

**STATEMENT OF ELBRIDGE A. COLBY TO THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE
CANADA-CHINA RELATIONSHIP, HOUSE OF COMMONS OF CANADA**

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Mr. Chairman, Vice Chairs, and Members of Canada's House of Commons' Special Committee on the Canada-People's Republic of China Relationship: Thank you very much for the invitation to testify. It is a great honor to be able to submit testimony to this important and timely Committee. I regret that my travel commitments prevent me from testifying in person.

Whether we like it or not, the world has now entered into an era of great power rivalry. While the United States and China are the two primary poles in this new old world, everyone – including Canada – will be profoundly affected.

Taiwan is the exceptionally dangerous flashpoint of this situation. As is well known, Taiwan is a self-governed island claimed by the People's Republic but traditionally considered to be within the U.S. defense perimeter. For many years, this uneasy, ambiguous situation could hold. While America and its allies shifted recognition from Taipei to Beijing, Washington remained opposed to the People's Republic forcibly subordinating the island. And Beijing, lacking the strength to bring the island to heel, did not really seek to force the issue.

The situation has now changed. The fundamental reason why is China's enormously growing strength. Until recently, China was an impoverished giant. Now it has a behemoth economy as large as America's. And it has built a military to match. Make no mistake: That military is specifically designed to seize Taiwan and take on the American military as part of that effort.

Nor is Taiwan likely to be the end of those ambitions, especially if Beijing can take it easily. Part of the proof is that China is increasingly building what is called a "power projection" military – one, like America's, designed to impose its will through military force far beyond its own shores. Just observe the oceangoing navy, replete with aircraft carriers and nuclear-powered submarines; space architecture; and overseas bases China is constructing.

At the same time, Beijing appears to be increasingly assessing that Taiwan will not fall into its hands peacefully and, more broadly, that some kind of confrontation with the United States and its allies is inevitable. Accordingly, there is greatly heightened concern in the United States and among our allies that China might strike at Taiwan, and might do so in this decade or even sooner. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan indicated earlier this fall that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is a "distinct threat," and Secretary of State Tony Blinken recently remarked that Beijing appears to have moved up its timeline for resolving the Taiwan issue. No one really knows if Beijing will attack, but the consensus increasingly seems to be that it is a distinct possibility in the coming

years and that the probability of it happening will increase over this decade, which the Biden Administration's National Security Strategy refers to as "decisive."

Even worse, there is real concern among military officers and respected experts that the United States could fare poorly in such a conflict – and even lose. U.S. Strategic Command chief Admiral Chas Richard stated recently: "As I assess our level of deterrence against China, the ship is slowly sinking. They are putting capability in the field faster than we are. As those curves keep going, it isn't going to matter how good our [operating plan] is or how good our commanders are, or how good our forces are – we're not going to have enough of them. And that is a very near-term problem." Former Indo-Pacific Command Commander and retired admiral Phil Davidson stated recently that America's conventional deterrent is eroding in the Pacific. These assessments are shared by many of the nation's leading defense experts.

This combination of factors is why the United States has clearly identified China as the primary challenge in its defense planning and the defense of Taiwan as the Pentagon's "pacing scenario." This focus has now continued across two administrations, as reflected in the fact that the Biden Administration's 2022 National Defense Strategy is very similar to the Trump Administration's 2018 National Defense Strategy. Indeed, China policy and our posture toward Taiwan are relatively rare areas of bipartisan agreement in the United States. The debate is more about *how* to confront China and help Taiwan, not about whether to do so.

My own debate is not with the Administration's stated defense strategy – to the contrary, I think their stated strategy is quite good. My concern is rather with the woefully inadequate level of effort and degree of prioritization they are dedicating to the problem. Our top priority as a nation should be to ensure that our defenses in Asia are strong enough to persuade Beijing never to take the risk of attacking Taiwan or our allies in the Pacific. By allowing our defenses vis a vis Beijing to erode so much we are taking a cosmic gamble. This is the height of imprudence.

To be clear, I do not think Washington should change its diplomatic or political positioning toward Taiwan. The status quo is good enough for our interests. Rather, we need to be strong enough merely to defend our traditional position. This means focusing less on political symbolism and far more on shoring up our military deterrent: speaking softly and carrying a big stick, rather than the reverse.

What does this all mean for Canada?

The bottom line is that it means there is an acute need for more Canadian defense contributions.

The reality is that the United States will need to focus much more on matching China's awing military buildup in Asia, and it will not be able to achieve even this more focused goal by itself. The simple fact is that China has an economy of equivalent size to America's and it has the advantage of proximity, catch-up, and focus with respect to a

conflict centered on the Western Pacific. Addressing this challenge is going to require that America genuinely prioritize Asia and do so *now*.

This will require like-minded countries that share our opposition to China's domination of Asia to do much more – ideally well before a war starts but, if necessary, once it has broken out. Japan will need to spend far more on defense, likely at least 3% of GDP, and build a military designed to join in collective defense efforts alongside America's. The same goes for Australia, which is already leading the way in this respect. Taiwan will need to dramatically increase its defense spending and adapt its military for a defense against Chinese invasion and/or blockade.

At the same time, America's necessary focus on Asia will produce vacuums in other parts of the world, including Europe and the High North. Dangerous actors like Russia, Iran, and North Korea may very well seek to exploit this. So allies and partners will have to adapt and take more of a leading role in security in these regions. In South Asia, it will mean India. In the Middle East, it will mean Israel and the Abraham Accords partners. In Europe, NATO allies will have to assume much more of the responsibility for their own defense, as the United States will simply not be able to shoulder as much of the burden as it has done in the post-Cold War world.

In this context, Canada simply must do more. This is consistent with Canada's reputation as a great contributor to international public goods: the more Canada does to help address this more dangerous world, the better off the world will be.

But it is also in Canada's own security interests. If America is so worried about a Beijing-dominated Asia, Canada should be petrified. The "two Michaels" incident and the recent upbraiding of Prime Minister Trudeau by Xi Jinping give just a taste of how Beijing will treat smaller countries like Canada if it becomes dominant over the world's largest market area.

Even more directly, Canada is likely to become a potential target in the event of a conflict breaking out in Asia, whether Canada seeks to become directly involved or not. The American homeland itself is no longer a sanctuary, as two successive U.S. National Defense Strategies have made clear. This means Canada is all the more vulnerable, especially as it could offer an attractive way for China to hurt America without directly hitting U.S. territory.

It is of course up to Canada how and where to allocate its greater defense efforts, but I can say with full confidence that the world and Canada itself will be far better off with a much stronger and more active Canadian military. There is no time to delay. We are already late to the need.