**House Armed Services Committee Hearing**

**“Military Assessment of the Security Challenges in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Region”**

**April 26, 2017**

**Ranking Member Adam Smith**

**Opening Remarks**

**~\*~**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing. I also wish to thank Admiral Harris for appearing today. I regret that General Brooks cannot join us, but, given the current situation on the Korean peninsula, I understand his need to be there.

The Indo-Asia-Pacific region is vital to our national interests, and our government consistently relies on the U.S. military to support a variety of diplomatic, economic, and development objectives throughout the U.S. Pacific Command’s area of responsibility. For these reasons, the United States must remain committed to sustaining regional security. We should not presume, however, that conflict is inevitable, as we guard against threats. Our efforts should be geared primarily toward easing tensions, preserving peace, and upholding international order in the region.

Unfortunately, North Korea continues to pose a significant threat to the international community. It remains especially troubling that the North Korean regime routinely resorts to belligerence, brinksmanship, and open provocation to further its objectives. The North Korean regime’s persistent efforts to develop nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities continue to defy the international call for a de-nuclearized Korean peninsula. Consequently, the United States must maintain a coherent, whole-of-government approach and coordinate closely with its regional allies and partners to deter and contain North Korea.

In doing so, we need to demonstrate our resolve clearly and convincingly, but we should not succumb to using escalatory rhetoric, which could alienate our allies and partners or aggravate the risk of a fateful miscalculation. Reinforcing our missile defense posture against the North Korean threat, in coordination with South Korea and Japan, was a positive step. Additional targeted sanctions could be another. It would also help immensely if, going forward, China would coordinate its efforts with those of the United States to peacefully de-nuclearize the Korean peninsula.

China must also refrain from pressing its claims in the South China Sea in an aggressive or militaristic fashion and abide by internationally accepted norms applicable to the global commons. We should work to establish a stable and mutually beneficial relationship with China, encourage it to accept peaceful and equitable resolutions to the many disputed claims in the South China Sea, and dissuade it from employing unilateral, gray-zone methods, short of open conflict, to achieve its foreign policy goals.

The need to address these tensions as well as transnational challenges, such as violent extremism and illicit trafficking, demonstrate the value of adhering to a rules-based international order and illustrate the need for persistent U.S. engagement. The more we can do to defuse tensions and to avoid conflict through active engagement, the more we can help to realize growth and prosperity in the region. To advance enduring stability, the United States must continue to: bolster collective security; promote international laws, standards, and norms; facilitate productive multi-lateral exchanges; and reinforce constructive ties with its many allies and partners in the region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to the Admiral’s testimony.