



## Talking Points

# PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY <sup>s33(a)(iii)</sup> [REDACTED] – 4 <sup>s22</sup> MAY 2024

**REACTIVE ONLY – CORRECT AS AT 1030K 06 MAY 2024**

**Issue** [REDACTED] The guided missile destroyer HMAS *Hobart*, while conducting Operation ARGOS in the Yellow Sea, has experienced <sup>s22</sup> <sup>s33(a)(iii)</sup> [REDACTED] <sup>s22</sup> [REDACTED] <sup>s33(a)(iii)</sup> [REDACTED].

On Saturday 4 May 2024, *Hobart's* embarked helicopter MH-60R Seahawk maritime helicopter experienced an unsafe and unprofessional interaction with a People's Liberation Army-Air Force fighter jet.

<sup>s22</sup> [REDACTED]

### Contingency Talking Points [REDACTED]

#### PLA-AF incident – 4 May 2024

- I can confirm on 4 May 2024, HMAS *Hobart's* helicopter and crew experienced unsafe and unprofessional conduct by a People's Liberation Army (PLA) fighter jet in international waters in the Yellow sea.
- Both HMAS *Hobart* and the helicopter were in international waters operating in support of Operation ARGOS, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) commitment to international efforts to enforce United Nations Security Council sanctions on North Korea.
- During this routine operation, a People's Liberation Army-Air Force (PLA-AF) fighter jet released flares along the flight path of the Australian Navy MH-60R Seahawk helicopter.
- This was unsafe and unprofessional conduct by the PLA-AF.

<sup>s22</sup> [REDACTED]



s22

### General Talking Points

- Australia expects all countries, including China, to operate their militaries in a professional and safe manner.
- Defence has for decades undertaken maritime surveillance activities in the region and does so in accordance with international law, exercising the right to freedom of navigation and overflight in international waters and airspace.
- I will not be commenting any further at this stage.

### ***Has the ADF experienced unsafe and unprofessional interactions from foreign militaries during sanctions enforcement operations?***

- The ADF interacts with foreign militaries when operating in international airspace and international waters as a matter of course. The majority of these interactions are safe and professional.
  - Note the unsafe and unprofessional conduct by a People's Liberation Army warship in the East China Sea toward HMAS *Toowoomba* [14 November 2023].
  - HMAS *Toowoomba* had been in the region conducting operations in support of United Nations Security Council sanctions on North Korea.
  - Following the incident with HMAS *Toowoomba* the Australian Government raised its serious concerns directly with the Government of China through the appropriate channels in Canberra and Beijing.
- As the Deputy Prime Minister stated in his media release on 18 November 2023:
  - The safety and wellbeing of ADF personnel continues to be of our utmost priority.
  - Australia expects all countries, including China, to operate their militaries in a professional and safe manner.

### ***Why was a PLA-N ship near HMAS Hobart?***

- HMAS *Hobart* was operating in international waters as part of an enduring commitment to Operation ARGOS, Australia's commitment to enforcing United Nations Security Council Sanctions against North Korea.





## Talking Points

- The PLA-N ship was shadowing HMAS *Hobart*.
- It is routine for PLA-Navy vessels to shadow movements of Royal Australian Navy vessels in the South China and East China Seas.

### Background [REDACTED] - NOT FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

#### PLA-AF incident – 4 May 2024

- On Saturday 4 May 2024, HMAS *Hobart*'s embarked *MH-60R Seahawk helicopter* experienced an unsafe and unprofessional interaction with a PLA fighter jet.
- HMAS *Hobart* was operating in support of Operation ARGOS, the ADF commitment to international efforts to enforce United Nations Security Council sanctions on North Korea.
- While the helicopter was conducting flying operations it encountered PLA-Navy and PLA-AF aircraft. During the second mission, the helicopter was shadowed by a PLA-AF jet aircraft. s33(a)(i)  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
- The interaction is assessed as unsafe and unprofessional.



