



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on National Defence

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 088

Monday, January 29, 2024

Chair: The Honourable John McKay



Standing Committee on National Defence

Monday, January 29, 2024

• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): I see that's it's 11 o'clock. I see that there's quorum, and we have our witnesses in place. I want to welcome you all back after the break. Particularly, I want to welcome our clerk back. We are very pleased.

An hon. member: Hear, hear!

The Chair: In your absence, Andrew, the committee almost derailed, but fortunately your substitutes were quite helpful. We are very pleased to see you back.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Wilson): Thank you.

The Chair: With that, I want to call our witnesses in no particular order. I will leave them to decide who goes first.

You all know the drill because you've all been here many times before. With that, I will ask whoever is the lead to begin.

Major-General Gregory Smith (Director General, International Security Policy, Department of National Defence): Mr. Chair, I have an opening statement.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, we are honoured to once again appear before you. I am Major-General Greg Smith, director general of international security policy. I am joined by my colleague Major-General Paul Prévost, director of staff for the strategic joint staff, in addition to my two GAC colleagues, Amanda Strohan and Jennie Chen.

Thank you for this opportunity to continue our discussion with the committee on the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces' efforts to help implement the government's Indo-Pacific strategy.

[Translation]

Despite a challenging global security environment, the Indo-Pacific remains a priority for the defence team. We have continued to move aggressively to implement the Indo-Pacific strategy. In 2023, we delivered on all our stated strategic objectives and look forward to building on these successes in 2024.

[English]

In short, we have increased our defence presence in the region, allowing for more engagement, co-operation and collaboration. This includes increased security co-operation with partners and ex-

panded engagement through regional training, multilateral exercises and events.

From deploying our third Royal Canadian Navy warship to engaging in large-scale, strategic, multilateral exercises in the region for the first time and expanding our defence relations with priority countries, National Defence has delivered.

[Translation]

The defence team's main effort in 2024 will be maintaining, and where possible, increasing active and meaningful operational contributions to the region on a sustainable and enduring basis. This will be critical in demonstrating that Canada is a reliable partner to the region and a net contributor to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

[English]

Operation Horizon will be the primary vehicle for delivering the defence lines of effort in the Indo-Pacific strategy, capturing operations, existing and new exercises, and activities from all elements of the Canadian Armed Forces, including capacity-building programs.

Through Operation Neon, we will also continue monitoring United Nations Security Council resolutions against North Korea as we maintain our long-standing support to the United Nations Command, and for the importance of denuclearization and the promotion of peace on the Korean peninsula. In December 2023, as part of this commitment, Canada increased the Canadian Armed Forces' footprint within the United Nations Command, including assuming the position of deputy commander of the United Nations Command.

Together, these operations will directly support the promotion of peace, resilience and stability in the region, and they will help uphold the rules-based international system.

[Translation]

The defence team will also continue to foster defence relations with key regional partners and communicate our defence and foreign policy interests, as well as highlight Canada's significant contributions to the collective effort of promoting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

[English]

In fact, last week, a defence delegation visited the region for defence policy talks to deepen relationships with partner nations and hear from them how Canada can become a better and more trusted defence and security partner. These talks resulted in concrete deliverables, advancing relationships one step at a time. For example, we signed a defence co-operation memorandum of understanding with the Philippines, establishing a framework that will significantly enhance the level of co-operation and the types of activities between our forces.

As well, during the Canada-Vietnam defence policy dialogue held in the fall, we signed a United Nations peacekeeping co-operation memorandum of understanding, allowing our forces to share expertise and support training efforts through Vietnam's peacekeeping training centre.

As we head into the second year of the Indo-Pacific strategy, the defence team will continue to promote and share our key accomplishments, as well as the vast array of activities and strategic impacts that Canada delivers in the region to support our shared interests with partners.

In sum, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces will continue to deliver a meaningful and multifaceted regional presence for Canada from which we can promote peace and stability in support of our national interests and values.

[Translation]

I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. We're ready for questions.

Do you have an opening statement from Global Affairs?

• (1105)

Ms. Amanda Strohan (Director General, Indo-Pacific Strategic Planning, Policy and Operations, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): We don't have an opening statement, but perhaps we'll introduce ourselves, if you're all right with that.

The Chair: By all means, yes.

Ms. Amanda Strohan: My name is Amanda Strohan. I'm the director general for Indo-Pacific strategic planning, policy and operations. I'm joined by my colleague.

Ms. Jennie Chen (Executive Director, Greater China Political and Coordination, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Good morning, everyone. My name is Jennie Chen. I'm the executive director for our greater China political division at Global Affairs.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We know Major-General Prévost.

With that, Mrs. Gallant, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Reportedly, top Chinese and U.S. officials held candid talks in Bangkok aimed at lowering tensions between the superpowers on Taiwan and other subjects. How realistic is it that an invasion of Taiwan will be avoided? What military assets does Canada have in order to do our part should it become necessary?

MGen Gregory Smith: I can start, Mr. Chair.

The important thing is that the Indo-Pacific strategy, I think, establishes deterrence. We have a presence in the region. We're doing Taiwan Strait transits. We're doing exercises. We're showing ourselves as a regional partner. I think all of that sets a tone in the region that we're present. Canada is not the biggest player there, but we're a willing and able partner in the region. I think that helps create an overall environment in the area to say that we're present and it's important.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Should a conflict erupt, what can Canada actually provide in terms of firepower or evacuations? How are we set up to do the part of the plan that we may be called on to do?

