when you were talking to the Chinese?

**Weldon Epp:** As the question was framed in terms of the negotiations, let me try to get to a straight-up answer to the question.

We have raised, and we will continue to raise in the future, a range of issues of concern with respect to China and our relations with China. It includes human rights issues, foreign interference and transnational repression. During the visit of the Prime Minister of Canada, if that's the specific window you're focused on, the Prime Minister himself, Minister Anand and others have spoken to a wide range of concerns, including human rights concerns. They were raised at all levels.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** Were they on the table?

**Weldon Epp:** Mr. Chair, I will—

**Ziad Aboultaif:** Just a yes or no, if you can, because I have another question after that.

**Weldon Epp:** As I've said, and as the Prime Minister has said, a wide range of concerns, including human rights, were raised in multiple meetings at all levels during the visit of the Prime Minister to China.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** Were they on the menu?

**Weldon Epp:** I'm not going to use euphemisms. I'll say it directly. The Prime Minister and Minister Anand, during that visit, raised a variety of issues, including human rights issues, during their series of meetings.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** Was there any preconditioning? What were the negotiation preconditions for both sides, our side and the Chinese side, as highlighted for this committee?

**Weldon Epp:** I'm not comfortable saying categorically what the answer to that question would be, because I would just remind the members of the committee that the update to our approach, our recalibration of relations with China, actually had a number of different tracks. To be very specific, there were resolutions to trade issues, access for canola, etc. There were discussions on those tracks. There were discussions about how we move forward. The moving forward was about taking what had been an existing strategic partnership that was broad and ambitious and dated to a different era, and saying, "What can we do to make it fit for purpose and focused in 2026?"

There were no preconditions in the sense that you are asking. There were interests. It was in our interest to say that our ability to move forward in a relationship with China needs to have a security table. It needs to have an opportunity for us to talk about issues of human rights.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** In order to come up with an agreement, you're sitting at the negotiation table. I know that negotiation is a two-way street. It's not just one way or the other. It's both ways. Both parties have to agree. Sometimes you have to leave things off the table. Sometimes you need to take it out.

What have we compromised in order to get that understanding you're talking about with regard to China?

• (1620)

**Weldon Epp:** I understand. I think the way that I would best answer that is to say that the strategic partnership, the outcome documents, from the Prime Minister's visit are actually quite unusual. They're quite explicit. They're quite long. It's not for every visit that the Prime Minister makes or every engagement we have with China that we're that explicit.

Those documents speak to a number of... I wouldn't frame them as "conditions" but as a number of interests Canada had. One of them I would highlight is—as we are discussing with them the modalities of implementing, of re-implementing, what had previously existed but had been broken—a regular table to raise issues of security and law enforcement. That's important, because if we're going to advance a relationship between Canada and China, be it economic, be it people to people, we also have to have regular access at the most senior levels to talk about some of the challenges you've just raised.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** A quick example are the Chinese police stations in Canada. Was that a condition, from our side on the table, to move forward?

**Weldon Epp:** To move forward, the intention is for exactly those sorts of issues to be a regular part of our agenda. The concerns we have about foreign interference, concerns we may have about the applicability of Chinese law—long-arm jurisdiction, transnational repression—those sorts of issues are issues that are appropriate for discussing in our law enforcement and rule-of-law dialogue, and that is one of the objectives coming out of the updated strategic partnership.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, MP Aboultaif.

We'll go to MP Stéphane Lauzon.

Welcome to the committee. You have five minutes for questions and comments.

**Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.):** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I will ask my questions in French.

[*Translation*]

I would like to start with Colonel Jerome Patry.

Since the adoption of its Indo-Pacific strategy in 2022, Canada has clearly strengthened its presence and engagement in this region. My question is meant to reassure Canadians. I think that we have a role to play in this.

How has Canada's military posture in the Indo-Pacific region changed since 2022? What position have we taken since 2022? Can we talk about capabilities? Have there been additional deployments to meet these needs, or are they meant to protect Canadian sovereignty and contribute to regional stability?

**Col Jerome Patry (J35 Expeditionary, Future Operations, Canadian Joint Operations Command, Canadian Armed Forces):** Thank you for that excellent question, Mr. Lauzon.

