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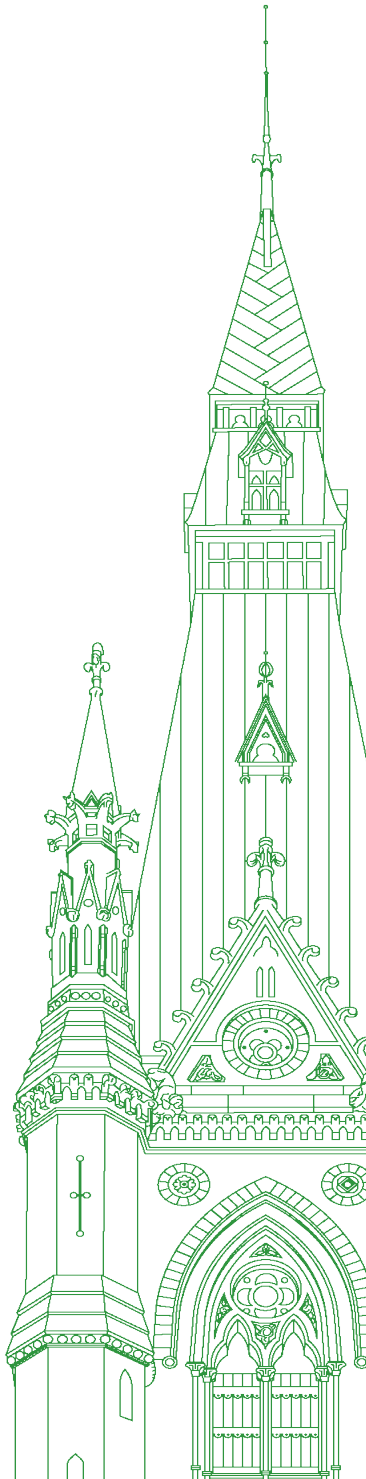

Chair: Mr. Sven Spengemann

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Thursday, May 12, 2022

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): Good afternoon, honourable members.

I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 20 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[*English*]

Pursuant to the motion adopted on January 31, the committee is meeting today on its study of the current situation in the Taiwan Strait.

[*Translation*]

As usual, interpretation services are available during this meeting. You simply have to click on the globe icon at the bottom of the screen.

For members participating in person, keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for mask use and health protocols.

[*English*]

I would like to take a moment to remind participants that screenshots and taking photos of your screens are not permitted.

[*Translation*]

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

A reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

[*English*]

Colleagues, I would now like to welcome our first panel of witnesses back before the committee, and thank them for agreeing to return.

We have before us today Professor Kerry Brown, professor of Chinese studies and director, Lau China Institute, at King's College London; and Professor Steve Tsang, professor, SOAS University of London.

Welcome to the committee, both of you.

[*Translation*]

Also joining us is Professor André Laliberté, from the University of Ottawa. He will be listening in to the discussion with the first panel, but we will not hear from him until our second hour.

Welcome, Professor Laliberté.

[*English*]

Colleagues, with that we will turn to Professor Brown and Professor Tsang, in sequence, for opening statements of five minutes each.

Professor Brown, the floor is yours. Please go ahead.

Dr. Kerry Brown (Professor of Chinese Studies, King's College London, and Director, Lau China Institute, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

Thanks for inviting me today.

I suppose the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has made people think a bit more urgently about what the People's Republic of China's view might be towards some kind of resolution on the Republic of China, on Taiwan. This is a long-expected and feared issue.

Under the current leader, Xi Jinping, there has been, I suppose, an intensification of the idea that this is China's historic moment, that it's following a particular kind of narrative of its history and that part of this will be this idea of unification—that China is not complete and whole and it, therefore, needs to reappropriate what once belonged to it. That's the historical narrative, of course. That narrative is extremely contested, and I'm sure we could talk about that later, if people wish.

Xi Jinping, since 2014, has unambiguously said that the framework of talking about economic collaboration, of the softer kind of societal collaboration, between the two sides of the strait is not enough. He made a comment in 2014, I believe, to a visiting former Taiwanese political leader, that you can't keep on pushing this issue down the road and that at some point there will have to be a resolution.

Under the previous president of Taiwan, Ma Ying-jeou, in 2015, Xi Jinping actually held a bilateral meeting—the first since 1949—between the leaders of the two places. There seemed to be some kind of political momentum towards something, but under Tsai Ing-wen, who was elected 18 months later, because she represents the democratic, progressive party, she's regarded as a bit more antagonistic and independence supporting by Beijing. That kind of dialogue between China and Taiwan has definitely become much more difficult.

Part of that is because of the international situation. Part of it is because of relations between China and the United States becoming much tougher. Part of it has also been because of the deteriorating situation since the onset of COVID, although in some ways that's had impacts on everything, and part of it, I suppose, is because of this intensification of Xi Jinping's leadership, as he has continued in power, of a sort of nationalistic core.

It used to be that we assumed that in China it was all about the economics—"it's the economy, stupid"—but I believe it would be better to say, "It's identity, stupid." Identity is a really crucial issue. On the cultural issues of identity and China's being a great, powerful, strong country on the global stage, this issue of Taiwan has become more domestically important for the Beijing leadership.

Finally, on the issue of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the appalling scenes we've seen there over the last couple of months and what this means for the issue of cross-strait relations, in some ways it has probably made the Beijing leadership, one assumes, much more circumspect about what an invasion entails and what military actions are. We have to remember that China has not had combat experience properly for many decades: Vietnam in 1979, but that was very limited; and probably really only in the Korean War, which was 70 years ago.

It has a big military, but it has not really used it beyond its borders, so when it sees a relatively experienced actor like Russia—with the Soviet Union being in Afghanistan for almost a decade—having such massive issues as it undertakes its operations in Ukraine, I suppose the Chinese leadership have to pause and think about this. An amphibious landing is not easy. I believe the last one was during the Second World War. It's a huge undertaking.

The second thing is that it will look at this and think of the "hearts and minds" issue, the fact that 23 million Taiwanese definitely don't see themselves remotely as having a wholly Chinese identity—surveys have proved that again and again—and the fact that they'll be facing a huge issue even if they were, heaven forbid, to think about military options.

● (1615)

The final point I'll make about that nationalistic kind of dynamic is that it's not easy to see it going away. If leadership have put so much into the idea of identity being the key thing, then the 2049 deadline is a very real one. The idea of what reunification might mean in the abstract, and I stress "in the abstract", is very urgent. It is not likely that this particular leadership will radically change their minds about the idea for 2049, which is the 100th anniversary of the foundation of People's Republic of China. It's a big event, obviously. This has to be marked in some enormously important way. That obviously would involve Taiwan.

I don't see that disappearing. There are many ways you could talk about what would be possible within the parameters of reunification, but I think politically the commitment to reunification in the abstract will not go away in Beijing, even though it gets more and more difficult to imagine what that could possibly be, if you look from Taiwan's perspective, beyond a complete rejection of it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Professor Brown, thank you very much for your opening remarks. I know that there will be great interest in following up on what you said.

We will now go to Professor Tsang for five minutes.

The floor is yours. Please go ahead.

Dr. Steve Tsang (Professor, SOAS University of London, As an Individual): First of all, thank you very much for inviting me.

Let me start off by saying that the situation in the Taiwan Strait is very tense, of course, but I do not see a war as something that is imminent. The war in Ukraine is a hugely important subject for Taiwan, and indeed for Beijing. Both capitals are looking at what happens in Ukraine and beyond to draw lessons and indeed to see what lessons the other side is drawing, and to try to, therefore, frame their own policy on that basis.

Let me perhaps start on the Taiwan side first. For the Taiwanese, they really want to see how western support for Ukraine goes and what lessons China will draw. Here I think we're looking at both military and economic issues. In terms of the military issue, the kind of incredibly imaginative way the Ukrainians have been doing this, and the supply and support that western countries have been giving Ukraine, have proven very important and valuable in getting the Taiwanese to think about what they should do.

They are also thinking about what lessons the Chinese are drawing. I think the obvious lessons for the Chinese on the military side is that the Russians really went in without proper planning and preparation. The Chinese will make sure that they will not make that mistake again themselves. It doesn't mean that the Chinese will change their determination about Taiwan.

In terms of the economic side, the important lessons here that both sides are drawing are in terms of what unity western nations have demonstrated in their response to Ukraine. The questions therefore would be this: Would the west, led by the United States, be able to respond in a similar way in the event of a Taiwan Strait crisis? Would the western sanctions on Russia, particularly over the Russian foreign exchange reserve, be something that could be applied to China? If similar kinds of sanctions on Russia were being contemplated for China, what kind of damage would it do to both sides? Would it be able to provide any kind of deterrence against China?

Shifting very quickly to the Chinese side, I think the key lesson they are drawing is quite simply this: Militarily, we can deal with it; we simply will get ourselves much better prepared.

In terms of the economic ones, it is a much more serious issue. It is still early stage in terms of whether western unity can hold. If western unity cannot hold, then they will draw very different kinds of lessons from it. In terms of what the endgame for Ukraine will be, if the endgame for Ukraine is essentially a Eurocentric one, then the Chinese will draw one set of lessons. If they see the endgame of Ukraine as a more global approach to seeing the issue, they will draw a very different set of conclusions. That could potentially deter the Chinese.

I will stop here.

● (1620)

The Chair: Professor Tsang, thank you very much for your opening remarks.