MGen Gregory Smith: Mr. Chair, I'll start. Maybe my operations colleague will want to join me on this one.

We're trying to prevent that. That's what the Indo-Pacific strategy is about. It's about creating overall deterrence. I like to call it a "rules-based international order presence". It establishes the idea that we must follow the guidelines of how we act in the world internationally. Beyond that, we're working very closely with our allies and partners to try to prevent such a threat.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Prevention is certainly worth a pound of cure, but our job is to protect Canadians and the region in the worst-case scenario. What assets do we have in place and what plans do we have in place should the worst-case scenario come to pass?

MGen Gregory Smith: I'll start by saying that we're planning with our allies and our partners, but we hope that never happens. Beyond that, I think we've already talked about some of the presence we have there with the three ships that go into the region periodically or throughout the year. Beyond that, we're increasing our army, air force, special forces and cyber presence throughout to try to prevent that from happening.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay.

Let's move a bit north. North Korea fired several cruise missiles in waters off its east coast yesterday, and nuclear-capable cruise missiles were test fired last week. Is this the usual sabre-rattling over western naval exercises in the region around this time of year? If not, how is Canada prepared to protect our residents from potential collateral damage should missiles enter our airspace?

MGen Gregory Smith: Mr. Chair, I'll start. I'll see if one of my colleagues wants to join in.

I talked about Operation Neon. Op Neon is designed to try to do sanctions monitoring. We have a continuous presence there. It's episodic, but again, it helps set the tone in the region to say that we're monitoring what's happening and trying to prevent any type of conflict from continuing. Again, it's not going to prevent the firing of missiles, but it does show continuous presence. We're a big player as far as that goes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: If the missiles are launched, what type of air defence does Canada have in place in order to protect our residents?

MGen Gregory Smith: Mr. Chair, I'll just ask a question. The residents of...?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Residents of Canada.

Our Canadian citizens in South Korea will be the next question.

MGen Gregory Smith: Okay.

We're talking about ground-based air defence. We don't have any ground-based air defence on the B.C. coast or anything like that, but that's why we have an Indo-Pacific strategy. That's why we do Operation Neon. It's to try to prevent these types of things. It's continuous presence to create deterrence, if you will.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay.

Many people in my community have a son or daughter in South Korea teaching or living permanently. I know that it's on their minds all the time. Whenever the sabre-rattling happens, at what point do we start making plans to get them out of there? What is the signal? If you had family of your own in South Korea, when would you tell them to get out?

• (1110)

MGen Gregory Smith: Mr. Chair, again, I'll see if any of my colleagues want to jump in here.

We have non-combatant evacuation operation contingency plans for all kinds of regions throughout the world. We did it recently in the Sudan, and we did it recently and prepared for it in Lebanon and Israel. We're prepared and can do those types of things.

That being said, how can we set the conditions so that the situation will never occur? That's through the kind of presence we're creating right now—and I'm talking militarily. Clearly, we have other trade, people-to-people connections and a lot of other activities that will try to lower the temperature there to prevent that from happening.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay.

I'll ask Major-General Prévost a question.

At what point do Canadians know it's time to start making plans to get their families out of South Korea?

Major-General Paul Prévost (Director of Staff, Strategic Joint Staff, Department of National Defence): Mr. Chair, the answer to this question lies with Global Affairs, as they are responsible for consular cases, so I'll refer to them.

Ms. Amanda Strohan: Sure.

First of all, let me say that we have condemned the missile launches consistently. Again, I agree with my colleagues that sanctions are an extremely important part of the deterrents to ensure that we don't arrive at a situation of conflict in the region, and that we would appeal for calm, stability and security.

With respect to Canadian citizens in the region, as we have in many parts of the world, Global Affairs Canada has a branch that is responsible for planning for contingencies. We do that around the world in coordination with our National Defence colleagues and partners across government. We have plans in place for the region, much as we do in the rest of the world.

We have travel advisories, which are reviewed on a regular basis for countries across the region, and Canadians are encouraged to follow those travel advisories. Canadians living in the region are encouraged to register with us and to follow our travel advisories for the most up-to-date information on security threats in the region.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gallant.

Mr. Fisher, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, folks, for being here. I hope you had a great new year and got a bit of a break and time to spend with family members.

I'm interested in what has happened in the global landscape and the global environment since we launched our Indo-Pacific strategy. We have the war in Ukraine and the conflict in the Middle East. There's obviously going to be—justifiably so—a shift in the international community's focus.

How has the recent launch of the strategy impacted the important work you're doing? Also, how has that impacted relationships with our partners in the Indo-Pacific?

Ms. Amanda Strohan: Indeed, the Indo-Pacific strategy recognizes the importance of the region in an increasingly complex world. It is fair to say that the geopolitical situation around the world has become increasingly complex since the strategy was launched just over a year ago.

What that tells us is that we were timely in launching a strategy and the framework of the strategy remains sound. The strategy is built around five strategic pillars or objectives that we consider to be Canada's priorities in the region. These are peace, security and stability, trade and economic prosperity, protecting the planet, investing in and connecting people, and engaging in the region and being a reliable partner. Partners in the region are increasingly important to us as the world becomes more unstable, and that framework continues to be valid.