I'll start by referring to what my colleague from foreign affairs said at the beginning of the meeting. He mentioned Operation Horizon, which was launched to implement the defence elements of the strategy. The purpose of the mission is to promote peace, resilience and security in the Indo-Pacific region, and to increase respect for international law.

Operation Horizon replaced what we used to do. We now have episodic deployments in support of a persistent and predictable presence in the region through land, air, cyber, space and special operations forces activities.

Under Operation Horizon, we have increased our regional and multinational involvement through a series of exercises in the region, each with a specific goal, from enhancing interoperability with other countries to supporting capacity building.

**Stéphane Lauzon:** That's a great answer for the committee's information, but you didn't mention respect for human rights or our commitments to democratic governance and the rules-based international order.

Are those rules respected? Can you talk about that a bit?

**Col Jerome Patry:** Of course.

When we talk about capacity building in the region, we're talking about participating in exercises that build trust, both our trust in our allies and their trust in us. It helps to strengthen those ties. We do that in a number of ways, including through land and maritime operations.

• (1625)

**Stéphane Lauzon:** Since 2022, have you felt that other countries and India have more trust in Canada?

**Col Jerome Patry:** That's hard to say at this time.

**Stéphane Lauzon:** I'm asking more about the feeling you get on the ground. Do you feel the relationship is better today than it was at the beginning of your mandate?

**Col Jerome Patry:** I would say that our participation in each of the major multinational exercises in the region has increased significantly. Previously, we were mainly observers during the exercises, and now, we are main contributors.

Exercise BALIKATAN comes to mind. It's coming up soon, and we will be the third international contributor in terms of number of forces deployed.

The size, intensity and impact of our involvement in the region has definitely increased under Operation Horizon.

**Stéphane Lauzon:** All right. I'm almost out of time, with just 20 seconds left, so I'm going to ask you to send us a recommendation relating to your area of expertise that we could include in our final report, something that would help you in your decision-making. The committee would be delighted to have that information and to discuss it when we draft our report.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. You were right on time.

We'll go next to MP Kronis for five minutes.

**Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Epp, has Canada's rapprochement with China created any changes to Canada's approach to Taiwan?

**Weldon Epp:** None that I am aware of.

**Tamara Kronis:** The Indo-Pacific strategy actually commits to “push back against any unilateral actions that threaten the status quo in the Taiwan Strait”. It also identifies China as an “increasingly disruptive” power. Has anything in that assessment changed?

**Weldon Epp:** The base assessment of China's foreign policy intent, its national security enterprise and what it sets out as its own goals—none of that has changed. None of our partners see a change in that. What we do see is a change in the international environment. We should expect, tactically, China to do things differently from time to time. For example, there was a period when wolf warrior diplomacy was the best idea. This has changed to a charm of offensive.

They're very clear on their national objectives. Those include, from their point of view, national reunification with Taiwan, so everybody is on the same baseline. That baseline hasn't changed. What is the case is that the government continues to support... We've had a broad range of business delegations. Our Canadian trade office in Taipei has had a banner year. It's been very busy. We've seen trade grow. We signed a FIPA since the Indo-Pacific strategy was passed. Again—

**Tamara Kronis:** Absolutely. I mean, we totally understand that you've been very busy. I'm trying to understand this, though: The world has changed, yet on some level what's being said here is that we're waiting for what seems to be—or is being pitched as—an incremental update to the Pacific strategy. If not much has changed,

then why don't we have it? If a lot has changed, then what is actually changing?

**Weldon Epp:** Again, the exam question answer, or the project to get to, is that Canada was always.... It's not one of before or after. It wasn't that Canada wasn't in the Indo-Pacific until the strategy and now we are. The idea was always to take a very significant step up in terms of our capacity to pursue our economic and security goals in the region.

That is the continuity piece. Any version for any government or engagement in the Indo-Pacific will be about that. What has changed, though, is the international environment since it was launched. We've had the deepening of the conflict in Ukraine. We've had conflict in the Middle East. We've had a different government come to office in the United States. Whether for Canada or for China and other actors, the balance of priorities and operational commitments will evolve with that.

