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TRANSCRIPT

Event

Clean Energy Strategies Conference  
**Fireside Conversation with Representative Young Kim  
(R-CA)**

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FEATURING

**Representative Young Kim (R-CA)**

*Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives*

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Joseph Majkut: Welcome back. Without further ado, please let me introduce Navin Girishankar, president of the Economic Security and Technology Department here at CSIS, in conversation with Representative Young Kim of California. (Applause.)

Navin Girishankar: OK. Well, thank you. Hello, everybody. And a very warm welcome to Representative Kim. Thank you so much for taking time. I know it's a very busy schedule today, but we're delighted that you're here at CSIS. We want to talk economic security, and then we want to drill down on energy.

You have been a leading voice. The national economic security hearing that you had, I found it really quite compelling when you described economic policy as foreign policy. Give us a little double-click on what you meant by that to get the conversation started, Representative.

Representative Young Kim: Thank you so much, Navin. And thank you, CSIS, for having me today. One of the recent hearings that my Subcommittee on East Asia and the Pacific had was on the economic statecraft, and how we need to reform or make it stronger so that we can utilize all of the tools we have and ensure that the economic security is our national security, and economic policy is our foreign policy. And with that in mind, we wanted to ensure that what we do always keeps the economic statecraft, which has been fragmented and split across all different sections over the last 20 years or so. So I wanted to, you know, really address the issue as a critical priority for the House Foreign Affairs Committee, as in 20 years, we have never been able to fully reauthorize State Department.

So through that process, I want to ensure that the Foreign Commercial Service that has been taken out of the State Department and into the Commerce, but that really didn't meet the intended purpose. So through the State reauthorization process, I want to be able to bring back FCS. Not only that, FAS, Foreign Agriculture Services, so that we can really utilize the economic statecraft, if done right, and be able to provide the foreign economic service officers that are serving our interest overseas in the region, especially in the Indo-Pacific area, where I am excited to be paying a lot of attention given the role that I have. They will be able to have all the diplomatic tools that we have in the diplomatic toolkit, and help our American businesses that are trying to, you know, invest in the region. So that's what I mean by – when you talk about energy issues are national security foreign policy issues, so economic security is national security.

Mr. Girishankar: Got it. And I want to come to energy in a moment, but let me linger on the first point for a second here. When I think about the goals, tell me if I have this right. You've kind of made the case that our foreign policy needs a more deliberate focus on economic policy, economic security, economic diplomacy, opening up markets for U.S. companies, and also a clear view on who – I

think you described it as predatory companies here in the United States. Tell us a little bit more about this and what the goal is here.

Rep. Kim: So I think when we talk about economic strategy there are a couple of things that come to mind. First of all, we need to prioritize the security supply chains, prioritize reducing our U.S. – as well as our ally and partners’ – dependence on China, and prioritize making sure that our, you know, American companies have the right tools and have the ability to have market access, and protect them from the predatory foreign competition.

So some of the ways that we can use as metrics to see if it is really working is, like, you know, utilize, as I mentioned earlier, Foreign Commercial Service. Use that as a – and we can track it, find out if there is a track record on number of – or the type of projects that we are actually helping. So that’s what I meant. And if we are actually helping U.S. businesses abroad, including the AI defense or energy sectors and foreign government contracts that we were able to help secure, those are some of the things that come to mind. But the tools that we need are obviously the DFC, Ex-Im. And utilizing those tools that we have in our toolkit, are we actually helping our American businesses gain that market access?

Mr. Girishankar: Yeah, a very output-driven – outcomes-driven focus to commercial diplomacy, economic diplomacy.

Rep. Kim: That’s right. That’s right, yes. Mmm hmm. It’s got to be tangible. It’s got to be – the action-oriented initiative coming out of – the initiative that we’ve seen just recently with the Quad. You know, are our Quad allies actually being utilized to actually help us achieve the goal that we are talking about?

Mr. Girishankar: Yeah. And just if I may reflect for a second here, Congresswoman, in the era of trade rebalancing, which we’re in right now, it is also quite refreshing to have this vision that you’ve laid out, an affirmative vision for opening up markets, driving U.S. exports, particularly in advanced technologies. You raised the point here, and I just want to ask you to just speak to this again, if I may, which is that there is, in some sense, a dissipation of our energies by having kind of fragmented roles and responsibilities. And can you tell us more about what your particular view is on where these commercial diplomacy capabilities should be housed in the U.S. government?

