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Chairman Bera, Ranking Member Chabot,

I am deeply grateful and honored to be asked to share my thoughts with the Subcommittee members.

As an analyst who devotes her days trying to understand the world through Beijing’s eyes, I will focus my statement on where the Indo-Pacific region fits into the Chinese leadership’s grand strategy.

The Indo-Pacific region is where US and Chinese tectonic plates rub against each other. The term “Indo-Pacific” itself is very telling about the US perspective: it is primarily a maritime geographic expanse that links the US to an economically vibrant region, and a crucial strategic space where many of its key military allies are located; an area the US envisions as “free, open, secure and prosperous.”

There is no “Indo-Pacific” in Beijing’s conception. The region is in fact included as part of China’s “periphery.” Here too, the term itself is very telling about the Chinese perspective: China is at the center and at the top of a 360-degree peripheral zone that expands over both the continental and maritime domains. Left unclear are the exact geographic extent of this “periphery” and the kind of future the Chinese party-state hopes to see for it.

In order to get a better understanding of the Chinese leadership’s objectives for the region, one needs to look back over a decade ago. In the immediate aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, Chinese political elites felt that the American/Western decline had accelerated, while China was on an unremitting upward trajectory. The 2011 Obama administration’s announcement of the “Rebalance” of its diplomatic and security focus to the Asia-Pacific region was read in Beijing as a move meant to increase the pressure on China’s immediate periphery, constrict its strategic space and, ultimately, thwart its rise. In order to counter what was essentially perceived as an intensified phase of American containment, Chinese planners devised their own “strategic rebalancing.”

The strategy embraced both land and sea, trying to stabilize China's Eastern maritime flank (constricting as much as possible US access to the China Seas while pressuring its allies), while at the same time consolidating China's power on its Western continental and maritime flanks. To expand China's influence and bolster its position over the region, Chinese planners decided to use economic power, China's strong point, as the main sinews, supplemented by the building of an increasingly dense network of both hard and soft infrastructures (transportation, energy and information and communication infrastructure-building, trade and financial agreements, people-to-people exchanges). The strategic plan was announced at the end of 2013 under the name "One Belt One Road," which is now better known globally as the "Belt and Road Initiative."

Viewed for what it is - namely, as a strategic plan - the BRI gives some indications about the Chinese leadership's intent. Geographically, BRI includes not only the entire Eurasian continent (Central, South, and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa and portions of Central and Eastern Europe, aka the "Silk Road Economic Belt"), but also its adjacent waters (Arctic, South Pacific, Indian Oceans and Mediterranean Sea, aka the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" and its "three blue economic passages"). The vision for the region's future is better explained by what it is not. It is not one where the widespread respect for and application of liberal democratic principles, such as freedom, individual rights, rule of law, transparency and accountability, lead to greater openness, prosperity, and security. At the same time, it is not one where all the countries in China's greater periphery end up having modeled themselves on the Chinese party-state's system or have become local appendages of the Chinese Communist Party. It is one where the multiplication of dependencies to China have created enough positive incentives and coercive leverage to ultimately compel regional countries to defer to Beijing's wishes, and constrict their ability and willingness to defy and resist against China's power.

This vision is not compatible with that of the United States.