Canada has continued, though, to deepen, as the colonel just spoke to, our security presence in the region. It continues to increase. We signed, again, just last year, the Minister of National Defence—

• (1630)

**Tamara Kronis:** I understand all that, but I'm actually asking a directional question.

In the existing policy, Canada is seen as an “increasingly disruptive” force.

**Weldon Epp:** It's China.

**Tamara Kronis:** I'm sorry. China is seen as an “increasingly disruptive” force.

Does Canada still see China as an “increasingly disruptive” force in the region?

**Weldon Epp:** What I would say is that this assessment.... By the way, and not because members of the committee don't know this—it's for any Canadians listening—the strategy had quite a bit of text about China. I've spent a lot of time in the last few years talking about one word. That word is not a pejorative word. It's a descriptive word. China is disruptive in economic terms, in innovation terms and, potentially, in security terms.

This description used at the time continues to be the case. When the Prime Minister was asked this in Beijing, he said that there are multiple superpowers in the world that are disruptive. This was a term from a previous government—

**Tamara Kronis:** Is it increasingly so?

**Weldon Epp:** I didn't hear him say that. I don't—

**Tamara Kronis:** It's in our current strategy. Can we expect to see the word “increasingly” removed?

**Weldon Epp:** Again, I'm in a position only to say that we're in the process of giving advice to government. I can't speak to advice that is privileged for government.

What I can expect to see is this: For a baseline assessment of a region that's increasingly important, we need to be there in both security terms and economic terms. I don't see that baseline changing, and the activity the colonel just spoke to is the proof point.

**Tamara Kronis:** In the few seconds I have left, I would love to hear from the colonel.

Is it the Canadian Armed Forces' position that Canada remains an "increasingly disruptive" force in the region?

**The Chair:** Give us a very brief response.

**Tamara Kronis:** A yes or no would be great.

**The Chair:** You mean China. You said "Canada".

**Tamara Kronis:** I apologize. I mean China. I'm thinking about Canada. That is where my heart always is.

**The Chair:** Give us a very brief response.

**Inderjit Nijjar:** I'll jump in for the defence team and echo that our focus is on the Canadian Armed Forces and our work emphasizing predictability, transparency and respect for international law in the region.

**Tamara Kronis:** That's not an answer.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll next go to MP Vandenbeld.

You have five minutes.

**Anita Vandenbeld:** Thank you very much.

I'd like to switch gears a bit and talk about the development and humanitarian support that Canada provides in the region.

We know this is a region with a wide variety. We have a number of countries emerging out of "least developed country" status, like Bangladesh, and countries that are ODA-eligible yet starting to become donor countries themselves, especially in the south. Look at Indonesia, Philippines and others.

I wonder if you could talk a bit about how Canada is engaging with these countries in terms of humanitarian needs. There are tremendous needs, for instance, in the situation with the Rohingya. More importantly, how are we moving toward support and partnership in development?

**Weldon Epp:** It's an excellent question because it does indeed point to one of the areas we see evolving and getting updated in terms of Canada's approach in the region.

Canada has been a long-time donor in the Indo-Pacific. We can think all the way back to the Colombo plan. Canada has a strong brand and has been seen as a strong partner in the region for a long time. It is the case today that many countries we've been a development partner with for decades are economies that are very much in transition. Some of them are now lower-middle-income economies. Their need to continue to develop requires us to be nimble and to look at the approaches and the partnership Canada can bring to the table.

The thing I will say, quite concretely, is that this provides an excellent opportunity for something Secretary of State Sarai has spoken about: bringing in the Canadian private sector. There needs to be a continuum for our development assistance partnerships with economies that are lower middle income—Indonesia, Vietnam, etc.—where Canada has been a strong development partner. We now have an FTA in the case of Indonesia. It was just negotiated. The tool kit can't just be two separate worlds. It really needs to come together. The secretary of state has spoken about this being one of his top three priorities for the region.

I can talk about other aspects.

There will continue to be a lot of work done to address the needs identified by our partners in the region, be it inclusive economies—that is, working with communities on better inclusion of women and girls in their economies—humanitarian issues or disaster risk and resilience. Those will continue. Watch this space in terms of how we work more closely with FinDev Canada, the trade commissioner service and others to bring blended financing solutions, etc.