Of course, over time, we will continue to tactically recalibrate as we look at a strategy that will extend over five to 10 years, but the framework of the strategy and the principles on which it is based are still valid a year in, and they will continue to be valid as the strategy moves forward.

Mr. Darren Fisher: You talked about one of the pillars being economic and about trade. I see that particular pillar as being something that must have been heavily impacted by the things I just outlined.

Ms. Amanda Strohan: Indeed. Again I think it speaks to why the strategy is increasingly important. In fact, trade and the economic pillar of the strategy were very active in the first year of implementation. If you look at some of the activities we conducted over the last year, we have our team Canada trade missions that started in the first year of the strategy, with the first full-scale mission taking place in October. There are another four team Canada trade missions coming up in the next months.

We're opening an Agriculture and Agri-Food office in Manila, and Export Development Canada is also expanding its presence in the region with two additional locations. We've named and posted a senior trade representative in Jakarta, and we've put more money out the door in the CanExport facilities for Canadian exporters in the region.

There's a lot of activity happening on the trade and economic front to uphold this strategic objective of the strategy.

• (1115)

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you for that.

Sticking with recent tensions that have cropped up since we launched the strategy, what about the tensions between the governments of Canada and India? How have they impacted our ties and relationships in the Indo-Pacific region?

Ms. Amanda Strohan: I'll take that question as well.

In the context of the Indo-Pacific strategy, what I would say is that this strategy, as I said, is over five years and renewable for another five years. It is a 10-year strategy. We are focused in the IPS on our long-term relationships in the region. We know that India will continue to be an important partner in that. We recognize that there will be ebbs and flows with respect to bilateral relations with many countries in the region over the course of the 10-year time horizon of the strategy. We're prepared for that. Again, the principles of the strategy remain valid.

With respect to specific bilateral relations with any country, I would refer those to my colleagues potentially before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs. With respect to the Indo-Pacific

strategy, we think the strategy framework continues to hold. In fact, it was designed specifically to help us navigate complications in the region over the course of 10 years.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you.

Major-General Smith, during your opening remarks you talked about a defence delegation that was working with partners on how we can become a better defence partner. Obviously, you had only five minutes, so can you just fill us in a little bit on what kind of conversation that was? I assume that we're seen as being a good partner in defence around the world. I'm interested in your thoughts on who might have said that we could do better and what we could do better.

MGen Gregory Smith: Mr. Chair, I was fortunate to go to the region—I got back late last week with my boss—and participate in what's known as the Shangri-La Dialogue Sherpa Meeting, which is a regional security forum. It's named after the hotel; it's nothing exciting.

All of that is to say that we had multiple bilaterals with partners throughout the region who said, yup, you're present, and you've been doing good things. However, it's a year in, so I don't want to be too self-celebratory up here and say that we've resolved this. We're now a year in, and from a defence perspective, we're starting to build on relationships. I talked about the visit with the Philippines and Vietnam, and I went to Cambodia, as a means of starting relationships with the countries that are important particularly for ASEAN.

I think we're building upon these relationships and also looking for opportunities across the five pillars of defence. Yes, we want to have ships and visit as much as possible. Where can we do exercises? How about capacity building, including women, peace and security, and maybe some cyber? We're looking for those opportunities. I would say we're doing well after the first year, but we'll continue to build on those.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have six minutes.

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

I also thank the witnesses. It is always a pleasure to see them again.

I want to start with a few questions about AUKUS, the tripartite agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. We know that the Canadian government is not going to participate in the nuclear submarine component of the agreement, but that it wants to contribute to the component on artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, among other things. I would like you to give me an overview of the situation.

In addition, when you want to join such a group, the important thing is not so much what you can find there, but rather what you can bring to it. However, in a previous study, we saw that procurement delays are very long. As a result, what we manage to acquire in cybersecurity is often a bit obsolete as soon as we acquire it.

Is there a specific strategy that would make it possible to bring something worthwhile to the table, even if it means reviewing cybersecurity and artificial intelligence procurement in a more targeted way?

MGen Gregory Smith: I'll start the answer, but cybersecurity is a broader issue than national defence.

That's a good question. The AUKUS agreement has two pillars. The first concerns nuclear submarines, in which Canada is not a participant, obviously. However, we are ready to contribute to the second pillar, and we are waiting for an invitation.

I would also say that cybersecurity as it relates to national defence is one of the five pillars of the Indo-Pacific strategy. We're already starting to do some work on that. So we are taking significant steps. At the same time, we are working with other groups. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, is a very important group. We try to do as much as we can with that association. There is also the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, with which we are doing more. I can talk more about it if you want, but it is moving forward. That is where we are focusing our efforts at the moment.

• (1120)

Ms. Amanda Strohan: I could add to that. It's not just National Defence that is involved in cybersecurity. There are other departments and other government agencies involved in this.

[English]

In the Indo-Pacific strategy, there is indeed an initiative for cybersecurity and cyber-diplomacy. That initiative is well under way with partners. Some activities have already taken place in the course of the first year of the strategy. We convened like-minded partners, including some from the region, in June in Vancouver to talk about threats emanating from the region. In the strategy, we participated in the Singapore International Cyber Week in October and the ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity with partners in October. We've been very active on the front of cyber-diplomacy and cybersecurity.

