

Discours du sénateur Olivier CADIC
"THE GLOBAL IMPORTANCE OF TAIWAN STRAITS"
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Dear Colleagues,

This summer, France enacted its second military programming law since Emmanuel Macron became President of the French Republic.

Since his arrival, France's military budget has doubled.

Emmanuel Macron recalled this Monday at the Élysée Palace in front of the French ambassadors:

This is the largest increase in France's defense budget in 50 years.

It grants a 413 billion euro (US\$453.3 billion) defense budget for the next seven years.

The country's military spending will amount to more than 2% of GDP by 2025.

France is aware that the world is becoming more dangerous.

Great powers are removing themselves from under the rule of international law.

Russia's current aggression towards Ukraine illustrates this.

During the debates in the French Senate this summer, I proposed amending the military planning law.

I have included in the legislation that France has now an obligation to defend freedom of navigation in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea as an Indo-Pacific power, in order to preserve peace and stability in the region.

It is a commitment by France that I would like to comment on.

The Indo-Pacific covers between 2/3 and one half of the Earth's surface and is home to 60 to 75% of the world's population.

The Indo-Pacific now generates nearly 40% of global wealth.

Perhaps more than 50% of global GDP in 2040 according to IMF forecasts.

At least half of the world's freight transits through this zone, which concentrates most of the world's reserves of critical raw materials: lithium, nickel and copper.

France and the EU have adopted a strategy for the Indo-Pacific, extending from the eastern coasts of Africa to the French territories of the Pacific.

For France, seven of its thirteen overseas departments, regions and collectivities are located in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

More than 1.6 million French people live in these French territories, and 200,000 expatriates are registered in the countries of the region.

In 2022, the Indo-Pacific represented more than 35% of France's foreign trade (outside the European Union) and more than 120 billion euros of French investment.

France has been the most attractive country in Europe for 4 years for foreign investment.

The only investment in France of the Taiwanese company Prologium announced last May, for more than 5 billion euros, corresponds to 50% of Chinese investments for 25 years in France, all sectors and companies combined.

In my eyes, protecting peace in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea aligns with France's strategic national interests, and is essential to a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

During his Senate hearing last May, our naval chief of staff assured us that patrols in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait were regular and adequate.

The Admiral reiterated our goal to affirm international law and allow nonaggressive transit.

The US Navy and Coast Guard transit also through the Taiwan Strait. Other democracies such as Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan and the Netherlands have conducted similar operations.

The ongoing militarization by Beijing in the South China Sea makes us fear that this maritime freedom of movement will eventually be threatened in this area.

The resurgence of incidents observed in the China Sea is linked to the Beijing regime's desire to appropriate an international maritime space, as demonstrated by the map published by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Monday.

China has many territorial disputes with its neighbors Japan, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and of course Taiwan.

The situation is becoming very tense, even distressing, for Vietnamese fishermen who are regularly threatened by the Chinese Coast Guard.

According to satellite images from the American company Planet Labs, released on August 10, Beijing has begun construction of new infrastructure on a small island in the Paracel archipelago, located less than 300 kilometers from the Vietnamese coast.

In addition to a cement factory, the images clearly show the construction of a runway in the middle of the island, strengthening projection capabilities in this area of which Beijing claims almost total sovereignty, including in the exclusive economic zones of the countries of the region.

The port on this island gives China a permanent maritime presence in the South China Sea.

This is an additional way for the Chinese to support their Coast Guard and their maritime militia, which put pressure on Vietnamese fishermen.

Filipino senators explained to us at the end of last year, in the French Senate, that the small Philippine reef called "Julian Felipe" has become a hotbed of tension, since Beijing claims it as its stronghold and has built military bases there on artificial islands.

Chinese incursions into the western Philippine Sea are now a daily occurrence and make the front page of local newspapers.

China has poldered seven sandbars to make them permanent islands in the Spratleys, a vast archipelago claimed in part by the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei.

In 2015 and 2016, the Chinese built these islands.

Now they are equipping them with more and more military capabilities: there are more missiles deployed, more rotations of planes and fighter jets, more surveillance equipment.

Chinese claims expressed under the formulas of "historic Chinese waters", "zones of indisputable sovereignty" and "traditional Chinese fishing zones" were invalidated in July 2016 by decisions of the international arbitral tribunal set up at the initiative of the Philippines.

Beijing considers that sentence "null and void".

Not content with failing to respect international law when it is not in line with its objectives, Beijing directly threatens the free flow of international trade by claiming that the waters of the Taiwan Strait are under Chinese sovereignty.

This predatory approach of China associated with a Navy that progresses in quantity as well as in quality, seeking to compete with the American Navy, creates the escalation.

It is even likely to trigger an international conflict if Beijing breaks the status quo by trying to invade Taiwan, like what we are seeing in Ukraine with Russia. The Taiwan Strait is a key corridor for the global economy....

It is an obligatory passage for the main commercial maritime flows that link Europe, the Middle East and the primary Chinese, Korean and Japanese ports.

70% of world container traffic and 50% of hydrocarbon and liquefied natural gas pass through it.

Because the Taiwan Strait is one of the most strategic axes in the world, the outbreak of a war in the region would have catastrophic consequences for maritime transport and the world economy.

Xi Jinping has made the conquest of Taiwan a goal that cannot, as he said, be postponed “from generation to generation”.

We now face the “threat” of a world dominated by China, a “revisionist” power whose nationalism feeds on a strong sense of revenge against Westerners.

Taiwan has become the 16th world economic power and would have its place in the G20.

Taiwan is collapsing the Chinese Communist Party's narrative that democracy is not the right model for the development of countries.

President Xi Jinping's repeated intentions to break the status quo to take control of Taiwan by force, if necessary, are of growing concern to us.

My dear colleagues.

A crisis in the Taiwan Strait would be very serious for our mutual economic interests and the entire value chain.

Nearly 100% of the world's most advanced semiconductor manufacturing capacity (sub-10 nanometers) is currently located in Taiwan.

In December 2022, Rhodium group estimated the economic cost of a simple blockade of the island at \$2.5 trillion.

The consequences would be more serious for European countries than those of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

The proliferation of military exercises by the Chinese army, under false pretenses, such as visits by foreign parliamentarians to Taiwan or Taiwanese elected officials abroad, constitute in fact a challenge to the status quo by China.

By endangering the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea but also in the Taiwan Strait, China threatens all the economies of the world.

This is why it seemed urgent and important for France to enshrine in its law the necessary defense of the right to maritime traffic in this region, particularly in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

Whatever the dispute between China and Taiwan, freedom of maritime circulation is essential, as is respect for international law.

This is why, my dear colleagues, I suggest that in each of your countries, you in turn enshrine this principle in your respective laws.