The last example I'll give in that regard is with respect to free trade agreements. We committed to providing support to the Indonesian government to make sure they get their game up so we can see strong utilization by companies from both sides with respect to high standards, be they for the environment or labour.

• (1635)

**Anita Vandenbeld:** Thank you, and thank you for mentioning the environment, because I know that Canada has also taken a leadership role when it comes to small island states, particularly when it comes to climate.

Could you tell us a little bit about Canada's leadership in terms of helping with climate mitigation and adaptation in some of the countries in the region?

**Weldon Epp:** Perhaps I can give a couple of illustrations of areas of work already under way by terrific Canadian partners, Canadian NGOs and others. This speaks to climate adaptation in terms of economic capacity. We have projects in both the Philippines and Indonesia that work with small business owners, mostly women-led businesses, to adjust to climate mitigation in climates that are increasingly at the front line of seeing traditional livelihoods being affected, be those farming, fishing, etc.

Another area, and this points to the capacity we now have, as a previous member of the committee mentioned, there is a new mission in Suva, Fiji. We have the capacity to work in a much more productive and responsive way with Pacific Island countries. The Kiwa initiative is an example where we are working together with other donors because we're a newer, smaller player, I would say, in the development space in the Pacific. We are working with France, among other partners, to support climate mitigation across small island states in the Pacific. The Kiwa initiative would be another example of that work.

**Anita Vandenbeld:** You mentioned women and women as economic drivers in their communities. Our feminist international assistance policy, of course, means that women are not just beneficiaries of aid but are drivers and part of the design and the delivery of programs.

Could you tell us a little bit about that?

**The Chair:** Again, give a very brief response, because we're a little bit over time.

**Weldon Epp:** Very briefly, I've had the privilege of being able to travel with our ministers to the region and see a number of incredibly important projects that demonstrate the value of bringing that lens not only to the what but to how we develop our systems. How we develop and work with countries to develop their economies is as important as the what. It brings in inclusivity. It brings in women and girls, and that will continue to be a priority.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll go next to MP Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Epp, we recently did a study on Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. Officials from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service gave us a presentation, during a public meeting, of course, and they said that the two biggest threats to Canada's Arctic sovereignty were Russia and China.

That information was shared during a public meeting, so it's in the public domain. Does your assessment of what we are now doing take that information into account, when it comes to Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy?

**Weldon Epp:** That's a great question.

I'll talk about a few aspects of our work that tie in with that.

We stepped up our conversations with democratic partners that have a legitimate interest in the region, Japan and South Korea, for instance.

When it comes to approaches in Canada's Arctic, we still have that Indo-Pacific relationship. We and our partners, so the U.S., South Korea and Japan, need to be more confident and to be more active in managing maritime activity intelligence. We have made investments that will help us do more on the front.

We also have partnerships with Japan and South Korea involving the Canadian Coast Guard. That will be very important.

In addition, the government has made investments, which the committee members are very familiar with, in our capacity to have a greater presence on the ground in Canada's north, across all domains.

• (1640)

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** As we've seen, budget spending on defence and recruitment is rising in Canada.

Conversely, international aid and development spending was cut considerably in the last budget. We're talking about \$2.5 million.

What impact will those cuts to international aid have on the Indo-Pacific region, do you think? Are they also taken into account, as far as Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy goes?

**Weldon Epp:** We are well aware that one of the government's priorities is to cut spending. Those cuts are real and will have an impact.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** That's not the case in defence.

**Weldon Epp:** Choices have to be made, and it's up to the government to make them. It's not my—

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** No, but I'd like to know what impact the cuts will have.

**Weldon Epp:** As far as the development budget and its impact on the Pacific region is concerned, I just described an approach I think is very important. We have more opportunity to work in partnership with developing countries. The tools we have are more than just development dollars; increasingly, the private sector is able to leverage our technology and contribute to development goals, such as in the energy arena in the Philippines.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[English]

We go next to MP Michael Chong.

You have five minutes.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Thank you.