The Indo-Pacific strategy aims, on the one hand, to reinforce our own capacity to anticipate and cope with threats emanating from the region, but it's also to help partners in the region improve their capacity to predict and cope with cybersecurity threats.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

To clarify my question a little, I understand that you are waiting to be invited to participate in AUKUS, but for that to happen, you have to be attractive.

Is there a specific strategy being deployed in terms of resources to be able to present something worthwhile and to ensure that an invitation becomes inevitable? Diplomacy and cybersecurity are one thing, but in terms of equipment, is a strategy being developed to make Canada more effective and more attractive?

MGen Gregory Smith: We are already in discussions with the three countries that form the AUKUS partnership. We already have a very good relationship with these countries, including the United Kingdom and the United States. Things are going very well and we will continue to move this file forward.

To answer your question, we have a lot of resources. We work with those allies to present our strengths in some of the high-tech areas that we are very familiar with.

We are waiting to be invited to be part of that alliance. Few invitations go out, and that applies not only to Canada but to more allies, as well.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I have a question for Global Affairs Canada.

Canada is in the process of implementing a defence co-operation agreement with the Philippines. On the other hand, we see that the Philippines may have just helped China by providing troop support.

In this context, where a number of Indo-Pacific countries sometimes find themselves on both sides of the fence and have a lot of personal interests to protect, how can we find a balance between bilateralism and multilateralism? Is there an evolution toward one or the other, based on the situation we are currently seeing?

[English]

Ms. Amanda Strohan: We're doing both. I think it's fair to say that the Indo-Pacific strategy anticipates engagement on both the multilateral and bilateral fronts. We're very active in both.

I think you raise an important point to say there are varying and competing interests in the region. We are there to protect Canada's national interests. I think that really outlines why it is so important that we be there and engage with all partners across the region, because there are competing narratives and competing interests, and it is important that Canada engage.

The Indo-Pacific strategy invests \$2.3 billion in 24 initiatives that are to be implemented by 17 government departments and agencies. It demonstrates a seriousness and an engagement with respect to the region.

It's important that we be there. That has been well received by countries in the region. It's important that we be there, because we need to defend Canadian interests. There are competing narratives on the ground. By bringing what we bring with the Indo-Pacific strategy, we're there to demonstrate to partners that it's worth working with us, and we will continue to advocate for Canadian interests in that crowded space.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, you have six minutes, please.

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

In terms of some of the details on trade with the Indo-Pacific strategy, Canada is now the chair of the CPTPP. It was sold as this grand, progressive partnership. However, it seems to be in name only. We've traded off about 58,000 Canadian jobs, damaged supply-managed sectors and sold off parts of our auto industry. The trade-offs seem to be.... It was recently reported that there will be a 0.082% increase to our GDP by 2035.

Can you give us an update on the numbers? Has that changed? Are we seeing any actual grand growth from this trade partnership?

• (1125)

The Chair: Generally, I don't interfere with members' questions, which are perfectly legitimate. That strikes me as a question for another committee, but still, there may be some security implications.

If you could, focus on that part, please.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: When we talk about the Indo-Pacific strategy, a large part of that is trade, so I don't see....

The Chair: Fair enough. Okay.

Go ahead.

Ms. Amanda Strohan: Let me speak to that in general terms, because I don't have the specific data to address these issues in detail.

What I will say is that we're a trading nation. Our market access, which we have under our various trade agreements, is world-leading, and Canadian businesses are benefiting from that.

The Indo-Pacific strategy recognizes that this region in particular will be important for Canadian prosperity in the future. We recognize that the global middle class will be increasingly concentrated in the Indo-Pacific region. It will play an increasingly important role in supply chains.

We can anticipate that now and in the future, if we're not there, we will miss out on opportunities. It's a crowded space. That is why the Indo-Pacific strategy anticipates the need to engage in a commercial sense in the region.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: It's interesting that you talk about the global middle class, but ultimately a lot of these trade agreements will end up with working-class people suffering, certainly in terms of that progressive side that there was supposed to be. There were to be no major labour provisions. We're trading with countries that potentially have quite significant human rights abuses. There's no chapter on gender rights or indigenous rights.

In terms of those standards Canada is supposed to put forward, we continue to hear about the international world order and the battle for human rights as a part of that. Are we actually seeing that with the CPTPP?

Ms. Amanda Strohan: Again, I can't speak specifically to the CPTPP. I'm not a trade policy expert or a trade negotiator, but I can say that, under the Indo-Pacific strategy, there are a couple of things in which we've invested money. One is labour standards. There is a provision within the Indo-Pacific strategy to provide capacity building for countries within the Indo-Pacific region to meet the labour standards set out in international trade agreements. That's something we're doing.

We have also signed the plan of action trust fund with ASEAN to fund the participation of ASEAN members in free trade negotiations between Canada and ASEAN.

There are things we are doing within the Indo-Pacific strategy to help countries in the region improve their standards. We also have, within the Indo-Pacific strategy, provisions to increase our development assistance. We have money that is designated to improve democracy and human rights in the region. The strategy has five strategic objectives. It covers areas included under human rights and democracy, and we'll continue to defend those things to try to improve the situation.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: That's very interesting as well, because China has applied to join. It seems as though they may be given membership. How does that now work in terms of increasing democracy? How do human rights and labour standards now factor into what may be that expanded CPTPP?