## Talking Points

s22



Contact officer: s22

Contact officer phone: s47F or s22

Clearance	Name	Appointment	Date and time
<b>Drafted/Updated by:</b>	s22	Strategic Communication Advisor, HQJOC	0851K 06 May 24
<b>Reviewed by</b>	LCDR s22	Military Public Affairs Officer, JFMC N09	1057K 05 May 24
<b>Reviewed by SME:</b>	AIRCDRE John Haly	HQJOC J3	1830K 05 May 24
<b>Cleared by MAROPS / JFMC</b>	CDRE Jonathan Ley	JFMCC (MAROPS)	1830K 05 May 24
<b>Cleared IP Div</b>	s22	AS North South Asia	2135K 05 May 24
<b>Cleared MSC</b>	BRIG Nick Foxall	DG MSC	1855K 05 May 24
<b>Edited by</b>	LCDR s22	JFMC/ MAROPS N09	1040 06 May 24
<b>Reviewed by:</b>	CAPT s22	JFMC N3 / DMAROPS	1130 06 May 24
<b>Reviewed / Fact checked by</b>	LCDR s22	JFMC/ MAROPS N09	1205 06 May 24
<b>Fact checked by (re NOTAM)</b>	LCDR s22	JFMC N35 / MAROPS OPSCO	1250 06 May 24
<b>1* clearance</b>	CDRE Jonathan Ley	JFMC / DGMAROPS	1305 06 May 24





### Talking Points

<b>1* clearance</b>	AIRCDRE John Haly	HQJOC J3	1323K 06 May 24
<b>Original 2* cleared by:</b>	RADM Justin Jones	Deputy Chief of Joint Operations	1113K 06 May 24
<b>Cleared 3* by:</b>	LTGEN Greg Bilton	Chief of Joint Operations	1502K 06 May 24
<b>Cleared OSEC/OCDF</b>			





## Talking Points

# PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY <sup>s33(a)(iii)</sup> [REDACTED] – 4 MAY 2024

**REACTIVE ONLY – CORRECT AS AT 1030K 06 MAY 2024**

**Issue** [REDACTED]: On Saturday 4 May 2024, *Hobart's* embarked helicopter MH-60R Seahawk maritime helicopter experienced an unsafe and unprofessional interaction with a People's Liberation Army-Air Force fighter aircraft.

### Contingency Talking Points (O)

#### PLA-AF incident – 4 May 2024

- I can confirm on 4 May 2024, HMAS *Hobart's* helicopter and crew experienced unsafe and unprofessional conduct by a People's Liberation Army (PLA) fighter jet in international waters in the Yellow sea.
- Both HMAS *Hobart* and the helicopter were in international waters operating in support of Operation Argos, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) commitment to international efforts to enforce United Nations Security Council sanctions on North Korea.
- During this routine operation, a People's Liberation Army-Air Force (PLA-AF) fighter jet released flares across the flight path of the Australian Navy MH-60R Seahawk helicopter.
- This was unsafe and unprofessional conduct by the PLA-AF.

### General Talking Points

- Australia expects all countries, including China, to operate their militaries in a professional and safe manner.
- Defence has for decades undertaken maritime surveillance activities in the region and does so in accordance with international law, exercising the right to freedom of navigation and overflight in international waters and airspace.
- I will not be commenting any further at this stage.

#### ***Has the ADF experienced unsafe and unprofessional interactions from foreign militaries during sanctions enforcement operations?***

- The ADF interacts with foreign militaries when operating in international airspace and international waters as a matter of course. The majority of these interactions are safe and professional.





## Talking Points

- Note the unsafe and unprofessional conduct by a People’s Liberation Army warship in the East China Sea toward HMAS *Toowoomba* [14 November 2023].
- HMAS *Toowoomba* had been in the region conducting operations in support of United Nations Security Council sanctions on North Korea.
- Following the incident with HMAS *Toowoomba* the Australian Government raised its serious concerns directly with the Government of China through the appropriate channels in Canberra and Beijing.
- As the Deputy Prime Minister stated in his media release on 18 November 2023:
  - The safety and wellbeing of ADF personnel continues to be of our utmost priority.
  - Australia expects all countries, including China, to operate their militaries in a professional and safe manner.

### Background [REDACTED] - NOT FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

#### PLA-AF incident – 4 May 2024

- On Saturday 4 May 2024, HMAS *Hobart’s* embarked MH-60R Seahawk helicopter experienced an unsafe and unprofessional interaction with a PLA fighter jet.
- HMAS *Hobart* was operating in support of Operation Argos, the ADF commitment to international efforts to enforce United Nations Security Council sanctions on North Korea.
- While the helicopter was conducting flying operations it encountered PLA-AF aircraft. During it’s second mission, the helicopter was shadowed by a PLA-AF jet aircraft. s33(a)(iii) flares were released along the helicopter’s flight path at close range, requiring urgent avoiding action to remain safe.
- The interaction is assessed as unsafe and unprofessional.

