



Hearing on “China’s Activities and Influence in South and Central Asia”

Thursday, May 12, 2022

Opening Statement of Commissioner Randall Schriver

Thank you, Commissioner Bartholomew, and good morning to our esteemed witnesses. We hold this hearing at a dynamic time. For over 20 years, Washington has tended to view South and Central Asia through the prism of counterterrorism, especially in Afghanistan. Now as we transition towards great power competition, we are also reframing the way we see our interests in the region. Today’s hearing will help clarify how China affects our interests and what is at stake for the United States.

The Commission last held a hearing on China’s activities in Central Asia in 2015, a time when we asked whether China would cooperate with the United States to stabilize Afghanistan and join coalition counterterror efforts. Needless to say, our hopes for Chinese cooperation in Afghanistan have not materialized. Today, China is actively working to shape the regional security architecture to its benefit through joint military exercises, multilateral organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and even the direct presence of armed forces in Tajikistan. China’s growing influence in a region once considered “Russia’s backyard” raises questions of how China’s so-called “new-era strategic partnership of coordination” with Russia will play out. Russia has traditionally been a dominant security partner for former Soviet states, and how the Kremlin will respond to a growing footprint of Chinese troops in Central Asia remains to be seen.

China’s efforts to exert greater influence continue along its western horizon, reaching across Central Asia into South Asia, where its competition with India has continued to intensify. The United States has an unwavering commitment to India as a Major Defense Partner, and our two countries share common visions and aspirations in a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The U.S. and Indian defense establishments maintain close engagements that help ensure security with other partners in the region, for example through information sharing and cooperation between our two militaries.

The United States, India, and other countries in South Asia face a growing military challenge as PLA soldiers encroach on China’s borders with Bhutan, Nepal, and India. At the same time the PLA Navy is expanding its presence and improving its capabilities to deploy and conduct major operations in the Indian Ocean. The testimony in this hearing will speak to how partner countries in the region see these challenges and highlight opportunities for the United States to support and empower these countries as they respond to China’s destabilizing behavior.

Before we begin, I would like to remind you all that the testimonies and transcript from today’s hearing will be posted on our website, which is www.uscc.gov. Also, please mark your calendars for the Commission’s upcoming hearing on U.S.-China competition in global supply chains and policies to bolster their resilience, which will be on June 9. I will now turn to introduce our first panel.