Colleagues, just before we go into our first round, I want to remind our witnesses, and members also, of the method that we use to facilitate time keeping. It's very basic, but it's effective. It's a 30-second card that I will hold up, both in the room and also on camera, just to signal that your speaking time or questioning time is about to lapse. The allocations of time are very carefully negotiated among the whips and, in some cases, are as short as two and a half minutes.

If witnesses and colleagues could keep an eye on the time, that would assist the conversation greatly.

We will start with round one in six-minute segments.

Leading us off is Mr. Chong. Please, go ahead.

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

Thank you to both professors for appearing in front of us today.

My first question is with respect to President Xi. Is it safe to say that President Xi's number one objective as leader of the People's Republic of China is the reunification of Taiwan with mainland China?

Either one of you can respond.

Dr. Steve Tsang: I'm very happy to respond.

I don't think Xi Jinping's first priority is to take Taiwan into China. His first priority is to keep Xi Jinping and the Communist Party in power. That requires making China great again. Taking Taiwan is part of that.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Professor Tsang.

Professor Brown, do you have a perspective on that?

Dr. Kerry Brown: It depends on what you mean by “reunification”. That's a word that carries a lot of different meanings. Models talked about in the past were almost like having a holding company, and then you work out two sort of separate structures from a high degree of autonomy.

I suppose the thing that has changed the dynamics is Hong Kong. Treatment of Hong Kong by Beijing has had a big impact on Taiwan and its view of this.

I agree with Steve. The nationalist mission is all important, and this is part of that, but the nationalist mission is bigger. It's about delivering a vision of a country that is a great power at the centre of the world. That's why this part of that is important, but it's not the whole part of it.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

Both of you mentioned the importance of Ukraine.

Would you say that the success of the west and Ukraine, or lack of success in Ukraine, has a direct impact on Taiwan's security? In other words, the more success the west and Ukraine have in countering the Russian attack, the more hesitant Beijing will be to use military force to accomplish anything with respect to Taiwan. Is that a fair statement?

Dr. Kerry Brown: If I may, I think the sanctions, the speed with which those sanctions were imposed and the scale of them by North America and Europe in particular—and Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand—were a surprise. I think China will look at this, and it will make them think a bit.

We have to remember, those sanctions are not ones that Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and many other countries have joined. It has kind of made these geopolitical divisions between what I suppose we would call “the west and the rest” very evident.

I guess, also, that China will not welcome.... Of course, when Xi Jinping met Putin on February 4, they issued a joint communiqué. If you look at the language of that joint communiqué, it is very Chinese in terms of joint co-operation and it's very abstract. What Putin and Xi said to each other and how much Putin did say of what he was planning to Xi has been very controversial. It seems that the consensus is that he didn't really say much at all.

Although China has been neutral yet very friendly towards Russia, I don't think this situation in Ukraine is good for it. It doesn't want this kind of problem. It's destabilizing, and the way it's impacting on the global economy is unwelcome.

On the other hand, I'm sure it's not unhappy to see the west tripped up and distracted by this issue. That will probably be something that reinforces this narrative that China is on a winning streak, that the west is just busy fighting itself and that Europe is busy killing other Europeans. This is a narrative that's being reinforced by this.

● (1625)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

Professor Tsang, do you have a perspective on that question about Ukraine?

Dr. Steve Tsang: The issue here is three keywords: unity, success and sustainability. All three elements are being looked at by the Chinese. If the west shows all three, it will potentially have a deterrent effect on China. If one of them fails or is not being sustained, the Chinese may draw different lessons from it.

Chinese policy, to sum it up very briefly, is a policy of clear neutrality: support Russia and pay no price. Those are the limits of Chinese support for the unlimited friendship with Russia. It is China first.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

Thank you, as well, to the witnesses.

Go ahead, Ms. Bendayan. You have six minutes.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their opening statements.

[*English*]

I'm very pleased to have you at our committee today. I would begin by saying what an honour it was to attend Taiwan night last night among many friends, including Representative Chen. Of course, many of us were there to stand in solidarity with Taiwan and the Taiwanese people, particularly in light of what we saw come out today in the news regarding ongoing military drills.

I'll take you to that, Dr. Tsang. On May 6 of this year, 18 aircraft, I believe, including fighter jets and bombers, entered Taiwan's air defence zone, prompting the scrambling of many Taiwanese jets in response. This week, on May 10, I believe, the United States Director of National Intelligence told the Senate's armed services committee:

> It is our view that [the Chinese] are working hard to effectively put themselves into a position in which their military is capable of taking Taiwan over our intervention.

Gentlemen, I wonder if you could speak to this ongoing effort. Just today, the National Post referred to further military drills having been concluded in the southwest and southeast parts of the island.

Dr. Tsang, you made a parallel with the invasion by Russia of Ukraine, saying that China is closely watching the situation and would not make the same mistake as Russia in terms of not carefully planning any invasion.

I would put the question to you this way. Do you not see the consistent military drills being a form of planning?

Dr. Steve Tsang: It is definitely a kind of planning, preparation and intimidation. It's also testing the capabilities of the Taiwanese response and weaknesses. They are certainly part of it, but it doesn't mean that an attack or an invasion is imminent.

China can build [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] it requires to invade Taiwan relatively quickly, but training the people to use them effectively, particularly in a complex, combined operation, is going to take quite a bit of time. I would say that we are looking at 10 years at least, if not a bit longer, before China will really have the capabilities to do so. However, if and when it has the capability, I fully expect Xi Jinping to use it, but his approach will be one of demonstrating overwhelming force in order to force the government in Taipei to negotiate and surrender. Once negotiations start, there's no basis for America or anybody else to intervene.

● (1630)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you. That's incredibly insightful testimony.

I would like to take you into the psychology of President Jinping. On October 9, it was the anniversary of the 1911 revolution, as you very well know. Xi said, “Taiwan independence separatism is the biggest obstacle to achieving the reunification of the motherland, and the most serious hidden danger to national rejuvenation”. Later on, he added, “The historical task of the complete reunification of the motherland must be fulfilled, and will definitely be fulfilled.”

I hear you on the timeline that you believe is most likely, but can you enlighten us a bit about how that national rejuvenation goal should be understood and, perhaps, the planning that will be necessary in the next few years in order for him to achieve that goal?

Dr. Steve Tsang: Xi Jinping will do whatever it takes to take Taiwan. Because of the way he is using his own rhetoric and because of his own poor understanding of history.... Xi Jinping is somebody who doesn't know that the Communist Party of China, historically was one of the strongest and long-standing advocates of Taiwan's independence. Now if you say that, he would put one into jail for committing a crime of historical nihilism.

Now, what will he actually do? He will build up the necessary force that he thinks is needed to overtake Taiwan and to deter the United States from interfering, but calculating that the Americans potentially cannot be deterred and, therefore, will have to take out significant American forces as a way to push the Americans back.

I think he likes to talk much more simply in terms of national unification, but Taiwan is much bigger than the matter of national unification. Taiwan is strategically critical to China's overall global strategy. Taiwan is right in the middle of the first island chain, and it can only be taken by either deterring the Americans or defeating the Americans. With that being achieved, the Americans will effectively be pushed into the middle of the Pacific Ocean, fulfilling what Xi Jinping told President Obama in 2013 in Sunnylands, that the Pacific Ocean is a very big place and it's big enough for two—stick to your side and I will stick to mine.

In that scenario, we are looking at a fundamental change in the politics of the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN-10 would all have to do their deals with China, and so would South Korea. Japan will either have to go nuclear or do a deal with China, because Japan could no longer count on the U.S.-Japan defence treaty.

That will fundamentally establish Chinese hegemony in that part of the world, and basically remove the United States as an effective leader of the world. It is—

The Chair: Professor Tsang, I apologize. In the interest of time, I'll have to stop you there.

There will be an opportunity to come back to the points you're making at the moment, which are important.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Bendayan.

Once again, thank you to the witnesses.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron for six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today and for sharing their experience and research with us.

In the Minister of Foreign Affairs's mandate letter, the Prime Minister asks her to "[d]evelop and launch a comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy to deepen diplomatic, economic and defence partnerships and international assistance in the region…". It is a fact that Taiwan plays a very important role and is inextricably intertwined with the global economy. Taiwan is Canada's 11th largest trading partner, the fifth largest in Asia.

The Government of Canada is currently negotiating an investment agreement with Taiwan and has said that it would support Taiwan's admission to a number of international organizations. Canada has already expressed its support for the admission of Taiwan as an observer to the World Health Organization, or WHO, and the World Health Assembly. However, on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, the Liberal members objected to Taiwan's participation in the International Civil Aviation Organization, or ICAO, even though Taiwan is a major aviation hub in the Asia-Pacific region and follows ICAO standards and practices despite not being a member.

My first question is this. How do you explain the federal government's hot and cold attitude towards Taiwan's admission to certain international organizations?

Here's my second question. The People's Republic of China, or PRC, and Taiwan asked, within a week of one another, to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP, in late September 2021. We know that the PRC is less than upright in its adherence to international rules and that, if it were to join the CPTPP first, Taiwan would be permanently shut out of the partnership. Consequently shouldn't Canada support Taiwan's accession to the partnership first?

● (1635)

[*English*]

Dr. Kerry Brown: It seems like the first point is really about issues within Canada. Taiwan has wanted to join the international organizations for some time, and there was a brief time under Ma Ying-jeou about 10 to 12 years ago when it was a bit more flexible on China's side, but that time's over. China is definitely more and more aggressive in showing that Taiwan doesn't have international space, and that's the strategy.