Contact officer: s22 [REDACTED]

Contact officer phone: s47F [REDACTED] or s22 [REDACTED]

Clearance	Name	Appointment	Date and time
Drafted/Updated by:	s22 [REDACTED]	Strategic Communication Advisor, HQJOC	0851K 06 May 24
Reviewed by	LCDR s22 [REDACTED]	Military Public Affairs Officer, JFMC N09	1057K 05 May 24





### Talking Points

<b>Reviewed by SME:</b>	AIRCDRE John Haly	HQJOC J3	1830K 05 May 24
<b>Cleared by MAROPS / JFMC</b>	CDRE Jonathan Ley	JFMC (MAROPS)	1830K 05 May 24
<b>Cleared IP Div</b>	s22	AS North South Asia	2135K 05 May 24
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<b>Edited by</b>	LCDR s22	JFMC/ MAROPS N09	1040 06 May 24
<b>Reviewed by:</b>	CAPT s22	JFMC N3 / DMAROPS	1130 06 May 24
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<b>Fact checked by (re NOTAM)</b>	LCDR s22	JFMC N35 / MAROPS OPSCO	1250 06 May 24
<b>1* clearance</b>	CDRE Jonathan Ley	JFMC / DGMAROPS	1305 06 May 24
<b>1* clearance</b>	AIRCDRE John Haly	HQJOC J3	1323K 06 May 24
<b>Original 2* cleared by:</b>	RADM Justin Jones	Deputy Chief of Joint Operations	1113K 06 May 24
<b>Cleared 3* by:</b>	LTGEN Greg Bilton	Chief of Joint Operations	1502K 06 May 24
<b>Cleared OSEC/OCDF</b>	OCDF OSEC	s22	1942 6 May 2024 2002 6 May 2024







FOR: Deputy Prime Minister

CC: SEC, VCDF, ASSOC SEC, CJOPS, CN, CAF, DEPSEC SP&I, CDI, DEPSEC GOV, HMSC, FASIP, FASMECC

**OPERATION ARGOS: INTERACTION WITH PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY – AIR FORCE**

**Key Issues:**

On 4 May 2024, HMAS *Hobart's* embarked MH-60R maritime helicopter experienced an unsafe and unprofessional interaction with a People's Liberation Army (PLA) fighter aircraft in the Yellow Sea, while conducting Operation ARGOS. The airborne interaction occurred s33(a)(i) outside of China's claimed territorial waters.

HMAS *Hobart's* MH-60R helicopter manoeuvred to avoid flares that were released across its flight path by a PLA fighter aircraft. The MH-60R then communicated to the PLA aircraft that it was departing the area due to safety concerns and returned to HMAS *Hobart* where it landed safely. A placemat detailing the incident is at Attachment A.

Defence assessed this interaction as unsafe and unprofessional due to the close proximity of the flare release and the actions required by the MH-60R to assure the safety of the flight. Defence demarched China's Defence Attaché in Canberra on 6 May 2024. s33(a)(iii)  
s33(a)(iii)

**Media Considerations:**

Operation ARGOS underlines Australia's support for United Nations (UN) sanctions enforcement and the rules-based international order. s22  
s22 There is significant media interest in this incident. Defence has developed reactive talking points for your use, which have been provided to your office.

**Minister comments:**

Cleared by:

General Angus J Campbell AO DSC s22  
Chief of the Defence Force s22

7 May 2024

**Primary Contact Officer**

Air Vice-Marshal Stephen Chappell  
Head Military Strategic Commitments

s22

**Alternate Contact Officer** s22

Mr Bernard Philip  
First Assistant Secretary International Policy

s22



s33(a)(i)

1. ADF activities under Operation ARGOS are Australia’s tangible contribution to multinational enforcement of UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea and a demonstration of our commitment toward upholding the rules-based international order that has underpinned regional prosperity for decades.
2. s33(a)(iii)
3. s33(a)(iii)  
The release of flares in the immediate vicinity of other aircraft in attempts to warn off their activities and hinder flying operations is unsafe and unprofessional. While the dangers associated with the release of flares in the immediate vicinity of other aircraft are well known, and should be understood by professional aviators, s33(a)(iii)

Financial Impacts: No.

Systems/legislation/deregulation: No.

Consultation: Yes.

4. Director General Operations and Plans, Joint Operations Command, Air Commodore John Haley.
5. s47F

Attachments:

Attachment A      Operation ARGOS 4 May 24: Unsafe and unprofessional interaction between HMAS *Hobart*’s embarked MH-60R maritime helicopter and a People’s Liberation Army-Air Force fighter aircraft.








