**Ranking Member Smith Opening Remarks**

**“Military Assessment of Nuclear Deterrence Requirements”**

**Full Committee Hearing – March 4, 2017**

Strong nuclear deterrence is a cornerstone of national security. We are at a key decision point for investments that will shape U.S. nuclear forces for the next fifty years.

The first mission of the U.S. nuclear arsenal is prevention of a nuclear war. Achieving this goal requires strength, but in the last generation we have learned that it can also be advanced through diplomacy and innovation. Even massive nuclear superiority cannot prevent miscalculation, miscommunication, or accidents, while each of these dangers coupled with nuclear weapons threatens all of humanity. The truth is that deterrence does not occur on the battlefield; it occurs in the mind of the adversary. Robust deterrence, therefore, requires that we understand and communicate with our adversaries so that threats of nuclear destruction play an appropriately limited role in these crucial relationships. Reducing the dangers posed by nuclear weapons and avoiding nuclear proliferation remain an equally high priority.

I am increasingly concerned that we are moving in the wrong direction and that instead of enhancing U.S. security, we are taking unnecessary and dangerous risks with decisions where we cannot afford to make mistakes. When it comes to nuclear weapons policy, civilization hangs in the balance.

I am disappointed that, although several hearings and classified briefings are planned as part of the committee's focus on nuclear deterrence this and next week, not one witness has been invited to offer an alternative perspective to the need for full modernization of the nuclear triad and its associated enterprise. The weapons and production facilities we authorize today will shape our relationships with our adversaries and allies for two generations. I reluctantly concede that for the time being these must include massively destructive nuclear weapons capabilities, but I insist that our decisions must be informed by the possibility of negotiated stability through the proven tool of cooperative threat reduction.

While there is bipartisan agreement on modernizing the most survivable and reliable legs of the triad, several aspects of the nuclear weapons modernization plan are unwise and dangerous. For nearly a decade, we have improved our conventional forces and reduced reliance on nuclear weapons. The 2010 nuclear posture review stated the objectives of “reducing the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy,” “maintaining strategic deterrence and stability at reduced nuclear force levels," and it stated that “the fundamental role of U.S. nuclear weapons… is to deter nuclear attack.”

However, lowering the yield on new nuclear bombs for example and envisioning nuclear weapons as war-fighting weapons, particularly in the context of Russia’s doctrine embracing limited use of nuclear weapons in a situation where Russia’s vital interests are at stake to “deescalate” a conflict, risk reversing the trend to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons. Using nuclear weapons for any other purpose than to deter the use of nuclear weapons by others and creating the chance of miscalculation is an excessively risky approach and rests on the hubristic assumption that nuclear escalation can be controlled. This is one of the main reasons I have opposed the new Long-Range Stand-Off weapon. Similarly retaining a launch-on-warning posture increases the risks of hasty decisions to use nuclear weapons in response to false alarms. Increasing, rather than decreasing, ambiguity and the potential for miscalculation in a crisis amounts to playing with fire in a gas station.

In this context, I hope to hear your military advice on how we might be able to effectively sanction Russia for its violation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, and how we can ensure that we lock in legally-binding and verifiable Russian obligations to cap their number of deployed strategic weapons under the New START Treaty. Threat reduction and verifiable arms control are also relevant not only to strategic stability but also to cost: If negotiation can safely lower the price of deterrence, then it must be considered.

Second, I am deeply concerned that we have insufficient information on the full cost and plan for nuclear modernization. As we plan to spend over a trillion dollars sustaining and modernizing our nuclear forces and related infrastructure, which the Department of Defense has consistently described as our highest priority, *there is no long-term Department plan or cost estimate for this modernization*.

Several senior Defense officials, including Undersecretary Frank Kendall, the top acquisition chief, have publicly referred to an affordability problem and a former Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy has referred to the lack of planning and accountability for these future investments. This lack of both long-term planning and understanding of the full-scope of the required investments cripples DOD’s and Congress's ability to make informed decisions on which investments to prioritize and to start funding now. This is especially problematic when a number of these investments require allocating tens of billions of dollars in the near-term. That is why I have asked the Congressional Budget Office to provide an independent and comprehensive cost estimate of the effort to sustain and modernize U.S. nuclear forces.

Third, aspects of the nuclear modernization plan are redundant and unnecessarily expensive. What’s more, we are seeing already significant cost increases. For example, as recently reported, the Department of Defense’s independent cost estimating arm assessed the cost of the Ground-Based Nuclear Deterrent as between $85 billion and nearly $150 billion. That is a 50%-75% cost increase over the Air Force’s earlier estimate of $62 billion. In another concerning example, the 10-year cost estimate report for nuclear modernization contained—for the second year in a row—a cost estimating error. If nuclear modernization is supposed to be one of our top defense spending priorities, then shouldn’t we care enough to get the math right?

The nuclear modernization plan also calls for significantly expanding, by a factor of about 8, the capacity to make additional nuclear weapons. This proposal would be costly, not to mention the potential environmental impacts and safety risks associated with expanding the fabrication of nuclear weapon components. Additionally, the plan envisions building new types of nuclear weapons without any analysis of the cost; of the military requirements for such programs; of feasible alternatives; or of whether these programs might exacerbate a nuclear arms race or risk requiring a resumption of nuclear explosive testing.

Nuclear modernization should not be about expanding our nuclear capabilities when we already have over 4,000 nuclear weapons, enough to destroy the world several times over. It should not feed an unaffordable nuclear arms race and increase risks of unintentional nuclear war. It is not something that should be decided on in 140-character tweets. Rather, it requires rigorous analysis, a clear understanding of what the highest priorities are, how we can enhance strategic stability—especially at a time of high tensions with Russia—and how we can reliably and credibly deter the use of nuclear weapons against the United States and our allies by our adversaries. I hope we can get to some of this information and analysis today. I thank the witnesses for being with us today.