My only response to the second issue is that every country has to face a quandary. You have to decide how important the Chinese economy and the market in China are, and how much you want to jeopardize that, because China is more willing to push back and say no to partners now, if you want to engage with Taiwan. It's a high-risk business, and that's not an easy decision, because under Xi Jinping, I think there's greater clarity. There's no ambiguity now. You can't sit on the wall. You have to basically play with one or the other. I think this is strategically probably what Beijing is most likely to do—freeze Taiwan's position and make it more difficult in the international community. It has instruments to do that.

It is possible for people to say they'll go with Taiwan, but I guess the only thing they have to consider is that there are obviously quite high costs to that now, not just with security but economically. I wouldn't be blasé about that, because, obviously, economically the world is in a very difficult position now. That's the only thing I would really stress. Yes, you can make these choices to say you'll go with Taiwan rather than the PRC, but there will be increasingly high costs to that, and those shouldn't be obscured.

● (1640)

Dr. Steve Tsang: Can I come in here?

I missed part of the first question, because I was slow in finding the English channel for that.

I think that both questions are really asking about the same issue, whether we're talking about the CPTPP or the international organizations for Taiwan to participate in. There are two issues here. One is that the Chinese government will use its economic leverage to make other countries follow what its government wants to do over Taiwan. If you like, they will come out and bully you if they can get away with it, and they think they will.

The second question, therefore, is this: How can something like this be responded to effectively? Apart from the United States of America, I don't think there is any one country that is at the moment strong enough and powerful enough to be able to, on its own, stand up to the Chinese government and not get punished. The U.S. can do that because China cannot afford to bully the U.S.A. yet. If Canada can unite or coordinate with a significant number of major trading economies that believe in your value system and in doing the right thing, then it can be done, because collectively, you are bigger than China, and they cannot punish you.

Collectively, you can do that. Until you can do that—

The Chair: Professor Tsang, thank you very much.

I apologize, again. We'll have to leave it there.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Did you take into account the time I lost because of the interpretation issues?

The Chair: I gave you an extra minute, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: All right.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have Ms. McPherson, please, for six minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here. This is very fascinating and very interesting testimony.

Perhaps I'll follow up on some of the comments that Mr. Bergeron has made before me, and give Dr. Tsang a moment to complete his comments.

The New Democrats have advocated as well for Taiwan's inclusion and meaningful participation in several multilateral institutions and meetings, including, of course, the World Health Assembly and the International Civil Aviation Organization. The reason that I have advocated for that is that I do believe that Taiwan has those valuable experiences that they can contribute to areas of global health, particularly how the pandemic was dealt with, as well as with regard to aviation safety and security. Monsieur Bergeron mentioned the importance of aviation and Taiwan.

I'd love to hear more comments from you, particularly, Dr. Tsang to start with, and then Dr. Brown, if I could. You talk about China bullying and the need to work with allies. You talk about the need for us to work collectively. What I take from that is that Canada should be liaising more with some of those other economies to make these decisions collaboratively.

Can you talk a little bit from the other side about what there is to gain if Taiwan is able to participate in these multilateral institutions and meetings?

Dr. Steve Tsang: Thank you.

I think Taiwan has a huge amount to contribute to the international community. Looking simply at health and the COVID pandemic, Taiwan was one of the very first governments that sounded the alarm bell. If we had listened, we might have been able to contain the pandemic at the beginning of that process. We didn't do that. The rest is, as they say, history.

We are talking about a very significant medium power. If we use European countries as a yardstick, Taiwan is right in the middle of the EU countries in terms of its capacity and scope for innovation and change, and it's been quite a believable international citizen, so there's every reason to do that.

I think there's something even more important for doing that, which is that, for all the problems of the international liberal order, it is basically a rules-based order that is catering more to the kinds of values that as democracies we believe in. The Chinese government is working to change that, and by forcing governments to play by Chinese rules, it is also changing how international organizations, including the UN, function. That is not a direction of travel we should want to see.

I'll stop here and hand it back to you.

● (1645)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Dr. Brown, is there anything else you'd like to add?

Dr. Kerry Brown: Earlier on, Steve referred to the kind of cooperation amongst many different partners in working with Taiwan and the opportunities in Taiwan. I don't want to be negative, but every country in Europe and North America and those in the Asia-Pacific that are involved in this has very different dynamics in this issue and different priorities. Although, at the moment, there seems to be a kind of consensus because there's quite a lot of negativity and hostility towards China—and of course, what it's doing towards Taiwan is worrying—I don't feel so relaxed that there will be a great deal of consensus as we go forward amongst different countries.

It's going to be difficult, and the reason why it's going to be difficult is that the economic indicators look pretty grim, and countries are going to probably be focused on how they're going to do something about that. The U.K. is an example of this. I don't know whether we can say we're supportive of Taiwan—yes, spiritually and emotionally, and this is good. I don't know what action will actually follow, because saying is one thing but to do stuff is completely different. The brute fact is that Taiwan is a tiny economy compared with China. It's absolutely tiny.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Of course.

Dr. Brown, since I just had you there, you spoke a little bit about the impact of what's happening with the Russian Federation with their illegal invasion of Ukraine and the global community there. What do you think China will think of the potential of Sweden and Finland becoming part of NATO? Will that impact China and their actions?

Dr. Kerry Brown: I don't think it's a huge issue. I don't think China has any big view on NATO, apart from when, of course, 23 or 24 years ago it bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade.

I think its relationship with Russia—we assume—is a positive one, but Russians I've talked to and the Chinese recognize that it's a leader-to-leader relationship. It's Putin and Xi Jinping. Underneath that, historically, of course, there isn't a great deal of unity. It's not like this is a relationship built on a deep level of trust. I don't think we should forget that in looking at this issue.

Ms. Heather McPherson: The change would be pretty substantial and pretty monumental if Putin were no longer the leader of the Russian Federation. That would change that dynamic. That would change how China would evaluate its next steps.

Dr. Kerry Brown: Yes. I don't think China wants instability. It doesn't mind a weaker west, but it certainly doesn't want a west falling apart around its ears.

Putin is someone they've invested a huge amount in, and they don't want Putin to then go feral and start doing crazy things either. They may, at that point, have to come down from their neutrality, but at the moment, I think they're just going to stick this one out.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson, and thank you to the witnesses.

Colleagues, just on time management, we started with this panel at 4:05. To go to the full hour leaves us about 15 minutes.

I'd like to get a full second round in. I would suggest that we pare back the allocations within that round to give each member a chance to ask at least one question. That would involve three-minute and one-and-a-half minute allocations.

If colleagues are amenable to that, we will start with Mr. Morantz, please for three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: How much longer will the committee have with the first panel? Until what time?

The Chair: We will go until 5:05 p.m.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: When would our time with the second panel end?

The Chair: That would bring us to 6:05 p.m. We had two full hours scheduled with the witnesses.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Very well.

Is everyone okay with that?

The Chair: I'm not sure. It's up to the committee members to decide. If the committee agrees, we can take the full two hours, but if not, we can shorten it up.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: I am in favour of taking the full two hours.

[*English*]

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Chair, I can stay virtually to 5:45, but I won't be able to go past that.

● (1650)

The Chair: If necessary, if members wish substitute somebody in, they can do that.

There's one small point of business, which is the approval of the budget that I will need to pitch tomorrow on your behalf before the subcommittee of the Liaison Committee. It's just to make sure that the committee can travel. That is absolutely essential for tomorrow. I just need a motion and approval to be able to go to the subcommittee. I would propose we do that very quickly after this hour, before our second panel, and then it's at the discretion of members if they wish to stay for the full two hours until 6:05. Under that time frame, 6:05 would be the latest.

If that's agreeable, we'll go to Mr. Morantz for three minutes.

Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm sorry, Chair. I just wanted to alert you that Mr. Ehsassi had his hand up.

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Ehsassi. Please, go ahead.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I understand how complicated these things become when you have to monitor the screens as well.

I have to admit that I also have a hard deadline by 5:45. I was wondering if it would be possible for us to actually only have this committee until 5:45 today, given that there are other members as well. We heard from Mr. Sarai.

The Chair: We can do a vote, Mr. Ehsassi, if you'd like. You can move something and we can have a vote on it. There will still be quorum.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: If there aren't others, that's fine.

The Chair: For the decision that we need to take, I would propose we do that before the second panel, just so we have that motion we need for tomorrow, if that's convenient. If you need a substitute for the final 15 minutes or 20 minutes, you can certainly do that.

Mr. Morantz is up for three minutes.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to touch on the meeting between Mr. Putin and Mr. Xi in February before Russia invaded Ukraine. In that meeting they declared a new era in the global order, where they endorsed their respective territorial ambitions. Presumably that means that Russia is endorsing China's claim over Taiwan. The pact challenged the U.S. as a global power and NATO as a cornerstone of international security and liberal democracy.

I guess the question in my mind was.... I can understand why Mr. Putin would love to have this pact before he invaded Ukraine. I'd be interested in your comments on why President Xi would agree to such a thing. I'm wondering if President Xi regrets it, given how badly this Russian incursion has gone for them.

That is for either of you.

Dr. Kerry Brown: As I said earlier, the language of that full communiqué on February 4 is all sort of formal Chinese diplomatic language, with the win-win and all this sort of rhetoric. I think it would be surprising if Putin had been very explicit on February 4. I don't think China was expecting what happened to happen, but I don't think that China would radically change its support for Russia because they have had kind of a strong strategic relationship over the last 20 years.

The more interesting question is who is dominant in this relationship. I think for Xi Jinping, Russia being the bad boy and always taking the flak is cool. That's good.