I want to ask a bit about this memorandum of understanding that the Government of Canada entered into between the RCMP and China's Ministry of Public Security. My understanding is that this is the only memorandum that hasn't been made public.

Is that correct?

**Weldon Epp:** I would have to check, but I think that could be the case.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Can you speak a bit to the broad terms, since it's not being made public?

There are concerns that people have about this memorandum of understanding, and understandably so, because previously there had been co-operation between the RCMP and Chinese authorities on information sharing to prosecute criminals. The PRC ended up taking that information and persecuting dissidents. Operation Fox Hunt comes to mind.

What is in the memorandum of understanding that ensures that China is not going to use information conveyed to it by the RCMP or other Canadian authorities to target individuals critical of the PRC?

**Weldon Epp:** There are two things I might say in terms of the question. I won't speak to the details of the MOU. I think the RCMP can do so.

The concerns that are raised here are based on experience and concerns that are shared by Canadians and communities that have been targeted for transnational repression. Those are well known to us, and they remain a priority. These are discussions we have regularly.

Just to be clear with the committee, the focus of the next steps in terms of co-operation between the RCMP and the MPS has been very much on trying to move toward a much more practical outcome-oriented conversation on fentanyl, among other things. We are also looking at discussions that get to more practical co-operation on issues of international online scam centres that are supported by international crime.

There are a number of concrete things there, but the premise of the question is understood.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Speaking of practicalities and areas that are the department's responsibility, does it touch on issues like the illegal police stations that were established by the PRC here in Canada over the last several years?

**Weldon Epp:** It doesn't preclude that, but that topic is one that we would expect to be actively pursuing as we stand up the rule-of-law dialogue.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Is that captured by this particular memorandum of understanding, or is that being pursued by the department under a different rubric?

**Weldon Epp:** We will be pursuing issues like police stations, issues that cross the line of foreign interference, through the rule-of-law dialogue that we'll put in place—as, in any case, we have diplomatically.

We have raised those issues at every opportunity. The challenge in the Chinese system is to be raising them with the right interlocutor. I expect we will use all tables, including our channel through the RCMP with the MPS but also a more regular, agenda-setting “public safety senior official to counterpart” rule-of-law dialogue, to touch on issues like the police stations.

• (1645)

**Hon. Michael Chong:** The memorandum partially captures that—

**Weldon Epp:** Again, I'm not going to speak to the details of the MOU, which hasn't been released. I think the RCMP can.

The agenda for us will continue, and the possibility of doing so more directly is now before us.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I understand your answer. Thank you.

I want to shift back to the government's position that Canada is going to massively increase the export of oil and gas to the Indo-Pacific region.

The Prime Minister last year signed a letter of intent between Canada and Malaysia to increase investment in LNG exports, among other things, to Malaysia. One of Malaysia's largest companies, Petronas is the part owner of LNG Canada. The plan, in phase two, is to double up the B.C. Coastal GasLink pipeline and to double up the ability of that export terminal.

Seeing that this letter of intent has been signed, how involved is the department in working on this issue?

**Weldon Epp:** My answer to the question would be that our department's most active proponent and champion of this is our high commissioner to Kuala Lumpur, Jodi Robinson. She reports to me. We're very actively prioritizing this area of work. It's an area of work that, as you mentioned, Petronas has led, and we're supportive of Petronas's work.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** How does—

**The Chair:** You're out of time. I'm sorry.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** You were over by 30 seconds.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I'd like to take the next round.

**The Chair:** That is no problem.

Next is MP Mona Fortier.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I said earlier, this is an opportunity to have a conversation.

Mr. Epp, I want to talk about one of my favourite aspects of the work I do in my role, the francophonie. With the strategy's review, I think we have an opportunity to make sure that the francophone community plays a bigger role. I say that because the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie just released its report on the state of French around the world, entitled “La langue française dans le monde”.

Did you know that French is now the fourth most spoken language in the world? It used to be number five. According to the report, French is the second most learned foreign language in the world, with some 170 million people learning the language. The report also states that French is the third most popular language in the business and economic sector. It's an asset for building business relationships. I could go on.

