



FOR: Deputy Prime Minister



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  
Chief of the Defence Force

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7 May 2024

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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. [Redacted]
5. s47F [Redacted]

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.



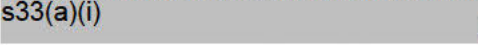




Background:

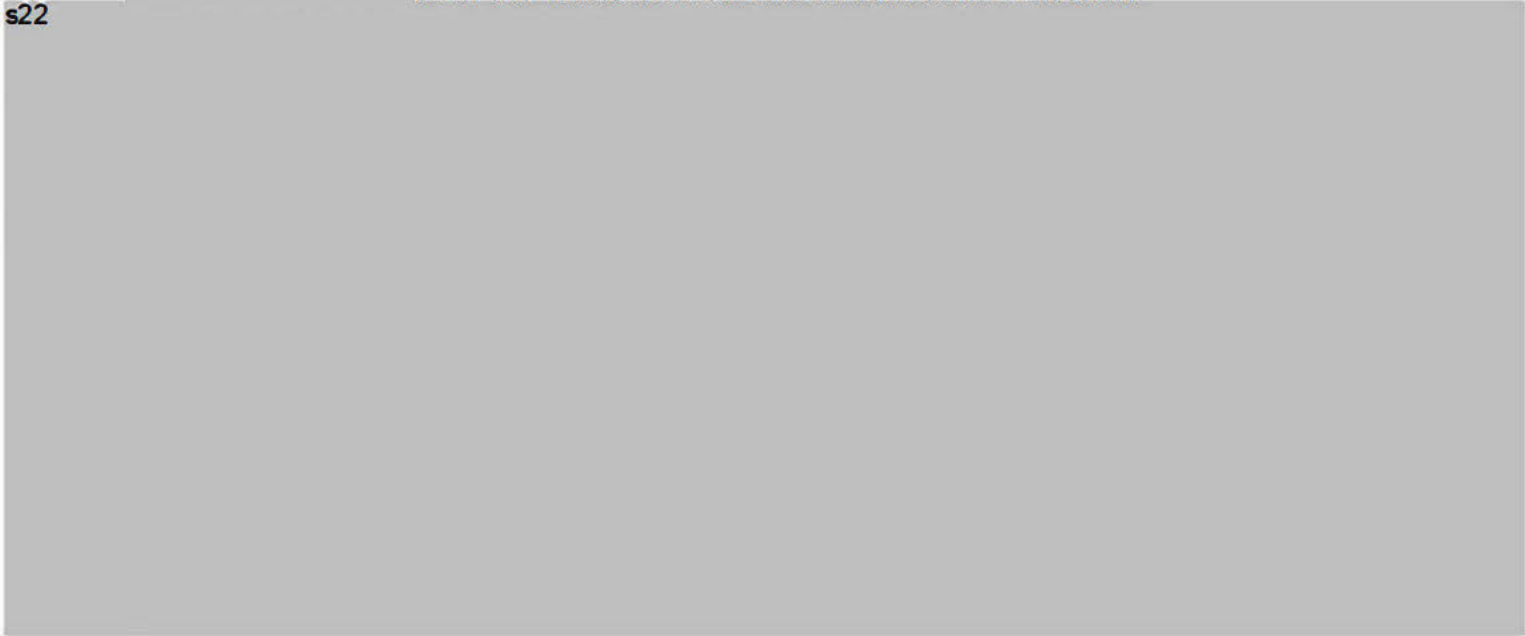
6. Operation ARGOS is Australia’s military contribution to multinational enforcement of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions against North Korea. Since April 2018, Australia has periodically deployed maritime surveillance aircraft and naval vessels to work alongside five-eyes and other partners (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) [Redacted] 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) [Redacted] s33(a)(i) [Redacted] 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 démarched 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.

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**Australian Government**

**Defence**

## 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)