

## Additional Information for the Hearing Record

On May 18, 2022, the House Natural Resources Committee held a hearing about the FY23 budget request of the Department of Interior's Office of Insular Affairs. I testified before the Committee on America's national security interests in the Indo-Pacific, Pacific Island nations, and specifically with the Freely Associated States (or "FAS," which include the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau).

During the hearing, Vice Ranking Member Gonzalez-Colon asked me about the Biden administration's China policy and its emphasis on cooperating with Beijing on climate change issues. I answered that the administration is pursuing a shortsighted approach with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It is of little wonder that the administration was caught off guard when the Solomon Islands and China recently announced their joint decision to establish basing access for China's navy in the South Pacific.

Vice Ranking Member Gonzalez-Colon then requested that I submit for the record alternative approaches to crafting a China strategy. I recommend a dual approach that recognizes the CCP as a strategic adversary, and seeks to gain tactical advantage in the competition.

During the Cold War, the existential stakes of protracted competition with the Soviet Union—namely, the specter of nuclear Armageddon—forced the United States to practice strategy like its life depended on it. Practically, this meant learning how to compete once again like a hungry young power. Instead of adopting a reactive posture, U.S. strategists honed the craft of identifying America's asymmetric strengths and exploiting the Soviet Union's strategic weaknesses. This process took decades to perfect, largely because relearning the art of strategy is difficult enough for one person, let alone an entire bureaucracy and political elite. But, thanks in large part to the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment, Washington now has a blueprint for its competition with the CCP: net assessment and competitive strategy.

Net assessments identify an adversary's vulnerabilities; competitive strategies exploit them. Three questions guide this process: what game is the United States playing, what game is the CCP playing, and what are our relative strengths and weaknesses? During the latter half of the Cold War, this framework empowered policymakers to move past *détente* and actually compete with the Soviet Union by capitalizing on America's unique advantages over the Soviets—namely, its free political system, market economy, and technological edge. Caught in an existential tussle with the Soviets, policymakers in Washington had no choice but to compete on dual planes that simultaneously defended their core interests while also understanding, and sabotaging, Moscow's game. Instead of thrashing about, the United States acted deliberately, baiting the Kremlin into decisions that favored Washington's strengths.

Today, however, it is China that is baiting America, and the Biden administration's propensity to seek cooperation on issues like climate change is a textbook example. With an offensive framework, however, American policymakers could turn the tables exploit Beijing's strategic weaknesses. Take, for example, the Belt and Road Initiative. It is intrinsically connected to the systemic human rights abuses of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang because half of its land routes run through the territory and over the backs of oppressed minorities. Economically,

meanwhile, the Belt and Road relies on corruption—and, in large part, the U.S. dollar—to grease the skids of construction. And militarily, its global scope could quickly overextend the People's Liberation Army.

Each of these openings stems from weaknesses that are particular to the People's Republic of China and its ruling Communist Party. China has adeptly exploited America's strategic complacency, but its brittle political system, totalitarian ideology, and fear of its own people all serve to complicate the BRI. The entire plan has multiple weaknesses at key nodes that, if pushed, could jeopardize the entire project. By harnessing the tools of net assessment and competitive strategies, U.S. policymakers could initiate targeted campaigns to exploit these vulnerabilities, atrocities, and illicit activities, and sabotage China's "Great Game," one step at a time. In order to do that, though, Washington will need to give up on the quest for turning the CCP into a partner.