Ms. Amanda Strohan: Again, I can't speak specifically to CPTPP or the potential for its expansion. I'm not sure if my colleague has any comments with respect to China specifically, but really we're not in a position to speak to the CPTPP specifically.

Ms. Jennie Chen: May I add something?

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Go ahead, yes, absolutely.

Ms. Jennie Chen: I would just say, in terms of accession for CPTPP, that of course China has applied to join CPTPP. As the chair of CPTPP this year, Canada is still working through the various processes and procedures with other members of CPTPP. It's a consensus-driven organization, so we have to work together with all the other members to plan that pathway forward. It's still under consideration.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

I'll shift to our DND folks, because I don't know how much time I have left—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: With all of these increasing pressures in terms of what's going on in the region, we have a retention and recruitment crisis. How are we managing that in terms of our numbers?

MGen Gregory Smith: Mr. Chair, IPS actually tells us what to do. It's great. It gives us the resources to do it, and we're fairly confident that we'll continue to do that across the five lines of effort. I have good confidence that we'll continue to do that.

Outside, as was said, there are a lot of pressures around the world, but we have the resources and the direction to do so.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Mr. Bezan, before you begin, you have to say CPTPP three times fast.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You have five minutes.

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

Welcome to our witnesses. It's good to see all of you—General Smith, General Prévost and our colleagues from Global Affairs—back at our committee.

Talking about Operation Horizon and freedom of navigation, particularly in the Strait of Taiwan, in the South China Sea, how many frigates do we currently have deployed on this operation?

MGen Paul Prévost: Right now we have no frigates deployed in the region under Operation Horizon, but one will sail shortly. The strategy calls for three ships to be deployed every year, and our intent for 2024 is to have three ships in the region.

Mr. James Bezan: How long is a deployment?

MGen Paul Prévost: Each ship will be deployed for about six months.

Mr. James Bezan: If it's six months, will there be overlap? Will there be two ships at a time?

MGen Paul Prévost: That's correct. One will sail from the east coast shortly to go the long way around to the Asia-Pacific, and the other two ships will sail from the west coast this summer.

Mr. James Bezan: How about our AOR supply ship *Asterix*? Has it been deployed, and will it be deployed again?

MGen Paul Prévost: We're still working on the final plan there. We'll inform the committee once we have it, but the *Montréal* is set to sail shortly.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you.

When we look at the recent election in Taiwan and the increase in provocative actions taken by the PLA Navy as well as the PLA Air Force over the Taiwan Strait and around the island of Taiwan, have we encountered when we've been showing our frigates and doing freedom of navigation of the sea any hostile actions by the PLA against our assets?

MGen Paul Prévost: I will take that one. Again, I wouldn't say hostile action, but we're concerned about the way the PLA Navy has been acting around our ships and around our aircraft.

Mr. James Bezan: No hostile action around the Cyclones as well—is that right?

MGen Paul Prévost: I'm sorry.

Mr. James Bezan: Our Cyclones have had some run-ins you might say.

MGen Paul Prévost: That is correct, and we're concerned about the behaviour. It's wholly in China's rights to intercept our military assets in the region in international waters. At the same time we're concerned about the way they're going about it, and we're having the discussions with China to try to professionalize the intercept.

Mr. James Bezan: Would you described their actions and interactions with the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force as careless?

MGen Paul Prévost: I would say it's of concern. "Careless" is probably a good term.

Mr. James Bezan: Going to Operation Neon in North Korea, Mrs. Gallant was talking about both the testing of cruise missiles—a capability they haven't had until recently—and firing that into waters near South Korea, as well as the very recent rocket launch and satellites that were put into orbit definitely giving them more reach with ballistic missiles.

How big of a concern is that to the Canadian Armed Forces in protecting our own airspace but also protecting the region?

MGen Paul Prévost: It's of concern. We're obviously following it. Every time North Korea launches something our intelligence folks spend quite some time studying what's going on there. It is of concern for the region obviously, but this is also why we have the Indo-Pacific strategy here to bring stability and security to the region by ensuring a presence with allies to make sure we deter, as much as possible, those actions.

Mr. James Bezan: I would hope with our allies, as we look at the increasing threats both in the South China Sea and the east Thomas Shoal and at the interaction between the PLA Navy and the Philippine Coast Guard, that we would do more in working together and ensuring that there are proper defences in place, like we're doing in NATO along the eastern flank.

Mr. Chair, with the time I have left, I want to move a motion that I gave notice of. I move:

That, given the testimony from witnesses at the Nova Scotia Legislature's Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, which repudiated denials from the Department of National Defence regarding military homelessness, and given that there is widespread and incontrovertible evidence that after eight years of Justin Trudeau as Prime Minister our military members can't afford food or housing, the committee invite the Minister of Housing; the Executive Director of the Royal Canadian Legion Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command; the Director of Emergency Management for the Halifax Regional Municipality; and the Executive Director of the Halifax & Region Military Family Resource Centre to answer questions on the military housing crisis.

Mr. Chair, I'm sure that over the holidays members saw the stories in the Halifax Chronicle. The first one came on December 21. There was a hearing done at the Nova Scotia Legislature on unhoused members of the Canadian Armed Forces and this is, in my mind, a travesty that is happening. It's unfortunate that our serving military heroes have been forced to live in tents and use food banks.