Suffice it to say that those three examples show how we can shine a spotlight on the francophone dimension and leverage the opportunities it provides, as we review Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy. As we know, the francophonie summit is being held in the Indo-Pacific region this fall, in November, I believe. It's taking place in Cambodia, so that provides an excellent opportunity.

As we know, in Canada, we want to make sure that the francophonie continues to prosper. We are bidding to host the 2028 summit.

What role could the francophonie play in all this? Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Weldon Epp:** I'll answer the question first, but Ms. Samaan may have more to say afterwards.

I think we have a very promising opportunity this year. I believe this is the first time in 20 years that the francophonie summit is being held in Cambodia, in Asia. Canada, Quebec, New Brunswick, France and others will play an important role, to be sure. We especially have an opportunity to promote not just the French language, but also people-to-people ties.

Cambodia's most important bank, its biggest bank, is the National Bank. Our business network in Cambodia has extensive ties to Quebec. The federal government has tools to strengthen the government's role in the financial system. Not long ago, Canada opened an embassy in Cambodia, in Phnom Penh.

I totally agree that we'll have an opportunity this year to leverage our partnership with the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie and strengthen those voices.

Do you have anything to add, Ms. Samaan?

• (1650)

**Valérie Samaan (Director General, Indo-Pacific Strategy Planning, Policy and Operations, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** I'll just add a few comments.

In terms of the francophonie's place in the updated strategy, we could see phase two of the strategy in the next few months.

As you know, under phase one of the strategy, the opportunity remains, after five years, to not just update it, but also expand and further develop it. The idea is to determine whether the strategy is well-suited to our needs in the next five years, so from 2028 to 2033. It will give us an opportunity to see whether it's possible to incorporate the francophonie, issues other than energy and other aspects that have been mentioned today.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** I hope that addition will be part of the review currently being carried out, in connection with another possible summit, as I understand it.

As we know, Canada is strengthening its presence as part of a digital trade agreement. You talked about that. Can you tell the committee about Canada's bid to host the 2029 summit? Is there information you can share with us about that?

**Weldon Epp:** That's correct. We launched a campaign, if you will, advising the other members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, or APEC, forum—not the Association of Southeast Asian Nations—of our capacity to host the 2029 APEC summit.

There's a whole process, and the other members have to support the bid. It is a possibility, and I believe only two other countries are still in contention. We are waiting for an official letter confirming certain countries' support for our bid. At that point, planning would get under way to host the APEC summit in a few years.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll go again to MP Michael Chong.

You have five minutes.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I want to continue my questioning on Petronas.

The Prime Minister indicated that Canada could double its LNG exports from 50 million tonnes a year, which is expected by 2030, to 100 million tonnes a year by 2040. That would be a fairly sizable increase in Canadian LNG exports, if it were to happen. I want to understand a bit more about what is actually going on in terms of the machinery of making this all happen. Phase two has been referred to the Major Projects Office.

How is this all being coordinated with GAC? Is the ambassador in Kuala Lumpur talking to the Major Projects Office? How is this all working?

**Weldon Epp:** That's an excellent question. I may fall short in providing entire clarity on it, but I can speak to the GAC role.

Clearly, part of the challenge, but also what we're seeing moving and taking hold, is that this is about making sure we have a clear value proposition and clarity on process and expectations. That gets to things like permitting, timelines, etc. Some of the policy changes that the government has announced in terms of how we go about major projects, as well as identifying a key centre of accountability for delivery, which is the Major Projects Office, are part of the equation.

The other part is then making sure that potential proponents or participants understand the opportunity. That's where GAC steps in. Our high commissioner in KL is super active and knows the C-suite of Petronas very well. She introduced them to me, to Minister Anand and to the Prime Minister.

We're going to continue to keep those lines open. I can say that company in particular, without getting into something commercially confidential, is incredibly sophisticated, having been, as you pointed out, very active in leading the consortium of LNG Canada phase one. It has spent incredible amounts of time getting to know in detail the various indigenous and first nations communities that are impacted and are partners in the region.

I have full confidence in the discussions Petronas is having now about whether it will play into not only LNG Canada phase two but also other major projects. Those are not major projects in our sense of the 11 but other significant energy opportunities on the west coast of Canada. They're quite significant discussions.