Also, if you think about it, America and everyone else are now very distracted by what's happening in Russia between Russian and Ukraine, and not focusing as purely as they were on issues around China. All the diplomatic effort is going there and for China that is not a wholly bad thing too. What it would be worried about is escalation and Putin being backed into a corner where he did something impulsive and kind of intemperate.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you. Given my lack of time, I was hoping I could go.... I have another question.

I'm sorry, Professor Tsang. Do you want to get in on that one very briefly?

Dr. Steve Tsang: Yes, I think it's a very important one, which is that I disagree with Kerry that the relationship is a purely personal one. All Xi Jinping and Putin want is a strategic partnership between Russia and China, even though they have other historical problems that have not disappeared. Xi Jinping knew exactly what he was doing when he agreed to that agreement with Putin, and he fully supports Putin in the invasion. I think we have to bear that in mind. Even though he might not have gotten all the specific details, he was not duped.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Tsang.

I apologize, Mr. Morantz. We just have to be a little tighter on time because these are very tight allocations of three minutes and one and a half.

Dr. Fry, please, you have three minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming and giving us such very frank and insightful answers.

What I want to ask is this: With Japan making clear statements about its concern over Taiwan and what is going on in that area of the straits, and Australia standing up for it.... Taiwan has lost quite a few of its allies, people who traded with it and were standing up for it. It's now down to about 14 clear-cut countries that are still trying to work with Taiwan.

Do you feel that things will change, given that 24 European nations supported Canada with the Michael Spavor and Michael Korvig thing? They came to stand at the court, and they came to speak out on that issue. Do you think that Europe, seeing the links between Ukraine and Putin right now, would begin to become a lot more aware of what could happen and begin to listen to Japan, which is a G7 country that may be very concerned about what's going on there for its own sake?

That's what I'm wondering. Do you think that those things are making people focus a little quietly on what's going on? The buzzing of warships and planes in the strait surrounding Taiwan is also something that Russia had done when it entered Crimea and when it started to do all of its manoeuvres, etc. It may very well be that it is a message that China is giving.

My question is this: What is going to happen with the Indo-Pacific region? Where's India going to go? Where is South Korea going to go when we start lining up and forming alliances, if anything begins to happen there?

Dr. Steve Tsang: First of all, I think the EU is getting more concerned about the assertiveness of China, but it is not paying really quite that much attention to the core strait situation. I think you can do both at the same time.

India takes the rise of China extremely seriously. They don't really trust the Chinese now, but where they will stand will be pretty opportunistic, particularly if we continue to have a Modi administration in Delhi.

Others in the region are concerned about China, but none of them want to be on the other side of China because they are likely to face punishment from the Chinese.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Fry. That's just about your time, within five seconds left. I apologize. These are much tighter rounds, and just to get through the entire thing, I have to be tight on time. Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have a minute and a half to ask your question and obtain an answer.

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry: I'm hoping that we can get a written answer from Mr. Brown on this.

Thanks.

The Chair: Absolutely. That's always available as an option, yes. Thank you for that.

[*Translation*]

The floor is yours, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since I don't have much time, I'll simply follow up on my earlier question about the PRC or Taiwan—or both—joining the CPTPP.

From the answers we've heard, especially from Professor Brown, I am given to understand that Canada has two options: either the PRC joins the CPTPP first, leaving Taiwan no place in the partnership; or Taiwan joins first, leaving the door open to the PRC possibly joining at some point.

[*English*]

Dr. Kerry Brown: With the WTO, the World Trade Organization, the People's Republic of China joined first and then Taiwan joined almost immediately afterwards, although Taiwan had been compliant way before the People's Republic. Possibly, that would be on a track with TPP.

Taiwan has signed bilateral trade agreements, I think with Singapore and some others. It might be politically possible, but I think there may be costs. It's a complicated issue. There may well be costs.

If it's a big deal, you can have Taiwan as part of it, but how can you exclude China if you want it to be meaningful? It's so much bigger as an economy.

● (1700)

Dr. Steve Tsang: Very briefly, if we have time, CPTPP is unlikely to go against China because it is led by Japan. Japan would not like to do that. The reality is that Taiwan is able to be compliant with CPTPP. China is not going to be able to comply for quite a long time. The question, then, really is this: Should an organization like CPTPP accept an appropriate potential member being denied membership because of the objection by one that does not actually meet the criteria for CPTPP membership?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Tsang.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

We go to Ms. McPherson, please, for one and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I don't have very much time at all, so I'll ask a very quick question. We are expecting Canada to have a new Indo-Pacific strategy. How should Canada address Taiwan in its new strategy?

Dr. Tsang, could I start with you?

Dr. Steve Tsang: I think the strength of Canada is always that it has a moral strength but is not actually part of the United States. You are not the United States, so you don't have those kinds of issues there. You can stand on your principles. When you do that, you could potentially provide leadership for other countries that share your values, which will also do so.

There is scope for you to try to do the right things, but you really will need to have quite a few friends acting together. Otherwise, you will pay a heavy price. Beijing will make sure that you do.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Dr. Brown.

Dr. Kerry Brown: The Indo-Pacific is going to only really be meaningful if it is a reality, because I think it's just a concept. I don't think it has any reality. If a lot of very different, complicated partners really buy into it and make it a reality, that will take an enormous amount of diplomacy and coordination. We're entering into a golden age of diplomacy here. If you are a diplomat, you have a big growth area. I'm sure they're very happy with this idea of the Indo-Pacific.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you so much. That's good.

The Chair: Ms. McPherson, thank you very much.

Mr. McCauley, welcome to the committee. You have three minutes, please.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Great. Thanks.

Witnesses, it's a pleasure to be joining you today. I want to ask you a question, just quickly, about how Canada's investing a fair amount in CPPIB into China. Of course, we have the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Does that hurt our credibility or our ability to perhaps stand up to the bullying or stand up for democratic rights in the area, while we're pouring money in at the same time?

Dr. Kerry Brown: You're in good company. Everyone's done that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Should we just keep it completely separate?

Dr. Kerry Brown: The trade flows between, for instance, America and China, I think are at historic highs. Between Australia and China, despite the terrible relationship, I believe they're also at historic highs, largely because of iron ore. Two-way trade between the U.K. and China has increased. It's not like having a big trading relationship—China's the biggest trading partner of 125 countries, I think—and also having significant security and values issues is unusual. That's the norm now. That's the norm.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I think you talked about how important it was domestically for Beijing to talk about the reunification. Do you see Beijing ramping up its propaganda, for lack of better words, about the reunification for domestic reasons?

Dr. Kerry Brown: I think—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is it like a regime in trouble that starts such sabre-rattling? Is this why they're doing it, or is this a longer term...?

Dr. Kerry Brown: I don't think it's indicative of the regime being in trouble. It's possible that it would be a screen, but I don't think that's the case in this instance. I think it is that for domestic politics, for any domestic politician, what's not to like? Xi Jinping is a politician. He's not God. He's a politician, an opportunistic—

● (1705)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: He almost has God powers in China now. If that's the case, he's very secure. He's president for life. Why is he continuing with this propaganda, for lack of a better word, about reunification?

Dr. Kerry Brown: It's simply because he believes it. The leaders in Beijing believe that Taiwan should be part of China. We shouldn't underestimate that. We don't believe that, maybe, but that's what Chinese leaders believe. I think it's been effective as a point of unity with a very diverse and different kind of audience, the Chinese domestic audience. They are receptive to nationalism.

They're not alone. Many audiences domestically, like the Russians and maybe even the British, are receptive to nationalism. There's nothing unusual about that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. McCauley.

We will go to our final intervention with this panel.

Mr. Sarai, you have three minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you, Chair.

My question is for you, Mr. Tsang. In light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, what's the economic impact for Taiwan? Is it harder for Taiwan to attract investment and capital when Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine heightens the regional security concerns?

Dr. Steve Tsang: It has certain effects in terms of companies looking at investing in Taiwan and thinking about the risk that Taiwan would face. It's something that's often stated, but it was not asked before the Ukraine war. The risk calculation has not actually changed as a result of the Ukraine war. If anything, the Ukraine war gave Taiwan a much better scope to prepare itself for its longer-term security.

In the short to medium term, the negative economic impact on Taiwan is there, but it may well be smaller than its negative economic impact on some other countries, including both Europe and potentially even China. Taiwan is not subjected to any of those potential sanctions. Some of Taiwan's industries are less immediately affected by the war in Ukraine than in some ways the Chinese economy is. China is much more dependent on energy. The shooting up of energy prices thus increases the cost of production in China in some ways more than the same in Taiwan.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: On a different front, in terms of Japan, how important is the relationship between Taiwan and Japan in keeping that balance in the region? Do you see Japan getting closer and strengthening its defence systems? Is it enough of a deterrent, along with the U.S., for any invasion from China toward Taiwan?

Dr. Steve Tsang: I think Japan is changing in the last three or four years, taking Taiwan's security very seriously and moving increasingly to a situation that, if a military crisis should develop across the Taiwan Strait, the Japanese will find ways to give support to the United States military. I think Beijing is already working on the assumption that if and when Beijing uses force against Taiwan, they will be taking on not only the Americans but also the Japanese and the Australians.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Sarai, thank you very much.

Colleagues, on our collective behalf, let me express our appreciation to both professors.

Thank you for being with us so late in your day and for the important testimony you've given us. We very much appreciate it. Thank you. We'll now invite you to disconnect.

