Written Statement of Paul Sullivan

President – International Business

Acrow Corporation of America (Acrow Bridge)

Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Hearing on Economic Security Zones and American Economic Statecraft

Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written statement for the record. My name is Paul Sullivan, and I serve as President of International Business for Acrow Bridge, a U.S. firm specializing in the design, manufacture, and supply of modular steel bridges. Acrow appreciates the Committee's focus on Economic Security Zones and the broader question of whether the United States has the tools, authorities, and institutional capacity necessary to compete effectively in an era of strategic economic competition.

From Acrow's perspective, this hearing addresses an urgent and practical reality. Across emerging and developed markets alike, infrastructure is no longer simply a matter of engineering, procurement, and construction. It is increasingly a domain of economic statecraft. Roads, bridges, ports, logistics corridors, energy systems, and industrial zones determine how goods move, how communities connect, how governments project capacity, and how countries integrate into regional and global supply chains. When these systems are financed, designed, built, and maintained by trusted partners, they strengthen economic resilience. When they are captured by opaque financing, non-transparent procurement, poor technical standards, or strategic dependency on authoritarian competitors, they can weaken sovereignty and expose countries to coercion.

Economic Security Zones can become an important part of a new American economic security architecture if they are designed not only around investment attraction, but also around trusted infrastructure, resilient supply chains, transparent procurement, diversified financing, and strong local capability. To succeed, however, they must be backed by the full range of U.S. foreign policy, commercial diplomacy, export finance, and development finance tools. American companies cannot be expected to compete alone against foreign firms that often arrive with the coordinated backing of their governments, export credit agencies, development finance institutions, state-owned banks, diplomatic networks, and political influence.

Acrow Bridge and the American Infrastructure Export Base

Acrow Bridge is headquartered in Parsippany, New Jersey, with its steel bridge manufacturing facility in Milton, Pennsylvania. We are a small to medium-sized business with approximately 350 employees. Our direct employment numbers, however, do not fully reflect our economic footprint. Our work supports thousands of American jobs across steel production, galvanizing, engineering, transportation, logistics, professional services, and other parts of the U.S. industrial base. When Acrow wins internationally, American workers, American suppliers, and American communities benefit.

Acrow is the world leader in the design, manufacture, and supply of modular steel bridges, having delivered our bridging solutions to more than 150 countries across the globe. We serve customers across a wide range of bridging applications, including permanent, temporary, emergency / disaster response, military / security, and mining / energy, among others. Our bridges are proprietary engineered systems, not commodities. They must meet demanding standards for safety, durability, load capacity, corrosion protection, rapid deployment, and lifecycle value.

Our deep experience across many international markets and regions gives us a clear view into how infrastructure competition is changing. What we have found in these markets is that the question is not whether a U.S. product is technically superior or offers better lifetime value. The question is whether the procurement environment, financing terms, local political dynamics, and foreign government support systems allow that value to be recognized. Too often, American firms face international competitors that are not competing solely on price, quality, or performance, but with the support of national strategies designed to capture markets, shape standards, and create long-term dependence.

The Infrastructure Dimension of Economic Security

Infrastructure should be viewed as a foundational element of economic security. A bridge may appear to be a discrete public works asset, but in many countries it is also a supply chain asset, a trade facilitation asset, a food security asset, a public safety asset, and a governance asset. A rural bridge can determine whether farmers reach markets, children reach schools, emergency services reach communities, and regional economies connect to national and international trade corridors. A logistics bridge near a port or industrial zone can determine whether manufacturing investment is commercially viable. A resilient bridge network can determine whether a country's supply chains continue to function after floods, storms, conflict, or other disruptions.

For this reason, Economic Security Zones should not be limited to fenced industrial parks or special regulatory regimes. They should be understood as ecosystems that require reliable connective infrastructure, trusted suppliers, transparent financing, enforceable standards, and long-term maintenance capacity. If the United States seeks to help partner countries reduce strategic dependencies, secure critical resources, and strengthen supply chains, then the infrastructure that connects those resources and supply chains must be part of the architecture from the beginning.