That's where GAC plays a role, and then we hand it off. Petronas is a special case because they're already very much on the ground, but for new companies, there's a hand-off with Invest in Canada. In the hand-off to the Major Projects Office, their role is to drive delivery. As the resources, funding and investment funds are committed or available, it's up to them to coordinate on the delivery. We're on the front end of client acquisition, if you will.

● (1655)

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Is it safe to say, coming out of the letter of intent signed between Canada and Malaysia, that phase two is a live issue in relations between Canada and Malaysia?

**Weldon Epp:** I would say it's a commercial decision at this point for Petronas principally. In the case of Malaysia, it's Petronas. That commercial decision is very much a live discussion with Minister Hodgson's team and on the ground with GAC's trade commissioner service and our head of mission there.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** That's helpful. Thank you.

I want to touch on the issue of parliamentary exchanges, which I think you and I are going to talk about a bit later. The Prime Minister, in the readout between him and the chair of the standing committee of the National People's Congress, emphasized the importance of parliamentary exchanges.

I hope it's the department's position that there can be no parliamentary exchanges until there's full reciprocity between our Parliament and the National People's Congress, seeing that sanctions are still being imposed on members of Parliament and on committees of this Parliament while there are no sanctions being imposed on the National People's Congress's members or its committee. Is that a fair assumption to make?

**Weldon Epp:** I entirely understand the premise, and it would be a government decision to take. Since my first post in Beijing in the 1990s, I've seen the value, but the value of these exchanges has to be calibrated to the risk-reward ratio. I understand—

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I'll finish by saying that it's a question of national honour, national dignity and national self-respect that there be full reciprocity before any of these exchanges can take place.

**Weldon Epp:** It's entirely understood, and I'll take that back.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Yes, there should be full reciprocity.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We go next to MP Lauzon.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

**Stéphane Lauzon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being with us today.

Mr. Epp, you referred to the Prime Minister's high-profile visit in your opening remarks. It was an important step in improving trade missions. You also talked about economic partnerships, highlighting supply chains as a way to help all that.

Let's look ahead. The Indo-Pacific region will account for 50% of global GDP by 2040. In terms of the progress Canada has made in the marketplace, what makes you think we will meet those targets in 2040? What markets have we developed? Can you talk more about that?

**Weldon Epp:** I'll answer first, but then I'd like to turn the floor over to my colleague Mr. Smith. I think the most important thing I can say is simply how important negotiations are in concluding more agreements, more free trade agreements. Yes, the region is growing quickly and will be increasingly important to our economy.

As we've seen, the Prime Minister's vision is to further strengthen our relationships with reliable economies and governments, and to establish reliable relationships. That's much easier when we have a free trade agreement. A wide range of negotiations are under way, and Mr. Smith can perhaps give you more information—

● (1700)

**Stéphane Lauzon:** Can you give us examples of the types of negotiations you're referring to?

[English]

**Darren Smith:** Very quickly, the CPTPP is an excellent example. It's an anchor of our trade investment activities in the region. Of course, we've launched and completed negotiations with Indonesia. We have launched negotiations with the Philippines, and soon we'll be starting our negotiations with Thailand. We have an existing trade agreement in place with Korea.

All in all, what we're seeing is that we're creating the environment for traders and investors to succeed in this region and to help, perhaps, realign supply chains in new ways to deal with some of the challenges that have beset the international trading system. The results won't be immediate. It's going to take time. It's going to be a big shift for Canadian companies, and especially for SMEs, to reorient in terms of diversifying their economic activity.

We are seeing some early indications—we're seeing higher utilization of these trade agreements, and we're seeing more and more interest through trade missions and through other interactions—that Canadian traders and investors are taking the steps necessary to realize those objectives.

[*Translation*]

**Stéphane Lauzon:** That's very helpful information for the committee.

Now I want to ask you a more specific question, since I'm only filling in today. I'm not a standing member of the committee.

I want to talk a bit about Quebec. As you know, Quebec has natural resources, AI, robotics, aerospace, wood, forests, diversity and the list goes on. How can Quebec benefit from the international relationships you're helping to cultivate through your negotiations?