Colleagues, I wonder if we could quickly get to the point of business that I raised with you. The motion with respect to committee travel needs to be bought before SBLI tomorrow. Are colleagues okay with the budget as received? Is there consent to adopt it?

Go ahead, Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I wholly support it, Mr. Chair.

I just have a comment to make. The proposed dates still seem a bit problematic to me. I think it would be hard to make them work.

I imagine that, once the budget request is under review, we could adjust the dates to reflect key political and military considerations at the time.

Is that right?

● (1710)

The Chair: The clerk is telling me that is the case.

[*English*]

Is there any other commentary on the budget, colleagues? If not, I would ask for your approval, or at least see if there's any objection, either virtually or in the room.

Seeing none, Madam Clerk, we have approved the budget. I will be happy to deliver the message tomorrow that there is unanimous support from the committee for these travel plans. Thank you very much.

Colleagues, with that, we would like to welcome our second panel this afternoon.

[*Translation*]

Joining us is André Laliberté, full professor at the school of political studies, in the faculty of social sciences, and the research chair in Taiwan studies at the University of Ottawa.

[*English*]

We also have Joseph Wong, Roz and Ralph Halbert professor of innovation, Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy and professor of political science at the University of Toronto.

Welcome to the committee, both of you. We will give each of you five minutes for your opening statements and then engage in the discussion with members.

[*Translation*]

Professor Laliberté, you can go ahead with your opening statement. The floor is yours.

Mr. André Laliberté (Full Professor, School of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Research Chair in Taiwan Studies, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the work of Weldon Epp, director general of the north Asia and Oceania branch, and Jordan Reeves, the executive director of the Canadian trade office in Taipei. They are doing a great job representing our interests in Asia at a challenging time.

I followed the proceedings closely when they appeared before the committee in February. I am saddened to see that the scenario discussed then has now become reality, with Russia's aggression in Ukraine, which has been going on for more than two months already.

I realize that the senior officials who implement our policies prefer not to speculate, but developing policies means considering various scenarios. The one that concerns us today involves aggression by the PRC against Taiwan. I want to take a moment to stress the importance of terminology here. This is not about reunification, as the Chinese government purports; it is about an irredentist claim to subjugate a sovereign state, pure and simple. After all, Taiwan has never been part of the PRC.

Military action against Taiwan would deeply upset the stability of value chains in the crucial semiconductor sector and, without a doubt, impact the global economy. Such an attack would represent a serious threat to democratic regimes in Asia and shift the strategic balance in ways we can neither foresee nor easily manage.

It is essential not to incur that risk. Avoiding it means making absolutely clear that such action would be illegal under international law, regardless of the anti-secession law passed by the National People's Congress of China. I hope that Canada will be as quick to stand with Taiwan in support of its right to self-determination as it was for Ukraine, and rightfully so.

Some may not see that comparison as valid because, unlike Ukraine, Taiwan does not enjoy diplomatic recognition by the international community. I would point out, however, that Taiwan is a sovereign state according to the criteria set out in the Montevideo convention: it has a permanent population, a defined territory, a government and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.

First, Taiwan has been permanently inhabited by indigenous peoples, who arrived long before the first Chinese settlers. They set foot in Taiwan at the same time that the Europeans arrived here, on Turtle Island.

Second, Taiwan not only controls its territory, but has also harnessed the resources of that territory to become the world's 25th largest economy. In addition, Taiwan has equipped itself with the capacity to defend its territory by spending a significant amount on defence, with the 22nd largest military budget in the world.

Third, Taiwan has not just a functioning government, but also a government whose legitimacy is unchallenged. The same cannot be said of the country across the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan's government is chosen through competitive elections in what has long been considered Asia's most democratic regime.

Fourth and finally, through the tireless efforts of its representatives, Taiwan has demonstrated its capacity to enter into relations with other states. Over the years, those representatives have shown exceptional professionalism in the face of China's sustained efforts to force the rest of the world not to recognize the country that Taiwan represents.

The basic premise of the entire discussion on China–Taiwan relations is that peace depends on dialogue between the two parties. Taiwan initiated the dialogue in 1991, when President Lee Teng-Hui declared that the Republic of China in Taiwan was renouncing all claims to the territory governed by the People's Republic.

Since coming to power, President Tsai Ing-wen has been equally pragmatic, adopting the same attitude. Since the beginning, the Chinese Communist Party has been the one refusing to engage in any dialogue, imposing its own conditions.

● (1715)

No matter what political scenarios are being considered in the medium-term in Taiwan, one thing is for certain: Taiwan's citizens no longer believe China's promises under the “one country, two systems” arrangement. Polls clearly show that the majority of Taiwan's population identifies as Taiwanese, not Chinese or half-and-half.

The continued refusal to legally recognize the nation of Taiwan significantly jeopardizes the validity of international law, when countries yield to a position of power rather than respecting the principles on which that law is based.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Laliberté.

We will now hear from Mr. Wong.

[*English*]

Professor Wong, please go ahead for your opening remarks of five minutes.

Dr. Joseph Wong (Roz and Ralph Halbert Professor of Innovation, Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, Professor of Political Science, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you very much. This is truly an honour and privilege for me to be able to speak in front of this committee.

I'm actually Zooming in from Accra, Ghana, right now, so you'll have to forgive me if the connection is a little wonky at times. I will do my best.

Let me begin by saying that it's very clear that Taiwan and its fate are central to the legitimation formula of the authoritarian regime in Beijing. As noted by Kerry and Steve before, the very fate of Taiwan and the ability of the Communist Party in China to make claims on Taiwan and to eventually unify it with the mainland are absolutely essential to the legitimation formula for that regime. In other words, as Kerry points out, the identity politics trumps, in many cases, the economic politics.

This puts Taiwan in a very precarious situation, and I would suggest to you, in an even more precarious situation as time passes, because on the one hand it means there is less and less space for Taiwan to manoeuvre in the international arena, and we have seen tremendous effort by the regime in Beijing to limit this space for Taiwan.

It comes, however, precisely at the time when support for Taiwan internationally, I would suggest to you, is at one of its all-time highs. About 10 years ago I'm reminded that Charles Glaser wrote a very influential piece in various foreign policy magazines in the United States, suggesting that perhaps that was the time for the United States to let Taiwan go, and that this was increasingly a problem for American foreign policy. That was 10 years ago, and increasingly that seems to be a very antiquated view of Taiwan.

Indeed, Taiwan presents itself to the world, I would suggest to you, as the paragon of democracy. It leads the region in terms of women's participation in politics, including the election of the president for two terms. Taiwan presents a model to the industrial world in terms of social policy. Its national health insurance program is a model that countries should emulate, and in terms of its progressive policies with respect to the LBGTQ community and so forth.

I also believe that Taiwan has lots to offer in terms of its lessons with respect to relations with its indigenous peoples, and I think there are plenty of opportunities for Canada to continue to collaborate with Taiwan on that front.

Of course Taiwan is an extraordinary economy, and we have seen that any blockages in the global supply chain, particularly as it relates to the semiconductor sector, can be crippling. It presents a strategic value that I think is quite unprecedented.

However, I say this to say that there is less and less space for Taiwan to manoeuvre, precisely at the time when Taiwan's value and the stakes of Taiwan's future is higher than ever before, which means the possibility of conflict, and the stakes of that conflict are ever more dire.

The question I want to contemplate, then, is this: What do we do with China? It strikes me that one way out of this very difficult situation is to increase the prospects for China and the Chinese regime to entertain the prospects of democratic transition.

Here I want to offer some reflections on this. Professor Laliberté, I think, has done an extraordinary job of describing to us the situation in Taiwan, and I want to talk a little bit about China.

The conventional wisdom in our theories of democratic transition is that democracies will emerge from the ashes of collapsed regimes, that we look for and wait for regimes to crumble under the weight of their own illegitimacy, and from that, then, democracy emerges. That is indeed one way in which democracy has emerged in a lot of the world.

However, the modal pathway for democratic transition in Asia, actually, is not democracy emerging from the ashes of a collapsed regime, but, rather, democracy emerging through the leadership of strong political parties. Indeed, Taiwan is the best example of this. The KMT was a regime that democratized during the late 1980s and into the early 1990s precisely at a time when it was weakening, but it was still a very strong political party. It was a party that was very confident. In other words, democracy proved to be incentive-compatible for this authoritarian regime.

This is a paradox, because what I'm essentially arguing here is that precisely at the time in which a regime is strong and it has little reason to democratize is also the best time for a regime to entertain democratic transition, because it's probably going to lead to the most stable democratic transition. I think everyone would agree that no matter what you think of the regime in Beijing, no one wishes for a regime that collapses, because under the weight of that collapse we're talking about potentially 1.4 billion people suffering.

That's the paradox here. What we should then think about are the implications of this, particularly as they relate to our own foreign policy and how we think about China.

● (1720)

First is that we ought not to wish for the collapse of China and we ought not to wish for the collapse of the Chinese Communist Party regime. I think that would be disastrous for a good portion of humanity.

Second is that it doesn't seem to me that isolation is in any way going to provide the kinds of inducements or incentives for the Chinese regime to entertain democratic transition. In fact, we know that isolationism will likely increase the authoritarian measures employed by the regime.

Third, and this is the most important, is that we should be thinking about the prospects of democracy in China being the result of strategic inducements on the part of the rest of the international community. The recognition that democracy is indeed incentive-compatible with the authoritarian regime, and that democratization of the regime is something that would not lead to the collapse of China....

It's through this that we can open up the political space for more opportunities on how we might be able to continue to recognize Taiwan as the sovereign democracy that it is.