In our experience, partner governments often want American solutions. They associate U.S. companies with quality, transparency, accountability, safety, and long-term reliability. But many of these governments also face urgent infrastructure needs, fiscal constraints, political pressure to deliver quickly, and foreign competitors offering bundled packages that appear attractive at the point of sale. Without coordinated U.S. support, American companies can be displaced even when our solution better serves the long-term interests of the partner country and the United States.

The Competitive Challenge from the PRC and Other Foreign Competitors

The People's Republic of China has made infrastructure a central instrument of its global economic strategy. Chinese firms, including state-owned and state-supported enterprises, frequently compete abroad with access to subsidized finance, diplomatic reinforcement, bundled construction packages, and political support that are not available to most private U.S. companies. These offerings can be particularly difficult to counter in markets where procurement systems are still developing, where governments face immediate budget constraints, or where decision-making is vulnerable to non-transparent influence.

The challenge is not merely that Chinese firms are aggressive competitors. Competition is expected and healthy when it is fair. The concern is that competition is frequently distorted by practices that undermine transparency, technical integrity, and long-term value. These practices can include below-market financing, tied procurement, political pressure, corruption, insufficient attention to lifecycle costs, failure to meet technical specifications, weak quality control, limited local skills transfer, and disregard for intellectual property. When a procurement process is decided before a technical evaluation is complete, or when financing is tied to the selection of a particular foreign supplier, the result is not a level playing field.

This problem is not limited to the PRC. Acrow also encounters European competitors that benefit from highly coordinated national export strategies, export credit agency support, development finance support, and diplomatic advocacy. Many European firms are highly capable and compete legitimately. But in some markets, we also see non-U.S. competitors adopting tactics similar to those associated with Chinese firms, including aggressive political influence, procurement shaping, selective technical compliance, and efforts to weaken or appropriate proprietary designs and know-how. The broader trend is clear: many governments are using national tools to advance their companies' interests abroad. The United States must recognize that American firms increasingly compete not only against foreign companies, but against foreign systems.

The consequences extend beyond individual contract losses. When low-quality or non-transparent infrastructure is selected, partner countries may inherit assets that are unsafe, difficult to maintain, expensive to replace, or dependent on a single foreign supplier. When local officials become accustomed to opaque procurement, the institutional damage can persist for years. When U.S. firms lose repeated opportunities in strategic sectors, America loses market presence, industrial scale, technical influence, and the ability to shape standards. Economic Security Zones should be designed to reverse these patterns by creating procurement environments where trusted suppliers, transparent finance, and lifecycle value are rewarded.

The Value of U.S. Government Support

U.S. Government support is essential to helping American infrastructure firms compete internationally. Acrow uses U.S. Government resources in a range of capacities: identifying potential partners, understanding local market conditions, engaging relevant stakeholders, supporting meetings with public sector clients, encouraging transparent procurement, and ensuring that decision makers understand the strengths of U.S. technology, manufacturing, and financing solutions.

Commercial diplomacy is often the first and most important tool. U.S. Ambassadors, embassy economic and commercial teams, the Foreign Commercial Service, and interagency deal teams can open doors that a private company cannot open alone. They can help identify serious opportunities, convene credible local partners, elevate U.S. solutions with senior officials, and communicate the importance of fair and transparent procurement. They can also reinforce that a U.S. company is not merely selling a product; it is bringing American standards, accountability, safety, and long-term partnership.

Official advocacy is especially important in public sector procurements. In many markets, the presence of the U.S. Embassy can help ensure that procurement authorities evaluate bids based on published criteria, technical performance, lifecycle cost, and transparency rather than political pressure or informal influence. This does not mean asking the U.S. Government to pick winners. It means asking the U.S. Government to support a fair process in which American firms can compete on the merits.

The Export-Import Bank of the United States is also critical. EXIM is the official export credit agency of the United States and exists to support American jobs by facilitating exports when private financing is unavailable or insufficient, while helping level the playing field for U.S. goods and services in foreign markets. For infrastructure projects, the availability of competitive export finance can determine whether a U.S. solution is viable. Without it, American companies may be placed at a structural disadvantage against competitors backed by more aggressive foreign export credit systems.