We had a number of different quotes from Craig Hood, the executive director of the Royal Canadian Legion, talking about couch surfing, living rough in tents, living in their vehicles and entering into unsafe relationships to secure housing at risk of domestic violence. He described this as a serious incident or an epidemic that needs to be tackled. That is from Craig Hood.

Ryan Taplin, a 33-year-old military veteran, is also talking about the need to use more benevolent funds in the Legion to support current serving members. This is unheard of.

Erica Fleck, director of emergency management for the Halifax Regional Municipality, said that she's also identified an increase in the number of active-duty members who are unhoused and who have only precarious housing. This speaks to the housing crisis in Halifax and the region.

I was hoping that we'd have a 106(4) emergency meeting on this to discuss having an expansion to our current housing study and having these extra witnesses invited. I think that four meetings are not enough to tackle this issue, knowing the crisis out there, especially when numbers at the Canadian Armed Forces are living in the cold and have been left out there. I reached out to both our Bloc and NDP colleagues and, unfortunately, couldn't get them to sign on to a 106(4), but I'm hopeful that they would support expanding the study and inviting these witnesses, along with the Minister of Housing.

This is Minister Fraser's backyard. He represents Nova Scotia, and I would hope that, as the Minister of Housing, he would be able to talk about how he's addressing this crisis in Nova Scotia and elsewhere that's impacting the Canadian Armed Forces.

I also would hope that Mr. Fillmore and Mr. Fisher, who have CFB Halifax and 12 Wing Shearwater in their ridings would also be supportive of this to ensure that we address this issue in an expeditious manner so that we can ensure that those who are serving us... We ask them to sacrifice a lot in operations. We aren't asking them to live on the streets while they're in service to Canada.

With that, Mr. Chair, I hope that we can support this motion.

● (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

The motion is in order, and when notice is properly done....

Given that this may be a matter of some debate, can I release the witnesses? It's kind of unfortunate. It's very difficult to get all witnesses together in one place at one time, and this is a bit of an unfortunate situation. I'm anticipating that it will occupy the balance of the time that we've designated for this meeting, so can I release the witnesses?

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): If I may, in response to your question, if there is no debate and we go straight to a vote, we would have time for witnesses.

The Chair: I already have two people who want to debate it.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I'll come off if everybody else does.

The Chair: I'm looking for consensus here.

Should we release them or shouldn't we?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Is this point of order on whether I release the witnesses?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Yes. The only thing I would say, Mr. Chair, with all due respect to my great colleagues, is that we do have witnesses today. We understand...and actually it was a motion on housing that you brought forward that actually derailed some of the calendars that were established last year. We completely agreed all together. We agreed to go on to housing and the importance of housing on base. I'm not disputing this.

What I would say is that could we look—

The Chair: It is a point of order. The point of order is whether I may release the witnesses under the circumstances, not the merits of the motion.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: No—

The Chair: I can't release the witnesses...?

● (1140)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, I would like to have the floor if you may allow me to explain why I think we should possibly keep our witnesses to continue on this very important topic, while still looking at how we can agree, through consensus, to look at the motion on maybe another day when we don't have witnesses here. That's my argument, my point that I would like to make.

The Chair: I'm sure they'll be thrilled with watching this debate. Carry on.

With that, Mrs. Lalonde, go ahead on the substance of the motion.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I'm hoping, actually, that we can go back to our witnesses, because they are here and we saw some very relevant questions by all of us. I think there is merit to hearing the decision that was made on our calendars going forward.

Thank you for giving me the floor, Mr. Chair, because I do value the importance of having possibly a new list or of looking at our list on our housing study. Indeed, it's very relevant. I just find it always entertaining, if I can say that, that we always conflict ourselves or confront ourselves when we have an ability to hear senior-ranking officials, who come and take the time out of their busy day to listen to us and to give us the explanations we want.

Certainly, the motion on the premises sounds interesting. We are studying housing. I hope, Mr. Chair, that we'll go back to housing and complete that study. I don't know if the value of what Mr. Bezan is proposing can all be agreed upon today. I think there's merit in certain witnesses being included. He brought his list of witnesses when he proposed his own study.

Looking at this motion, there would be possibly a potential amendment that we would make. Could we look at this another day and continue to listen to our witnesses on the Indo-Pacific? If this is not something that the committee is willing to consider, then I would say, yes, Mr. Chair, you would have to release our witnesses, unfortunately, and then we will speak for a very long time together to amend this wonderful motion.

The Chair: Unless I'm reading the committee wrong, I don't see any appetite to adjourn this debate or to release the witnesses.

The next one up would be Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank you.

As I said, I wondered whether she might move to adjourn debate if that's what she really wanted to do, but...

The motion has tremendous merit, and I think it's extraordinarily relevant to many of the MPs at this table for a variety of reasons, including the Halifax members and including the other members who have raised this issue. I'll let the floor go now in the hopes that we may just come to a vote and approve this, and then we can resume our questions for witnesses.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelly.

I have Ms. Lambropoulos, Ms. Mathysen, Mrs. Gallant, Mr. Bezan and Ms. Normandin.

Ms. Lambropoulos.

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

I just want to say that I agree with parts of the motion. Of course, it is an extremely important issue, and nobody who is a member of the CAF should be experiencing homelessness. Let's just get that out there. If there are people who are experiencing that, then we absolutely need to look at this issue.