The Chair: Professor Wong, thank you so much.

I have a very brief housekeeping rule that Professor Laliberté was able to observe during the first panel. I have a 30-second reminder card when time allocation is up, because some of the interventions from members are quite tightly timed. In the shortest case, it's two and a half minutes each. Keep an eye on that if you could. That would assist us in the management of the committee's time.

We will go to round one, with allocations of six minutes.

Ms. Gray, welcome to the committee. You'll lead us off for six minutes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My questions are for Professor Laliberté. I wanted to start with the current situation in the Taiwan Strait.

How could trade with Taiwan be impacted with respect to creating supply chain issues?

Mr. André Laliberté: Do you mean if there's a conflict?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I mean with having tensions. Is there potential, and what could that potentially mean?

Mr. André Laliberté: Not for now. The tension is political and we're not yet in a situation where we have a credible military intervention, so the effect is minimal.

If we think in the long term, in as much as the threat appears more credible, that's going to factor into our long-term planning.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: That's great. Thank you.

There was an announcement where the government discussed the need for Canada and Taiwan to continue to work together. Specifically, in January of this year, the readout from the minister refers to—there are a number of things in here—an increase in “collaboration on science, technology and innovation”.

My question around that is whether there are any risks with potential tensions in the Taiwan Strait that could jeopardize this, specifically with shared IP between Canada and Taiwan. What can we do to mitigate this or protect ourselves moving forward?

● (1725)

Mr. André Laliberté: If we maintain and improve in our relations, I don't see a risk unless your hypothesis is that there's a military intervention by China. Of course, that is a serious risk, but this is not where we are now.

In the current level of our informal relations with Taiwan, there's no risk that I envision realistically.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: You mentioned semiconductors in your testimony, so I wanted to dig in a bit deeper there. We know that this is an important product for Taiwan, and it's important for Canada when it comes to critical mineral supply chains and EVs.

I was wondering if you could go into more detail about the opportunity for Canada to have better access to semiconductors by strengthening trade relations with Canada and Taiwan? Again, do you see any potential risks?

Mr. André Laliberté: I don't have expertise in that domain. I would not speculate too much, except to say that TSMC, Taiwan's main maker of semiconductors, controls 65% of the world market. There are other Taiwanese firms, so Taiwan, in the whole industry, controls 85% of the global market.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: With Taiwan expressing interest in and applying to join the trans-Pacific partnership, the CPTPP, I was wondering if you had any thoughts on how Canada could support Taiwan's bid to join this trade agreement.

Mr. André Laliberté: Taiwan qualifies already. There's no question about that. China does not qualify, so we have an obvious political issue here, except that we already have some international or transnational agreements where you have membership that is not limited to states. For example, we have Taiwan's customs territory in the World Trade Organization.

Unfortunately, to my knowledge, the CPTPP is between states, so we may have to send a signal that Taiwan should be welcome in the CPTPP. I believe that.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you for that information.

Just to tag on to that, what would be the implications if democracies such as Canada stopped advocating for Taiwan's participation in trade agreements like CPTPP?

Mr. André Laliberté: What would be the...?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: What could be the implications if democracies like ours stop or lessen our advocacy?

Mr. André Laliberté: That would contribute to the decline of our reputation as supportive of democracies.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

I think I might have time for one more quick question.

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

We heard testimony earlier today from another witness that it would make sense for like-minded countries to band together collectively—we have larger economies than the People's Republic of China—to combat potential threats. Would you agree that this would be a good strategy, not only for those countries, which might include Canada, but also for Taiwan?

Mr. André Laliberté: I think that the idea of grouping with like-minded countries makes sense, but maybe I would change the word "combat". I would say, just make sense and try to make convincing arguments. I like the way my colleague Joe Wong approached the question. He's talking about inducement. Like-minded countries come together vis-à-vis China to say that they might consider doing different policies and doing things differently, and will co-operate better, if China makes our preferred changes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Where do you see the biggest opportunities if Taiwan joins the CPTPP?

Mr. André Laliberté: I think it depends on our political will. Are we willing to support Taiwan's admission to the CPTPP? I hope that we will, in a nutshell.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ehsassi, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Allow me to thank both professors for their excellent presentations. I must confess, I learned quite a bit. I will start with Professor Laliberté.

In your opening remarks, one issue that you highlighted for attention was that the rest of the world has to be clear in terms of what the consequences would be for China should they invade Taiwan. As we all know, the U.S. is adhering to an official policy of strategic ambiguity. In your opinion, is that the right approach?

● (1730)

Mr. André Laliberté: That's an approach that has worked well so far, but that's an approach that is now showing its limits. I think we ought to move to a policy of clarity. Japan is moving in this direction. Canada is not in the same position as Japan or the United States. We're not a military power; however, in terms of co-operation in many areas, I think we should have a policy of clarity saying that, if China misbehaves in the Taiwan Strait, Canada should perhaps reconsider or downgrade some forms of co-operation.

If I may, Mr. Chair, I would like to add something. We always talk with the assumption that China is an ever-growing, important actor in the international community. I think we should stop being hypnotized by this perspective and consider the other important actors in Asia that are emerging and becoming potentially important partners. I'm thinking about Indonesia, the largest Muslim democracy on the planet. I'm tempted to say India, but I would say that I'll wait until the next election, because the Modi government doesn't inspire me with confidence. I'm sorry. I digress here.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

Now just quickly, Professor Laliberté, is it your read that South Korea and Japan are adopting a more robust approach and steering away from strategic ambiguity as well?

Mr. André Laliberté: For Japan, yes, I definitely see that, but for South Korea, I'm hesitant to answer because South Korea has concerns with North Korea. South Korea also does not want to antagonize China. It also has its own economic relationship with China. At the end of the day, I think that South Korea realizes that its security is better protected by reinforcing its co-operation with Japan and the United States.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

Now I'll turn to Professor Wong.

First of all, allow me to say that your explanation as to how the democratic transition took place in Taiwan was fascinating. I agree with you. The country is a model for the rest of Asia in terms of inclusivity and innovation on numerous different indicators.

We heard from the first panel that there were polls of the Taiwanese as to what their attitudes were towards a Chinese attack or possible unification. Could you share with us any data or information you might have on Taiwanese attitudes towards unification with mainland China?

Dr. Joseph Wong: I'll be very brief. Over the past 20-plus years in which I've had the privilege of observing elections and being engaged with scholarship on and in Taiwan, it is becoming unequivocally clear to me that people in Taiwan have increasingly less and less appetite for any prospects of reunification with China, and the situation in Hong Kong, I think, has only fuelled the discourse in Taiwan that the one country, two systems approach is simply unworkable and unpalatable.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

I'm also reminded of the youth-driven protests in Taiwan in 2014, I believe it was. Is it your opinion that younger Taiwanese are even more nationalistic than older Taiwanese?

Dr. Joseph Wong: You certainly see that in the survey data. I think that the protests of 2014 were an excellent display of democracy at work and a young democracy working out its rules of the game. Indeed, I think that younger Taiwanese, just in terms of the generational differences and the cohort effect, simply have less and less connection with China. The questions, even the categories used in surveys, are confusing to many young people in Taiwan. There's a sense of, what do these questions even mean?

● (1735)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you for that.

Now given that time is very limited, I'd like to squeeze in one last question.

Professor Brown was of the opinion that, although we should be vigilant, an attack is not imminent. He doesn't see that. Is that your read of the situation as well?

Dr. Joseph Wong: Yes, I think that the Chinese government is going to be much more strategic about this. They're learning about what's happening in Ukraine so I think there's definitely reason for pause, though I don't think that this in any way has softened the Beijing government's resolve to seek the unification of Taiwan with China.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Ehsassi.

Thank you, as well, to the witnesses.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron for six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. I appreciate their insightful comments.

I would like to make a small clarification regarding something Ms. Fry alluded to, Europe's so-called lack of interest in Taiwan. I just want to point out that, in November 2021, Europe sent a delegation to Taipei. I take that as a sign that the Europeans do have some interest in Taiwan.

I have to tell you, Professor Laliberté, that I was delighted to hear you talk about the criteria set out in the Montevideo convention to define statehood, or a sovereign state. I thought to myself how Quebec met all of those criteria. No doubt, we'll have a chance to discuss that another time.

I was fascinated when you spoke of Taiwan's commitment to no longer represent all of China. Polls show that the people of Taiwan now feel more Taiwanese than Chinese.

Before I get to my question, I'd like to share an anecdote, if you don't mind.

I was in a U.S. airport once and I stumbled upon a group of people who were clearly Chinese. I could tell from the conversations they were having, but after a while, I realized that there were two groups within the larger group and that they were not speaking to one another. I tried to figure out what was going on. You'll tell me that the same thing happens when Parisians are around people from other parts of France. In any case, I noticed that the members of one of the groups had passports from the People's Republic of China, and the members of the other group had passports from the Republic of China.

That brings me to my question.

It seems that something of a legal fiction has existed since nationalist leader Tchang Kaï-chek found refuge on the island of Formosa, where the Taiwanese government claimed to represent all of China, while in western China, the People's Republic of China, claimed, and still claims, to represent all of China.

Given the fact that the Taiwanese feel less and less like Chinese and more and more like Taiwanese, how do you square Taiwan's renouncing the claim that it represents all of China with the fact that the country is still formally called the Republic of China?