Background:

6. Operation ARGOS is Australia’s military contribution to multinational enforcement of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions against North Korea. Since April 2018, Australia has periodically deployed maritime surveillance aircraft and naval vessels to work alongside five-eyes and other partners (such as Japan, Republic of Korea, and France) to monitor and deter illicit ship-to-ship transfers of sanctioned goods.
7. On 4 May 2024, HMAS *Hobart*’s embarked MH-60R maritime helicopter experienced an unsafe and unprofessional interaction with a PLA fighter aircraft while operating in the Yellow Sea. At the time, HMAS *Hobart* was assigned to Operation ARGOS and was located s33(a)(i) outside China’s contiguous zone).
8. HMAS *Hobart*’s MH-60R helicopter was conducting an Operation ARGOS maritime domain awareness mission when it was intercepted s33(a)(i)  
s33(a)(i)      The use of the MH-60R is a normal mode of operation.





9. The PLA fighter aircraft released flares in the vicinity of the MH-60R <sup>s33(a)(i)</sup>  <sup>s33(a)(i)</sup>  release conducted by a PLA fighter aircraft occurred approximately 300 metres in front and 60 metres above and across the MH-60R's flight path. HMAS *Hobart*'s MH-60R helicopter manoeuvred to avoid the flares in order to assure the safety of the aircraft and its crew. The MH-60R then communicated to the PLA aircraft that it was departing the area due to safety concerns and returned to HMAS *Hobart* <sup>s33(a)(i)</sup>  No further airborne missions were conducted on 4 May 2024.
10. Defence demarched the Chinese defence attaché in Canberra on 6 May 2024 on this unsafe and unprofessional conduct. <sup>s47E(d)</sup>  <sup>s47E(d)</sup>  DFAT and PM&C were consulted in this course of action.

s22





Australian Government

Defence



Attachment A to MS24-900274 - Correct as of 06 May 24

## Operation ARGOS 04 May 24: Unsafe and Unprofessional interaction between HMAS *Hobart's* embarked MH-60R maritime helicopter and a People's Liberation Army-Air Force fighter aircraft

**Overview:** On 04 May 2024, HMAS *Hobart's* embarked MH-60R maritime helicopter experienced an unsafe/unprofessional interaction with a People's Liberation Army-Air Force (PLA-AF) fighter aircraft in the Yellow Sea, while undertaking Operation ARGOS. HMAS *Hobart's* MH-60R was s33(a)(i) outside of the People's Republic of China's claimed territorial waters (TTW) when it manoeuvred to avoid flares that were released approximately 300m ahead of and 60m above and across its flightpath by the PLA-AF aircraft.

s33(a)(i)



s22

**From:** s47F  
**Sent:** Sunday, 5 May 2024 6:51 PM  
**To:** s22 @defence.gov.au>; s22 @defence.gov.au>  
**Cc:** s22 @defence.gov.au>; Foxall, Nick BRIG s22 @defence.gov.au>; s22 @defence.gov.au>; s22 @defence.gov.au>; s22 @defence.gov.au>  
**Subject:** HMAS Hobart - UNSAFE s33(a)(i) interaction with the PLA [REDACTED]

Good evening s47F,

Further to HMSC advice this morning. On the 04 May 2024, HMAS *Hobart's* embarked helicopter was subject to conduct by a People's Liberation Army – Air Force (PLA-AF) fighter aircraft that has been assessed as UNSAFE and UNPROFESSIONAL.

In summary;

- HMAS *Hobart* was operating in the Yellow Sea, southeast of the Shandong Peninsula, undertaking Operation ARGOS s33(a)(i)
- HMAS *Hobart's* embarked MH-60R helicopter was airborne during this period.
- HMAS *Hobart* was being shadowed by a PLA-Navy (PLA-N) destroyer (DDG-113) and the embarked s33(i) helicopter from that vessel.
- HMAS *Hobart's* MH-60R was intercepted s33(a)(iii) s33(a)(iii)
- s33(a)(iii) on Sat 4 May 24 and involved the release of flares within approximately 300 metres of the MH-60R requiring the helicopter to manoeuvre to avoid the flares. On this basis the intercept was as assessed as UNSAFE s33(a)(i).

In terms of next steps from Defence's perspective:

- s47E(d)

s47E(d)

- s47E(d)
- IPDIV intend to demarche the PLA Defence Attaché in Canberra on Monday 06 May 2024. s47F
- IPDIV will engage the ADA (DA is in Australia) at Post Beijing to make arrangements to demarche counterparts as soon as practicable thereafter.
- IPDIV will work with you (and in turn PM&C/DFAT) to determine the approach to publicising this incident.
- Talking Points are being finalised and submitted through MECC this evening.

IPDIV/MSC are available to discuss further as required.

Kind regards

s22

Director

Military Strategic Commitments

Vice Chief Defence Force Group

s22 | Russell Offices | Canberra ACT 2600

s22

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