I just wish that the member did not raise it in such a partisan manner. I really don't believe that the Prime Minister has anything to do with the situation. I know that our economy is struggling worldwide, and it's due to geopolitical reasons.

I can't support it the way it's written, obviously, but I would be happy to see it amended so that we can still take care of the issue of the CAF members who are experiencing homelessness, as that in

particular is something that we should look at and find a solution for.

• (1145)

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I, too, am disappointed that we won't have additional time to speak to the witnesses. Even after experiencing the derogation from my colleagues, I did have further questions in terms of the security status around the world.

Regarding the motion, I, too, am okay with parts of it. I am certainly unsure and would love to have a further discussion about this at our subcommittee, where this actually belongs, to maybe expand the motion we are currently studying—the study on housing—to include some of these witnesses. That would be absolutely acceptable to me.

However, I would question the members' continual tactics, which seem to be a continuation from last year. Unfortunately, the new year hasn't brought anything new on that.

I would also question the member who brought this forward. I understand that he has the best of intentions. However, during the discussions of a 106(4), the honourable member from the Bloc and I suggested that we put forward an all-opposition letter to the minister directly. We asked the honourable member to sign on to said letter, which he delayed and then refused to do.

If he truly wanted all the answers, then maybe he could have signed on to that letter, but if this is the tactic that he wishes to use in terms of getting a clip that he can use, so be it. I hope that we can continue this conversation in the subcommittee where it belongs.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mrs. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: All that's in this motion is that it's asking for extra witnesses. Many times, the clerk is unable to get the witnesses for a given time. This furnishes him with a list of extra witnesses. We're asking for that in advance, should there be a blank or a hole where we have to cancel committee because we don't have witnesses.

If they want to deny the fact of what is going on with homelessness in the military, that is quite something else.

Let's get the witnesses on the list. Call the question.

The Chair: I've had a request to call the question before we hear...

Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: I'd just respond to some of the comments that have been made.

First of all, national defence, Canadian Armed Forces housing and compensation for our serving members are all the responsibility of this government under Justin Trudeau. The out-of-control housing crisis, the hyperinflation that we're seeing and the housing crisis in Canada, especially in places like Halifax, Toronto, Vancouver and Victoria, have skyrocketed because of what has proven to be created by this Liberal government and its policies.

We need to address this now. The reason I never signed on to the letter is that all it did was give time for the minister to maybe respond in the next six months. This is a crisis that's happening today. We have witnesses who have appeared in front of the Nova Scotia Legislature who said that there are members living in tents, couch surfing and putting themselves in harm's way.

I can't believe that we would sit around this table and try to delay this, that we would not bring this forward now and not expand our study and have these witnesses appear so that we can further drill down and make sure we get answers sooner than later. It keeps putting our members of the forces at risk.

The Chair: I have Normandin, Fisher, Fillmore and Lalonde.

Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I would like to apologize to the witnesses for the hiccups we are experiencing. I find that particularly unfortunate, as we had excellent witnesses to whom I would also have liked to put more questions.

That said, on the substance of the motion, I agree with the list of witnesses to be called. This is an important issue that needs to be looked at. However, I do not agree with the wording as a whole, which I find unnecessarily partisan. However, I would still have been prepared to vote in favour of the motion, in the interest of time.

That said, I think this is the kind of file that should be sent to the subcommittee. I understand that this may not be the approach that the people who moved the motion want to take, but I still recommend that we discuss this matter in subcommittee, so that in the future we don't waste the witnesses' time unnecessarily.

• (1150)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We have all agreed that the topic of housing is hugely important, which is why when the Conservatives, under James, moved a motion to study housing, we agreed. We're in the middle of a housing study right now. Bring these topics up during our housing report. Ask for extra meetings. The committee has been very supportive of your request for a housing study.

We think about the exorbitant costs that people may have, and then we see the Conservatives, after a 30-hour marathon, vote against an increase in pay for our DND members. Let's have those conversations.

This is something that we can do within the study you've asked us to do, which we are currently doing. I'm all for talking about these important issues. We can do them within the study that we're on now.

The Chair: Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

I just want to underline what Ms. Lambropoulos said. Homelessness is unacceptable for anybody. I think that everyone on this committee and every one of us in this room probably carries a specific sensitivity for those in uniform who are homeless.

In DND Halifax, which Mr. Bezan raised, there are 10,000 CAF members. Three-quarters of those are members who serve in uniform. I would say it is understandable that those numbers are reflected in the 200 to 300 or so folks who are living rough in Halifax right now. It's statistically going to happen, but it doesn't mean that it's at all acceptable.

Halifax in particular is experiencing this housing crisis in a way that is more acute, perhaps, than some other places. That's for the reason that our city has been the fastest growing in population in the country for a couple of years. We are surprised by this growth in a way. We're a victim of our own success. The growth in housing has not been able to keep up with this sudden explosion in population. I'm highlighting this because it's specifically a Halifax thing relative to some of the other cities.

There are many efforts under way, by three orders of government, to solve this in Halifax. The way this order of government can best address this is through the housing study that this committee is already undertaking. I don't understand why we need to stand for people making political hay out of what is a tragic situation when we already have a study under way to address the very issues you raise.

Mr. Chair, with that, I move to adjourn debate on this question.

