



Hearing on “The Chinese View of Strategic Competition with the United States”

Wednesday, June 24, 2020

Opening Statement of Commissioner Roy Kamphausen

Good morning, and welcome to the sixth hearing of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission’s 2020 Annual Report cycle. Thank you all for joining us, and a special thanks to our witnesses for the time and effort they have put into their testimonies. I would also like to thank the Senate Recording Studio for enabling us to livestream this event.

In its 2017 National Security Strategy, the Trump Administration labeled China a “revisionist power” that was engaged in a “great power competition” with the United States. This determination broke from the approach to U.S.-China relations pursued by administrations from both political parties since the normalization of bilateral relations more than 40 years ago. Even after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, successive U.S. administrations sought to engage with China, ultimately championing China’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001. Parsing the strategic, human rights, democracy enlargement, and trade rationales for engagement are beyond the scope of this hearing, but it is always a worthwhile exercise to examine the premises and assumptions that framed previous decisions.

Nevertheless, the principal effort of today’s hearing is to better understand Chinese perspectives on this competition.

Indeed, viewing the U.S.-China relationship as fundamentally competitive is not at all new to Chinese leaders in Beijing. In fact, China has been engaged in a strategic competition since long before the United States acknowledged that a competition was underway. In Beijing’s view, the normalization of Sino-American ties during the Cold War was only a short-term, tactical shift to counter the threat posed to China by the Soviet Union. None other than Premier Zhou Enlai, speaking at the outset of U.S.-China rapprochement in 1973, shed light on the instrumental nature and long-term goal of this strategy.

Speaking to high-ranking cadres, Zhou quoted Lenin. “There are compromises and compromises,” he said. “One must learn to distinguish between a man who *gave the bandits money and firearms to lessen the damage they can do and facilitate their [ultimate] capture and execution*, and a man who gives bandits money and firearms in order to share in the loot.”ⁱ In Zhou’s estimation, China’s cooperation with the United States belonged to the former category, suggesting that China was willing to cooperate with the United States in the near term due to temporary weakness, but only so as to ultimately return to its original goal: the defeat of their erstwhile American partners. Indeed, the essence of the *Tao Guang Yang Hui* (hide one’s capabilities and bide one’s time) approach, as enunciated by Deng Xiaoping in the early 1990s, is consistent with that line of thinking.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S.-China ties deepened, with the two sides developing a complex and multitiered economic and cultural interdependence. Expanding exchanges of goods, services, and

people, however, did little to alter Chinese leaders' adversarial view of the United States and its role in the world. In 1993, then CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin declared the United States to be China's "main adversary in international [affairs]" due to its position as the world's most powerful nation and its attitude of "hegemonism" toward China. Jiang added that he expected the United States to remain China's primary strategic opponent for a long time to come.

Nor did this view change following China's accession to the World Trade Organization. In a 2006 speech to Chinese diplomats, then top leader Hu Jintao reiterated that the United States remained China's "primary adversary ... in international dealings."ⁱⁱ He further warned of attempts by "outside enemy forces" to Westernize and "divide" China, stir up domestic social unrest, and ultimately carry out regime change.

In recent years, it appears those views have only hardened further. Last year, General Secretary Xi Jinping declared that China was now engaged in a "New Long March" and a wide-ranging "struggle" spanning the economic, political, cultural, foreign policy, and military domains. In Xi's view, this struggle would last until at least the middle of the century.

The evidence suggests that the People's Republic of China, even from the inception of U.S.-China diplomatic relations, has held competitive views about the United States. Recent developments indicate that Beijing has largely abandoned efforts to cloak its ambition. Indeed, in the 2018 Report from this very Commission, we declared the formal end of China's pursuit of a "hide and bide" effort vis-à-vis competition with the United States.

These recent changes in China's approach have caught many in the U.S. off guard. Some of the emotional reactions to China's competitive actions can be traced to surprise at unmasked Chinese ambition, as though China's competitive impulses are a new phenomenon. This lends impetus to the urgency of articulating a coherent approach to the future of U.S.-China relations.

To be sure, Americans might rightfully blanch at the prospect of committing to a competition with a country with a strongly oppositional political, economic, and ideological system. Indeed, the urge may be strong to identify a single exquisite solution to the challenge, or to seek victory within the span of the next election cycle. These are false hopes. This is a generational challenge, unavoidable and necessary.

The necessity of taking up the challenge is confirmed by the open and deep-seated hostility of China's leaders to the United States. What is essential is a carefully planned, long-term strategy, firmly implemented over successive administrations and supported by both political parties. This realistic approach to strategic competition is also the most necessary, and ultimately likely to be the most effective.

By better understanding how Beijing intends to approach strategic competition, we hope our hearing today will help U.S. policymakers, especially Members of the U.S. Congress, outline and implement such a strategy.

I will now turn the floor over to my colleague and co-chair for this hearing, Commissioner Ken Lewis, who will discuss the economic dimension of U.S.-China competition.

ⁱ Zhou En-Lai, "Report to the Tenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China," August 24, 1973.

ⁱⁱ Hu Jintao, "The International Situation and Our Diplomatic Work," August 21, 2006.