

Chairman Adam Smith - Opening Statement

Hearing on “National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in the Indo-Pacific”

March 27, 2019

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I would like to welcome our witnesses for today’s hearing on “National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in the Indo-Pacific”: Mr. Randall G. Schriver, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs; Admiral Philip S. Davidson, the Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM); and General Robert B. Abrams, the Commander of United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces Korea. Thank you all for your service to the country and your continued commitment to addressing critical national security challenges in the Indo-Pacific. Your views are vital to the Armed Services Committee’s ability to assess and evaluate the security situation in the region, and we look forward to your testimony.

The Indo-Pacific, home to more than half the world’s population and one-third of global GDP, is vital to the national security of the United States. In terms of military presence, U.S. commitment to the region continues today: more than half of U.S. Navy ships, U.S. Army forces, and U.S. Marine forces are in the Indo-Pacific. The security challenges in the Indo-Pacific call for persistent, predictable U.S. engagement to ease tensions, preserve peace, enhance regional security and maintain a rules-based international order.

Admiral Davidson has testified that “[t]he United States’ network of allies and partners is our principal advantage against any adversary.” I fully agree with his statement. As I have said many times, our alliances and partnerships are core to advancing our national security. In a world where our competitors seek to enable authoritarian regimes, we must also return to an approach that emphasizes human rights and political and economic freedoms. It is clear that working in concert with our allies and partners is necessary to addressing regional security challenges.

Negotiations with North Korea have seemingly, to date, reduced tensions on the Korean Peninsula. We should all be supportive of a diplomatic resolution to one of the most significant security challenges faced by the international community. We must also, however, be mindful of the historic pattern of relapses in negotiations with North Korea. I hope that Kim Jong Un’s regime will recognize the true value of constructive dialogue and embrace the opportunity to establish good will with the rest of the world. While recently the North Korean regime has refrained from its previous pattern of belligerent behavior, political brinksmanship, and open provocation, their nuclear program still presents a significant threat to U.S. national security, and the security of our allies and partners. The intelligence community continues to assess that

“North Korea is unlikely to give up all of its nuclear weapons and production capabilities, even as it seeks to negotiate partial denuclearization steps to obtain key US and international concessions.” The United States and the international community must remain vigilant in countering the nuclear and conventional threats posed by North Korea. This includes ensuring we sustain an adequate regional missile defense posture, maintain the readiness of our forces on the peninsula, and continue to work with the international community to enforce sanctions to keep North Korea at the negotiating table. We must also simultaneously avoid actions that could dangerously escalate tensions and risk miscalculation. Working closely with our partners and allies is critical to achieving a denuclearized North Korea.

China’s behavior also continues to pose a challenge to the international community. China is pressing its unwarranted territorial claims, has a well-known history of intellectual property theft, is leveraging predatory economics to expand its geographic access at the expense of local populations, and has shown consistent contempt for international norms. To quote the National Defense Strategy summary, China is “undermining the international order from within the system by exploiting its benefits while simultaneously undercutting its principles and “rules of the road.”” Our goal, working with our allies and partners, should be to establish a stable and mutually beneficial relationship with China in which China is willing to accept peaceful and equitable resolutions to territorial disputes with its neighbors while placing a higher value on cooperation with the international community. Encouraging China to pursue a more positive trajectory requires continued U.S. military presence in the region. It also requires the U.S. to continue building and maintaining strong regional partnerships through persistent, active engagement. The more we can do to defuse tensions and to avoid conflict through contributions to collective security, the more we can cultivate continued growth and prosperity in the region.

I thank the witnesses for being here today to speak to these regional challenges and others, including Russian activities in the Indo-Pacific, the threat from violent extremist organizations, illicit arms proliferation, and responding to disasters. I look forward to hearing their testimony.