The Chair: I'll call the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: That closes the debate. We have six minutes left. I don't see there's anything useful that can be accomplished in six minutes. I suppose we could go back to the speaking order. That would give Mr. Collins five minutes.

May I say, colleagues, my anticipation is that on Wednesday, we will hear from Brookfield for the first hour. Then we are to consider our report on our trip to Europe last summer, which I don't anticipate to be controversial. It may be that we could carve out a bit of time to deal with this issue and others as to where we want to go for the next few weeks and months.

Anyway, I would encourage you not only to speak to each other but also to speak to the chair so that we can possibly do this in a collegial way as opposed to other ways.

With that, Mr. Collins, you have the final five minutes.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Major-General Smith.

You emphasized in your opening remarks the importance of partnerships. You talked about Canada being a reliable partner. You used words like “collaboration” and “co-operation”. I'm interested to hear your take on what role the U.S. plays in terms of that partnership in fulfilling our goals and objectives in the region as part of the plan.

• (1155)

MGen Gregory Smith: The U.S. is an important partner—obviously it's the biggest partner in the region—and we do a lot with it. We can talk about the Taiwan Strait transits. Those are done with the United States of America. We're doing a lot in the region, and the United States is a very important part of that.

Mr. Chad Collins: Then I will just ask a follow-up on that. Former president Trump has very strong opinions about NATO and the partnerships and alliances that have been formed historically over the last several decades. He's pulled out some of those quotes and some of those opinions again in his quest to become the Republican candidate for the presidential election in the U.S. this year.

What do we do, as a partner of the U.S. and as part of that alliance, to prepare for the eventual or possible return of former president Trump and those opinions, and by extension, policies that facilitate and accommodate the same opinions?

MGen Gregory Smith: Mr. Chair, I like to emphasize the fact that we work very actively with the U.S. in the region, and this Indo-Pacific strategy shows Canada doing some really good things in the region. Again, it's the first year. This is not to get too celebratory about it, but I think we're doing good work and we're showing Canada's effort in the region to reinforce the international rules-based order.

Beyond that, the U.S. is one ally in the region. I talked about ASEAN and ADMM-Plus. Those are the kinds of organizations we're really trying to do more with, and that will equally better embed us in the region and show what we do to contribute.

Mr. Chad Collins: At this point, Mr. Chair, I cede the rest of my time to Ms. Mathysen.

The Chair: Are we splitting it between Ms. Mathysen and Madame Normandin?

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I can try to do it as quickly as possible.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: In terms of what happened during that whole surveillance balloon or two last year, we know that it increased tensions and there was a lot going on. How can Canada ensure it continues that key communication channel to protect not only our commercial assets but also our military assets within the Indo-Pacific, despite the cutting of some of those communication ca-

bles and ties that happened, as an example, between the U.S. and China during that period of time?

MGen Gregory Smith: Mr. Chair, I'll start and then maybe I'll throw it over to my Global Affairs colleagues.

We have a line of communication here in Ottawa. It's with the defence attaché. I'm the guy who gets to do that. We're trying to get past just *démarches*, which is just speaking angrily to each other, to re-establish relationships, and we're looking at that now. How can we get to a more baseline discussion?

As you know, we have not done exercises or military co-operation with the People's Republic of China and the PLA since 2018. We're taking a look, but we have to do that with our greater partners across government.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I will give the rest of my time to Ms. Normandin, if there's any time left.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Ms. Mathysen. I'll be quick.

We know that there is a desire in the Indo-Pacific strategy to strengthen student exchanges under the investing in people component and to build ties. However, at the same time, a cap on visas for international students was recently announced. How does that cap align with the strategy?

[*English*]

Ms. Amanda Strohan: I will take that question.

Indeed the Indo-Pacific strategy foresees a number of initiatives to reinforce collaboration on academic matters, including through scholarships. The commitment under the Indo-Pacific strategy, with respect to investing in people and connecting people, is to strengthen our ability to recruit and retain high-potential students.

I can't speak specifically to the recent announcement—we have colleagues at IRCC who are able to do that—but what I can say is that the principles behind the Indo-Pacific strategy remain. We are still committed to strengthening Canada's international student program through the Indo-Pacific strategy, which commits to recruiting and retaining high-potential students. We continue to be committed to do that, and we will work with our colleagues at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to continue pursuing that.

The Chair: With that, I want to thank the witnesses for their attendance.

For the purposes of collegiality, which seems to have not gotten off to a good start so far.... On Wednesday, we have the military housing. SIRVA has been confirmed. Then, in the second hour, we deal with the report, and possibly members could talk to us about other things they might wish to do.

February 5 is also on military housing. The defence ombudsman has been confirmed, and the MFRCs have been invited.

Then we switch to the transparency report on February 7, February 12 and February 14. On February 26, we switch to consulting services.

I will say that the minister has been invited for the February 7 meeting—not confirmed but invited.

With that, witnesses, I thank you for your appearance, and I hope to see you again sooner rather than later. What we're talking about here is extraordinarily important. Even since we adjourned prior to Christmas, the entire world environment has been shaken, and I think that this committee needs to be on top of it as much as possible. I'm rather hoping that colleagues will see fit to invite you back, not just to talk about this issue but to talk about other areas of conflict around the world, because your services are being called upon more and more and I don't see a quick end to this.

Again, thank you for your service. Thank you for your appearance, and thank you for your patience.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>