Rep. Kim: Mmm hmm. So, as you know, energy is critically important, right? And right now we’ve seen in the conflict that we’ve seen in Russia how they are, I guess – I mean, they’re really using – I mean, I was talking to my staff on the way over here. China is really using – I mean, Russia is using its oil and gas, you know, sector against Russia. And China now dominates those clean energy and gas in, you know, that sector. We have the ability in the United States. We

have the abundance of the opportunity to extract the oil and gas and clean energy.

And critical minerals are the foundation for the clean energy. So that's where I want to focus my priorities on the committee that I serve on. And so yesterday, as you know – I don't know if you guys were watching, my subcommittee held a committee hearing on breaking the choke point on China's dominance on the energy sector, especially on the critical minerals sector. We are the largest exporter of clean energy. Or, I mean, we have LNG especially. We have the capacity of doing it. But we haven't been able to fully utilize that. We have to do that, and pay more focus on it through the permitting process, through the – this will also help with the trade imbalances as well.

Mr. Girishankar: Yes, indeed. And another area where you have been a leading voice, on critical minerals, on energy, and energy as an important pillar of the economic security agenda. You talked about investment at home, and our building – in the previous panel – building our manufacturing capability and, I would say, our processing capability in critical minerals. What about partnerships with other countries in order to break the chokehold? How do you see that?

Rep. Kim: Well, obviously, let's talk about ASEAN, right? I mean, ASEAN is where we have, like, 700 million population. And it is the third-largest market. There is a tremendous opportunity where we can really use that partnership. We have to fully utilize it. And I know in your travels abroad, in my travels abroad, we see that tremendous opportunity. But we are not showing up. And we're not showing up, and it has only been filled and, you know, China moves in and fills the vacuum and the leadership that we are leaving behind. So I think that is where we can really fully utilize the partnership that we have.

So the importance of U.S. and ASEAN partnership, especially in the critical mineral sector, is where we can really use to get ourselves injected into that field. And the critical minerals, rare earth minerals, the mining, processing, and manufacturing, there is a tremendous opportunity in that. Which is why I was so excited after we did the hearing yesterday we introduced a bill – I wrote it down here, because it's the – it was just introduced – Mineral Security Partnership Authorization Act. MSC Authorization Act, really formally authorizing State Department to utilize and coordinate all of our U.S. efforts with the MSP partners. There are 14 partners, including the European Union. I think that is where, you know, we can accelerate the responsible investment in the critical mineral sector.

Mr. Girishankar: Yeah. And it's – to your point of, we have to show up. And to show up, we have to be well organized. And going back to your first point.

Rep. Kim: Yes.

Mr. Girishankar: Let me reflect something on ASEAN. You know, in the previous administration I had served, and working on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. Going around the region, the constant refrain – and I’m putting my words on it – is, either you have market access or you have deep pockets, what are you offering us? And I just wanted to ask you whether that resonates with what you’ve been hearing in the region, and how do we answer the mail on that one?

Rep. Kim: I hear the same thing. And I recently just came back from my overseas trips to Pacific islands, and had a – actually sat down with all the representatives from all the Pacific island nations. And one by one, going around the round table, they were all telling us: We want United States to be the partner of choice. But you guys are not showing up. China is coming in with the bag of funds, pocket full of offers, that just cannot refuse. So they are saying, can you do something? We want to work with you. We want you to partner with us. You just have to show up and show us what you can do better to help us.

Palau is a good example, right? I mean, Palau has stood very firm against the coercion that China brings in. China came in and said, you know, we can do all of these Z, Y, Z, and build all these infrastructures, and do whatever you want to do. But there is only one condition. You have to stop and sever your ties with Taiwan. And it was, like, a two day – one or two days just prior to my and my delegation’s arrival. And President Whipples of Palau basically said at a large conference, a public forum like this, let me tell you something. And he was talking to the Chinese counterpart. You know, when you get married between man and wife, or you’re partners, you make the oath and say, until death do us part. You know, I’ll be with you forever. And he said, Taiwan is that. Taiwan is that partner, until death do us part. We will not abandon Taiwan.