Mr. André Laliberté: That brings me back to what I said initially. It's not a legal fiction. The Republic of China has existed since 1911 and took refuge in Taiwan. Taiwan is a geographical name, and the Republic of China still exists. Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen, is fully aware that, if she decided to change the country's name tomorrow, it would spark nothing short of a war. The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China passed a law clearly stating that, if the name is changed, it would be war. That is crystal clear, set out in no uncertain terms. Obviously, Taiwan's government would not dare do such a thing.

Naturally, Taiwan has hard-core sovereignists, but they really are a minority of the population. They would like to see the country's name changed to the Republic of Taiwan to reflect the reality, but short of a revolution in mainland China, it won't happen in our lifetime.

● (1740)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I want to make clear, Professor Laliberté, that I never claimed the Republic of China was a legal fiction. The legal fiction I was referring to was the odd situation—unique in human history, in fact—where a country purports to represent a larger entity and where another country purports to represent that exact same larger entity.

I fully understand what you're saying. I was discussing it with people from Taiwan yesterday. I realize that a change of name would be sufficient justification to trigger an armed conflict.

Nevertheless, how do you reconcile, on one hand, Taiwan's renouncing its claim that it represents all of China and the feeling the Taiwanese people have of being less and less Chinese and more and more Taiwanese with, on the other hand, the fact that the state's official name contains the word China?

I realize they can't change the name, but how do Taiwanese authorities deal with that paradox, if you will?

Mr. André Laliberté: It's possible, just as it would be for a European country, for instance. China is a nation, in English and in French, but it also refers to a culture, and the Taiwanese openly admit that. Even though the most recent figures show that 64% of them identify as Taiwanese whereas only 20% identify as both Chinese and Taiwanese, the Chinese identity still matters. It represents their culture and the language they speak. Fukienese, the language spoken by the majority of Taiwanese, is, after all, the language spoken in the nearby province of Fujian.

The Taiwanese are willing to admit that, culturally, they are Chinese, so it may not be as preposterous as it seems for Taiwan to be named the Republic of China. It does have a basis.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You talked about Europe. Would you say that all Europeans can claim to be European while also being Danish, German, French or even British, and that the same could be said of the Taiwanese, who belong to a wider cultural makeup than just the traditional territory of the Middle Kingdom?

Mr. André Laliberté: You're dragging me into some—

The Chair: Professor Laliberté, I'm sorry to interrupt.

In order for us to stay on schedule, I would ask that you please respond very quickly.

Mr. André Laliberté: Yes, the European idea works in a broad sense.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Laliberté.

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

We'll go to Ms. McPherson, please, for six minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What a fascinating conversation. Thank you very much to the witnesses for this.

I'd like to start with Mr. Laliberté.

Your response to my colleague with regard to the U.S. strategy of intentional ambiguity was that it's not the right strategy now and Canada should be moving towards a position of clarity.

We heard from both of you that this is about identity politics for China. There is an ideology there. As we all know, moving someone along in an ideology is close to impossible. It feels a bit like we're in that situation where you're explaining to us that we need to be clear in our position with regard to Taiwan, yet our position will never move China. It will not be able to reconcile any movement we make.

I'm struggling with how to read that from you. Could you elaborate on that for Canada's position in particular?

Mr. André Laliberté: Are you talking about the issue of identity in Taiwan?

Ms. Heather McPherson: If you are saying that intentional ambiguity is not a good strategy and that the strategy Canada should take with regard to its position is one where we are clear on where we should stand with regard to Taiwan, yet we know that this is an ideological issue, how do we square that?

Mr. André Laliberté: Canada is in a particular place and we have to be more prudent because of our limited capacity, but Canada certainly should, I think, be clear about this idea that whatever understanding that China and Taiwan eventually arrive at should be through peaceful means.

There's a recognition that Taiwan is a distinct society—I weigh my words here—because of the fact that it's a population that has chosen its own government. It's a fact. The discourse coming from the PRC is that they talk about Taiwan being part of China since time immemorial. I would hope that our diplomats reject that discourse and simply say this is bad history and we don't have to accept that.

There's no reason in the world why we should take at face value what our Chinese vis-à-vis are saying when we know that it's wrong history. It's factually wrong. I'm not saying even it's morally wrong. I'm saying that this is not a fact. I'd be happy to give a seminar to go in depth into that question.

● (1745)

Ms. Heather McPherson: I suspect we may need a seminar because it is very complex, but I do like the idea of peaceful discussions that are prudent and provide clarity. Really, can we ask for more?

Dr. Wong, I was going to ask the next question of you. You spoke about Taiwan being a model of democracy for Asia. One of the things that I have done an awful lot of work on before I was elected as a member of Parliament is the United Nations sustainable development goals. We know that Taiwan has actually made a very strong effort towards achieving the sustainable development goals and that they have demonstrated that they are interested and willing to be a good international partner. We've not necessarily seen China adhere to those international fora with the same level of good intention.

Can you talk a little bit about that and perhaps expand on it? How could Canada support Taiwan through those areas, but also how could Canada support Taiwanese civil society? We know democracy is built upwards. Is there a way for us to be supporting the civil society from the grassroots?

Dr. Joseph Wong: That's a terrific question, actually.

I wanted to go back, if I might, on the question of strategic ambiguity just for a moment. The concept worked very well for the time, because it really was a way of talking about strategic engagement. When strategic ambiguity first emerged in U.S. foreign policy circles it was a very comfortable dual mission of both engaging with China, particularly economically, but with the aim of some hope for prospects of some kind of transformation. That was the sort of ambiguity. I think the reason why it has less purchase these days is that in fact China has sharpened its view of what strategic ambiguity is and has made very clear that, in its world, it really is a binary world between the autocratic world and the democratic world. Therefore, they've taken that agenda from our own strategic ambit.

The point I'm trying to make is that we ought not to think that democracy and talking about democracy, be it in Taiwan or in a prospective China, is necessarily antagonistic. If we can reclaim that balance, actually, we can reclaim the kind of strategic ambiguity that allowed us to do that work for a long time.

With respect to Taiwan's democracy, I think in fact this is one of the main ways in which Canada can continue to support Taiwan. When I talk to Taiwanese officials, particularly those in the foreign service, I continually stress that ways to collaborate with Canada would be in areas that are related to the SDGs and that are related in terms of public health. Are there lessons that can be shared with us in terms of pandemic preparedness? We know that Taiwan made enormous strides in the post-SARS world and in fact provides now tremendous lessons to the rest of the world.

Again, I've talked to our colleagues in Taiwan about more engagement around indigenous issues, reconciliation and TRC, and so forth. These are areas that will strengthen and knit together Canada and Taiwanese society more robustly and, frankly, in ways that are going to contribute to the strength of Taiwan's democracy and the resilience of the democracy over time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

Colleagues, we're at 5:50. To take us to the full hour, which I have pegged at 6:05, I would propose that we do exactly what we did in the last panel, which is a compressed second round of three-minute and one-and-a-half minute attributions, if that's amenable to colleagues.

I would ask Mr. Morantz to lead us off with three minutes.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Professor Wong, I was fascinated by something you were discussing earlier, about how democracy came about in Taiwan through strong political parties moving towards democratization. You hypothesized—I think this is what you said—that one potential for a lasting peace between China and Taiwan would be the democratization of China. I think that's what you said. I found that absolutely fascinating.

Is this just a hypothesis that you have? Do you have reason to believe that this could actually happen in the real world? Are there indications of anything like this on the horizon? I would like you expand on that in the last couple of minutes that we have.

● (1750)

Dr. Joseph Wong: Sure.

I think eight years ago I would have thought.... In looking at the tea leaves at the time, certainly there was a school of thought, in looking at Xi Jinping and his consolidation of power, that this was a preamble for potentially a kind of political liberalization that we saw in Taiwan, that we saw in Korea in the 1980s and that we saw in post-war Japan as well.

I'm less and less optimistic that this is the case, precisely because now so many of the issues that have arisen in China are so central to the legitimation of the Chinese Communist Party regime. That worries me however, because, as we look for cracks in the regime and for the potential collapse of a regime, that will definitely ensure that democracy does not emerge, which will potentially be disastrous.

I think there are still ways in which we can try to make the case, the positive inducements, that democracy is not incompatible with the Chinese Communist Party—in fact, just as the KMT did in Taiwan. It democratized. It won elections. It continued to govern for about a decade. It ceded power when it lost, just like any other democratic party. Taiwan continues to be stable.

If that scenario could be painted out for our colleagues in China and for some progressive thinkers within China, I don't think it's impossible. I hope for that simply because of the way in which we're going right now. As I prefaced my comments, the space for Taiwan is becoming less and less. The stakes over Taiwan are becoming higher and higher. That means that the prospects of conflict become ever more dire.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you for that.

In my remaining time, I have just one other question. The Canadian government promised an Indo-Pacific strategy over a year ago. If you were in a position where you could give advice to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, what do you think that policy should say with respect to the position on Taiwan?

The Chair: Give just a brief answer, please, in the interest of time.

Dr. Joseph Wong: Sure.

I think Canada should be unequivocally supportive of Taiwan. At the same time, I think Canada should not look to isolate China. There is a possibility to be able to entertain both. I think isolating China will not result in a positive outcome.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Morantz, and thank you to our witness.

We will now go to Mrs. Sudds, please, for three minutes.

Mrs. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Excellent. Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses.

My first question is for you, Professor Wong. China's diplomatic pressure has been reinforced by the World Health Organization. Under pressure from China, the WHO has excluded Taiwan from COVID-19 information-sharing forums. In response, and as a general practice, I think it's fair to say that Canada has consistently supported Taiwan's meaningful participation in global discussions where there is a practical imperative and where Taiwan's absence would be detrimental to global interests.