The U.S. Development Finance Corporation is another essential instrument, particularly where infrastructure supports development outcomes, private investment, and strategic supply chain objectives. DFC can help mobilize capital in markets where commercial lenders are reluctant, where project preparation is complex, or where strategic infrastructure is necessary to unlock private sector growth. In the context of Economic Security Zones, DFC should be viewed not only as a development finance institution, but as a strategic economic security tool.

These tools are most effective when they are coordinated early. Too often, U.S. companies engage after a foreign competitor has already shaped the project, influenced the technical specification, aligned financing, and built political momentum. To compete effectively, the United States must be present at the project development stage, not only at the bid stage. Economic Security Zones offer an opportunity to organize that early engagement around priority corridors, sectors, and partner countries.

Policy Recommendations

First, the United States should make infrastructure a core component of Economic Security Zones. Supply chains do not exist in abstraction. They depend on roads, bridges, ports, power, water, digital connectivity, and logistics systems. If Economic Security Zones are intended to secure critical resources and reduce dependency on the PRC, then the connective infrastructure serving those zones must be planned, financed, and procured through trusted and transparent channels.

Second, Congress should ensure that U.S. agencies have the mandate and resources to engage earlier in the project lifecycle. This includes efficiently allocated support for feasibility work, project preparation, procurement design, technical specification development, and partner-country capacity building. If the United States waits until a tender is issued, it may already be too late. The rules of the competition are often set long before the bid date.

Third, the United States should strengthen interagency coordination among the Department of State, Department of Commerce, EXIM, DFC, U.S. Trade and Development Agency, and other relevant agencies. American companies often face project opportunities that require diplomacy, financing, technical support, and development impact analysis at the same time. A coordinated approach would improve speed, consistency, and strategic focus.

Fourth, U.S. policy should place greater emphasis on lifecycle value and technical integrity in international infrastructure procurement. Economic Security Zones should promote standards that reward durability, safety, maintainability, interoperability, and local capacity development. Lowest initial price should not be allowed to obscure higher long-term costs, poor performance, or strategic dependency.

Fifth, the United States should expand the use of official advocacy where American firms are competing for strategic infrastructure projects. Embassy engagement is one of the most powerful tools available to level the playing field. It signals that the United States cares about the integrity of the procurement and the quality of the outcome, and it can help counter political pressure from foreign competitors.

Sixth, EXIM and DFC should be equipped to move at the pace of strategic competition. U.S. agencies must preserve rigorous standards, but they must also be able to respond within commercial and political timelines. Foreign competitors often present financing and implementation packages rapidly. If U.S. tools are too slow, too fragmented, or too difficult for partner governments to navigate, American firms will lose opportunities even when our offerings are superior.

Finally, Economic Security Zones should include a deliberate role for small and medium-sized U.S. exporters. The companies that embody American innovation and manufacturing strength are not always the largest firms. Many are specialized companies with deep technical expertise, strong domestic supply chains, and proven international experience. Their participation should be a measure of success for any new economic security architecture.

Conclusion

The United States has extraordinary strengths: world-class companies, trusted technology, deep capital markets, unmatched diplomatic reach, and a reputation for quality and accountability. But these strengths must be organized for the world as it is, not the world as we might wish it to be. Strategic competitors are using infrastructure, finance, procurement, and industrial policy to gain influence and lock in dependencies. The United States must respond with an integrated strategy that aligns American companies, American diplomacy, American finance, and American values.

Economic Security Zones can be a durable foundation for American economic statecraft if they are built around trusted infrastructure, transparent procurement, resilient supply chains, and practical tools that allow U.S. firms to compete. For companies like Acrow Bridge, this is not an abstract policy debate. It is the daily reality of competing internationally while supporting American manufacturing and American jobs at home.

I appreciate the Committee’s attention to these issues and its commitment to ensuring that the United States has the instruments necessary to compete effectively. Acrow stands ready to work with Congress, the Administration, and partner governments to advance infrastructure solutions that strengthen supply chains, support development, reduce strategic dependencies, and expand opportunities for American workers and companies.