It’s that kind of sentiment that I’m hearing from the Pacific Islands and our allies and partners in the region, especially in the ASEAN countries. So that tells us there is a great hunger and desire for us to show up and give them what they can do with us. And one of the tools that we can utilize is the DFC, Development Finance, you know, Corporation. Our subcommittee has the jurisdiction and oversight of reauthorizing it. I’m really excited about working on that. And part of the proposals in reauthorizing it is the equity fix. We’ve got to increase the amount that we can utilize to, you know, use, and then also expand the countries that are, you know, qualified to be a part of it. Right now it’s only intended for low- to mid-income countries. And Palau, for example, is considered high income. But if we can fix this, we can

do so much and, you know, they won't have to always fight against the Chinese economic coercion.

Sri Lanka, another country, is a good example. The Chinese went in. We were not there. Look what happened. So we just need to show up. And I agree with you, what you're hearing, what you're seeing on the ground, is exactly what I'm hearing and what I'm seeing. So we just need to do better.

Mr. Girishankar: Well, you have – certainly have a number of ideas there on DFC. Let me ask a question here, because one of the challenges has been we might be able to provide financing, but if you don't look downstream at who does the procurement or which vendors win the procurement, you might be shooting yourself in the foot. So you might be funding projects that, frankly, PRC-linked companies are providing. I just wanted to get your thoughts on that, because it's perhaps not enough just to finance, although we need to do that, but we also need to make sure that the providers – whether they're our companies or allied companies – are also in the game, right?

Rep. Kim: So as we utilize vehicles like DFC and Ex-Im, we want to ensure that there is that component of training the workforce. We have a lot of – for example, I was just talking to some other organizations, like Ukraine. We have settled a lot of Ukraine refugees in the United States. We need to be able to utilize them, train them, and then when they – when the conflict ends, hopefully soon, they will want to go back and rebuild. And we can utilize these tools that we have. And then we really focus on workforce development, the tremendous – the talent that they can have. So we want to be able to include – in the DFC, for example – we want to be able to include the training, workforce development, and then be able to identify the projects, the initiatives, or the companies that are utilizing our financing tools, to be able to really incorporate all of that. So hopefully that will help.

Mr. Girishankar: Got it. Yeah. Yes, it's a tall order, but one – we have to start somewhere. Let me just ask you, you've done some really interesting thing on Ex-Im, thinking on Ex-Im and how to expand its toolkit. Now, Ex-Im has had some evolution in its toolkit over the last few years, but certainly not where we probably need to be if we want to be competitive. Can you share with us some of your thoughts on Ex-Im's role?

Rep. Kim: Ex-Im could be used alongside DFC. My subcommittee is not overseeing the Ex-Im side of it right now. So I just want to make sure that when we're talking about providing the tools we include DFC and Ex-Im to be able to have the proper type of tools in the diplomatic toolkit.

Mr. Girishankar: Yeah. Well, you know, Representative, you've touched on a number of things here. When I step back for a second, I want to do a big picture, and step back, and give you a chance to share your vision here. Where do you see the

economic security arsenal, as you see – if you will, evolving as we look to the next 10 years, 20 years of U.S. commercial diplomacy?

Rep. Kim: So if we don't do it right, especially as we reauthorize State Department, and do not give the Foreign Commercial Service or State Department the right type of tools, this is where we're going to fall behind. And that's where I'm really concerned.

And then, of course, we are talking about the energy here. We have the tremendous opportunity in the energy sector. We want to be able to have the Foreign Service officers who are educated, fully informed, and aware of all of these toolkits so no longer they would be siloed from the State Department, therefore they don't have the opportunity to fully utilize the diplomatic toolkit that they have available.

So if we don't do this right, and do it right when we have this opportunity to reauthorize it, then I don't know when we're going to have that next opportunity to do it. So this is the moment. This is where we need to really focus on getting it done right, doing it right.

Mr. Girishankar: Well, we deeply appreciate your leadership on this. We have a department that's focused on these economic security issues. And these moments for reform come along once in a while, and that's when you have to strike. And I think you're really shaping the way we think about this. And really appreciate your leadership. And thank you for making the time and coming here today.

Rep. Kim: Thank you so much for having me. Thank you very much everyone. Thanks. (Applause.)

(END.)