I'm wondering if you can comment on the role that Canada has played to support Taiwan in this regard, maybe specifically with respect to the WHO or perhaps other international organizations.

Dr. Joseph Wong: I think it's absolutely ridiculous that Taiwan has continually been excluded from discussions around the WHO table. If we've learned anything from SARS, it's that despite all of the disadvantages Taiwan had to suffer in 2003, they somehow managed to weather that storm and indeed to have been able to implement lessons that we here in Canada only wish we had done in the wake of SARS ourselves to be better prepared for the pandemic this time around, as Professor Laliberté has already said.

I think the point here is to simply say, with regard to Taiwan's participation in the World Health Assembly and other like bodies, that this is not a political issue. This is an issue of global public health. This is an issue of collective interest for all of us, including China. I think changing that narrative and being steadfast in our commitment to a collective security, be it health security, be it cybersecurity or so forth, is a functional imperative that should trump any sort of political discussion, as far as I'm concerned.

● (1755)

Mrs. Jenna Sudds: Fantastic. I agree.

I think I have enough time for a quick question for Professor Laliberté. It's around economic ties. The economic ties between Taiwan and China have certainly deepened, in particular over the last two decades. I think both countries have seen rapid economic growth.

Has this mutual economic prosperity served to defuse regional tensions or has it exacerbated them?

Mr. André Laliberté: Unfortunately, sometimes it's also contributing to each side knowing each other better. There was some disenchantment from many Taiwanese businessmen in China, who did not always have positive experiences. It's not necessarily the case that trade between the two sides has improved relations between them. Of course, the intent was there.

From the Chinese side, it was also seen as an inducement to convince the Taiwanese to move closer to China. Also, many Taiwanese businesses saw there was a risk of deterioration of their economic position if they became integrated too closely with China. One instigation of the Sunflower Movement was precisely because the previous president Ma Ying-jeou wanted to move Taiwan closer to China. The young entrepreneurs in Taiwan were really worried about that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Laliberté and Ms. Sudds.

I'd also like to thank the witnesses.

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor for a minute and a half.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Professor Wong, when we spoke with the previous panel, Professor Tsang put forward the idea that Taiwan was simply a geographic barrier to China's expansionist aspirations in the Pacific.

Do you feel it's possible to agree on an arrangement for the territorial waters between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China to get around this problem?

[*English*]

Dr. Joseph Wong: That's going to be very difficult for a whole host of reasons. The claims that China's making over the South China Sea have obviously been ruled unlawful and not in compliance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The challenge, too, is that the PRC's claims to the South China Sea and its maritime boundaries are based on the same claims that the ROC government makes. The map of the nine-dash line that the PRC is using today to make its historic claims are, in fact, on the map that was drawn by the ROC government prior to the formation of the People's Republic of China. That itself makes it a very difficult situation to reconcile.

On one hand, to respect that line would be to contravene the UN convention. At the same time, as China continues to push that line, it also actually de facto recognizes the Republic of China, which puts the PRC government in a very difficult position.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron and Professor Wong.

[*English*]

We'll go to Ms. McPherson, please, for one and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Wong, you talked about the prospect of violence increasing and being more dire.

For my last minute and a half, could you give me your sense of where Canada's at, perhaps in terms of a grade? In your opinion, how are we doing so far?

Dr. Joseph Wong: In terms of...?

Ms. Heather McPherson: I mean in terms of our relationship and our acknowledgement of Taiwan. How are we doing with our participation and working with our allies on the ground?

Dr. Joseph Wong: In Taiwan, I think the CTOT has done an extraordinary job. Given the constraints within the international space, I think the Canadian trade office in Taipei has done an extraordinary job of establishing these kinds of linkages within civil society, working relentlessly in terms of bringing businesses and industry together, Canadian companies, technology, shared R and D, and so forth. I think that in those kinds of informal spheres, Canada has done an extraordinary job.

At the same time, to date or until very recently, it did not terribly antagonize the PRC, which still allowed us the opportunity to think about those strategic inducements that might help soften the regime in the PRC. More recently, as the PRC has become strident in its own views, it's again closing up that space. We need to be ever more clever and innovative in how we engage with Taiwan.

● (1800)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Dr. Wong.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. McPherson.

We will now go over to Mr. Morantz, or Ms. Gray or Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Morantz, do you want to lead off? You can always split it, if you'd like.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I can go ahead.

Mr. Marty Morantz: That's okay.

There was some discussion earlier, and the consensus of opinion seems to be that Taiwan is under no imminent threat. I'm wondering a couple of things. One is, under President Xi, has the threat level gone up? That's one thing I'm wondering about.

There seems to be an awful lot going on in the region. China always seems to be doing something provocative. There was the discussion earlier of the 18 warplanes sent into the air defence identification zone. Taiwan responded and scrambled their own aircraft. In April, it was reported that China entered into a security agreement with the Solomon Islands. The Solomon Islands cut ties with Taipei back in 2019 in favour of Beijing. There's the so-called pact that Mr. Putin and President Xi entered into, where they endorsed each other's territorial ambitions.

It seems to me that there's a lot going on there to render an opinion that they're not under any immediate threat. I'm wondering if you could square that circle for me.

Mr. André Laliberté: I don't necessarily share my colleague's optimism. I think that Xi Jinping has shortened the calendar of when he wants to arrive at a solution, in his view, about unification or annexation. The question is what methods he will use.

One of the reasons for the optimism is that traditional or conventional intervention across the strait will be extremely difficult, and there is a lot of thinking going on among people who study security that China is already exploring different approaches, including asymmetric warfare, grey zone ways of attacking Taiwan and embargoes. There are so many different ways in which they would possibly force a decision.

Your question is to what extent there's a higher degree of hostility than before. Xi Jinping has been very clear about his intent. The question—and, frankly, I cannot answer it—is to what extent it's going to be credible. Does the PLA have the capacity to really prevail?

Mr. Marty Morantz: Professor Wong, do you want to jump in on that?

Dr. Joseph Wong: I'll make two comments. The first is that I am more worried for Taiwan than ever before. The second is that, under Xi Jinping, I don't think there is any room or any prospect for the PRC to make a concession on Taiwan. Hence, I think about ways in which political reform may become more palatable in China.

Under the current regime, I cannot see Xi making any meaningful concessions on Taiwan.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Morantz.

[*Translation*]

We're now heading into the final round of questions.

Ms. Bendayan, you have the floor for three minutes.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Professor Laliberté, first, I want to thank you for being with us today. I listened to your testimony with great interest. Like the other members of this committee, I'm grateful to you for bringing to our attention the proper terms that we should be using.

In a similar vein, I'd like to address how China alludes to the constitutional principle of "one country, two systems" to allay Taiwan's fears that its democratic system and traditions cannot survive under Chinese control.

We all know what's happening in Hong Kong right now. We have seen the Chinese crack down on the democratic process and freedom of expression, among other things.

In your opinion, what impact will the events in Hong Kong have on the situation between China and Taiwan?

● (1805)

Mr. André Laliberté: Thank you very much for the question.

For one thing, it's not a constitutional principle. The phrase "one country, two systems" is a political statement. It's a political statement that Xi Jinping has simply decided to reject. He's given up on this principle because that's no longer his goal. The real goal is now the annexation of Taiwan.

On the other hand, if Taiwan is annexed, it won't be to let Taiwan be an autonomous region with a different regime, a democratic regime. In fact, it will be to make Taiwan another Chinese province.

Like my colleague Joseph Wong, I am very pessimistic about this.

If we were in another reality, that is, if Xi Jinping were to resign, if he were not to return as leader of the Communist Party, people would wonder whether that would result in a reform process in the party. That would be the ideal scenario, but there's little chance of that happening.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you very much, Professor Laliberté.

[*English*]

My next question is addressed to Mr. Wong.

We heard earlier testimony from another esteemed professor. When looking at the timeline of a possible invasion into Taiwan, he was predicting it about 10 years out. I, like my colleagues around the table, have been reading with much concern and dismay about the regular military drills that are ongoing, even just this past weekend in the southern part of the island. I wonder if you agree on that 10-year timeline, or if you think it might be sooner.

Dr. Joseph Wong: I couldn't speculate. I think it's shorter than what we had originally thought. There was a prevailing conventionalism not too long ago that time was on Taiwan's side. That is, if Taiwan could maintain its democratic course and China continued to economically modernize, this would be a positive scenario for both sides of the challenge.

Increasingly, it seems that time is not on Taiwan's side, so I can't speculate on the number of years. I think all of the analysts are considering the various types of scenarios and invasion scenarios people have talked about, the challenge of a coastal invasion in Taiwan and so forth, but it's beyond my expertise to be able to give a date except to say that, politically, it seems to me that the window is much shorter than it was before.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Wong.

Thank you, Ms. Bendayan. Your time is up.

Hon. colleagues, allow me to thank the expert witnesses for appearing before the committee this afternoon.

Professor Laliberté and Professor Wong, we thank you for your testimony and for sharing your expertise.

[*English*]

Thank you so much for being with us. It's greatly appreciated. We will allow you to disconnect.

Colleagues, I have a raised hand. There's a point of order.

Briefly, Ms. Sudds, please go ahead.

Mrs. Jenna Sudds: Thank you.

I have a brief point of order to correct the record. In my excitement during my line of questioning, I referred to two countries when I should really have been referring to two societies, if we could correct the record.... Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that clarification, Madam Sudds.

Colleagues, thank you very much for your work. With that, we stand adjourned until our next meeting.