

STATEMENT BY RETIRED BRIGADIER GENERAL ERNEST JOHN TEICHERT III

Honorable members of the committee. I'm retired Brigadier General Ernest John Teichert III and I had the honor of serving our country for over 28 years in the United States Air Force. I have served as the commander of the 11th Wing and Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, the commander of the 412th Test Wing and Edwards Air Force Base in California, the Senior Defense and Defense Attaché to Iraq, and most recently as the Assistant Deputy Undersecretary of the Air Force, International Affairs. During the last decade, I have focused extensively on strategic competition with China and Russia, and I can tell you that our national security depends on vigilance and resilience, a strong and well-equipped military, a thriving economy, and a robust industrial base.

We are in a global environment of strategic competition. At the end of World War II, the United States created a world order that was free, open, prosperous, and secure for all of humanity. The U.S. and her partners and allies have painstakingly maintained that world order for the last 80 years. Yet, malign activities by countries like China and Russia have demonstrated their determination to erode that world order and remake it in a way that only benefits them. We see it today in Eastern Europe, the Western Pacific, and all around the globe.

In 1999, two Chinese Communist Party Colonels published a strategy of Unrestricted Warfare that has been playing out as planned during the last two decades. Their theory of victory is to use all means, in all domains, in all places, and in all spectrums at the same time to achieve their interests. We have seen it in hundreds of billions of dollars a year of stolen American intellectual property, a wholesale theft of governmental personnel records, free speech sapping Chinese communist clubs on campuses, secret police facilities in our cities that restrict freedom of expression, and intentionally designed and financed disinformation operations and propaganda campaigns. We see it in action in the infiltration of our companies, our media, our entertainment, and our public dialogue. In February, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released the "Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community." One key point of extreme concern is the deliberate Chinese activities designed to manipulate policy by: "redoubling its efforts to build influence at the state and local level to

shift U.S. policy in China's favor because of Beijing's belief that local officials are more pliable than their federal counterparts." These insidious actions hinder our ability to act in our own best interests while diminishing our *capabilities* and reducing our national *will*. And, when the CCP believes that the time is right, they will take greater steps of aggression.

In an environment of strategic competition and to counter the temptation of Chinese aggression, the stated U.S. strategy is integrated deterrence. It is designed to alter the perceptions of benefits, costs, and risks of the Chinese action that we hope to prevent, and fundamentally uses proven *capability* and demonstrated *will* as its foundation. Anything that hinders our *will* ultimately diminishes our deterrence and makes it more likely that a communist-controlled China will be tempted to take aggressive action.

During the last 17-months, we have seen the heart-breaking war of aggression against the freedom-loving people of Ukraine by Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation. Putin is a serial war criminal and a ruthless thug. Ukraine has held their ground brilliantly. Yet, the war was in part prompted by Putin's perception that the west did not have the *will* to provide the support necessary for Ukraine to repel their invasion. He has been surprised by their resilience and our consistent support. The war, however, continues to wreak havoc in part because Putin's oversized influence on food and energy supplies prevents the world from taking further action to stop his aggression. He flexed his muscle in this way even earlier this week. Humanity's reliance on these resources has hindered our *will*, and China is watching.

Even in the last month, China has enacted new export controls on critical metals that are essential to the production of semi-conductors, missile, systems, lasers, and radars. Such action should be considered a warning shot of their resolve and a test of our *will*. The United States and our allies and partners have settled into a plan for de-risking in key areas with China to minimize our vulnerabilities and diminish Chinese influence. We must take great care to prioritize our de-risking in areas that are particularly important, where we are notably vulnerable, and where our supply chains are heavily reliant on or insidiously persuaded by harmful external influences.

Specifically today, I want to emphasize the critical importance of phosphate and its derivatives to the ongoing strategic competition and our national

security, particularly in the context of *capability* and *will* that make up a successful strategy of integrated deterrence. It is important to note the developing stranglehold enjoyed by malign actors in this area with China sitting as the undisputed top producer of phosphate with over 30 percent of world-wide extractions. Russia ranks a hefty fourth.

Phosphate and its derivatives serve as indispensable components in the production of military weapons, explosives, and propellants, while also providing the treatments that maintain the longevity of a variety of weapon systems. Phosphate enables the proper explosions of our weapons, the accuracy of our aim, the survivability of our aircraft, and the propulsion of our ships. It is a key element of warfighting that must be maintained through a safe, sustainable and reliable supply chain that cannot be held hostage to Chinese malign interests and underhanded influence activities. This makes up the *capability* component of integrated deterrence, and the loss or reduction of these warfighting systems would be devastating to our military success. Yet, the *will* component of our deterrent strategy is even more critical.

Phosphate and its derivatives serve as key components of fertilizer and animal feed. Thus, worldwide food supplies are reliant on this single mineral and can be held hostage by those who control it. As a result, it is also a particularly vulnerable target for Chinese-backed disinformation operations. Far more fundamental than even the wheat resources that have played a major role in the lack of western *will* to fully push back against Russia in its war of aggression in Ukraine, phosphate is a necessary component for the survival of humanity. Any Chinese threats of disruption for a substantial portion of worldwide phosphate supply would weigh heavily on our decision-making calculus and may tip the scales that makes the Chinese Communist Party believe that our *will* is simply too fragile to resist their acts of aggression when international and domestic food security is at risk. At that point, they WILL act to secure their interests and it WILL be counter to our interests.

This is a true national security threat. America must develop policies that make our phosphate supply chain safe, sustainable, and resilient in the face of China's multi-pronged assault of Unrestricted Warfare. To combat that assault, I believe that phosphate must be designated a critical mineral and that we must be extremely wary of Chinese disinformation and propaganda influence at all levels that would dissuade us from aggressively de-risking in this area. I see these as key steps forward in protecting our

national security and maintaining a strong posture of integrated deterrence against Chinese aggression.