**Weldon Epp:** Once again, I'm going to ask my colleague to jump in shortly. However, in terms of promoting that capacity in our negotiations, we've talked about a number of sectors where Quebec plays a very strong role, areas where Quebec's capacity is highly sought after in the region. I'll give you an example. In India—

**Stéphane Lauzon:** Are you referring to agriculture?

**Weldon Epp:** No, I'm referring to the growth of its aerospace sector, airports and the like. That gives us an indication of the demand that's coming and how our businesses in the sector can contribute. It's very important to be present now to get the most out of those relationships and the opportunities for greater contribution in the sector.

As far as what Quebec can add to the negotiation process, we have a mechanism for provincial consultation, which Mr. Smith can talk about.

[*English*]

**Darren Smith:** Certainly.

Very quickly, Quebec, like all other provinces and territories, is very much engaged in our activities on the free trade agenda. We utilize their input all the time, on an ongoing basis, for all of our trade negotiation activities. In fact, we get very clear and concise information from both the Quebec government and its stakeholders about some of the very specific opportunities—those issues that we need to concentrate on and prioritize with our negotiating partners.

Quebec has a very diversified export-oriented profile and also has some very strong companies that are involved in international activities from an investment perspective as well.

We are hopeful that, as we continue to expand, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, we can provide additional opportunities for Quebec-based companies and Canadian companies overall to succeed and find new market opportunities that have an equal playing field with others.

[*Translation*]

**Stéphane Lauzon:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We go next to MP Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Epp, when a bill is introduced in the House and it involves your department, or at least affects your work, I imagine that before the bill comes into force, you do an analysis and examine its potential impact on your work.

If not, do you wait until the bill becomes law to do an impact analysis?

**Weldon Epp:** That work is usually done beforehand.

• (1705)

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Can you tell me whether you've analyzed the impact Bill C-251 could have on forced labour? My colleague Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay sponsored the bill. Have you analyzed what the implications would be if Parliament were to pass the bill?

**Weldon Epp:** Personally, no, I haven't seen that analysis.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** No one here has seen it, then. Can you check with your department colleagues to see whether an analysis was done? I'd appreciate any information you could give us.

**Weldon Epp:** I've taken note of the request.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Great. Thank you very much.

Now I'll finish what I started saying.

Did you send the Minister of Foreign Affairs an opinion regarding the agreement with Taiwan? Do you think we should sign the agreement or not? Have you, as a department representative, done that work?

**Weldon Epp:** Mr. Smith can correct me if I'm wrong, but the purpose of any tool to strengthen or open outside markets, including the Taiwanese market, is to put us on equal footing with our competitors.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Forgive me for pressing the point, but I don't have much time left at all, and this is the last round. Did you or did you not give the minister an opinion on signing the agreement?

**Weldon Epp:** I can't share with you, here, the opinion given to the minister on that.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** All right. You can't tell us what you told the minister. I understand that is solely for the minister. However, you did tell her something.

**Weldon Epp:** I'd just like to say that it's important to explore business opportunities for our exporters. Taiwan is an important market where we didn't have the ability to be on a level playing field. That is why my colleagues, including Mr. Smith, undertook negotiations to give us a level playing field.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** You're saying it's to have a level playing field. I commend you on your work, which I hope will soon be rewarded with the government's signing of the agreement.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their appearance before the committee. We really appreciate it.

Colleagues, earlier today the clerk distributed two budgets for adoption by the committee. One is for the mandate of the Ambassador of Canada to the United States. That budget is \$500. The second one is for the review of Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy, and that is \$22,500.

Is it the will of the committee to adopt these budgets?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I have one last thing before we adjourn.

The informal meeting between this committee and the visiting delegation from South Africa has been postponed until June. In its place, there is a request by the deputy minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Kosovo and his delegation to meet us on the day we would have met with the South African delegation, which is Tuesday, April 28, 2026, at 9.30 a.m.

It's an informal meeting. We had already agreed to block that slot for the South African delegation. I'm asking to replace that with the Kosovo delegation and to give the clerk authorization for a small hospitality expense for that meeting. Do I have approval from the committee for that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Finally, is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We are adjourned. Thank you.

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