Opening Statement of Senator Brown

***Evaluating Sanctions Enforcement and Policy Options***

***on North Korea: Administration Perspectives***

September 28, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for following up with this timely hearing on an issue so important to our national security.

North Korea’s advancing nuclear weapons and ballistic missile program is alarming – to all of us, to our allies South Korea and Japan, to China, and to all who share an interest in a denuclearized Korean peninsula.

It’s become cliché to say there are no good policy options on North Korea. But experts agree that escalating bellicose rhetoric is counterproductive, makes us less safe, and undermines efforts to resolve the stand-off peacefully.

We have enacted new sanctions on North Korea, both last year and again last month, in response to its advancing nuclear capability and its record of horrendous human rights abuses, including the tragic death of Otto Warmbier. And the administration should make full use of those sanctions.

In recent weeks the UN Security Council adopted two new sanctions resolutions, the President issued a new sanctions executive order, and China’s Central Bank directed its banks to curtail facilitation of North Korean trade.

Beyond sanctions, several years ago President Obama began to work with regional allies to develop additional military capabilities to realign US and allied military posture for this more dangerous security landscape. That work continues.

Today we’ll hear from Treasury Under Secretary Mandelker and Acting Assistant Secretary Thornton about the diplomatic and economic strategies we’re using, including targeting funds flowing to North Korea through other countries like China.

I hope we will also hear details on how Treasury is engaging China’s Central Bank. I know Under Secretary Mandelker has just returned from Europe, where she’s been working with our allies to further isolate North Korea.

As we have heard in prior testimony, the Chinese oppose the North Korean nuclear weapons program, and find it destabilizing -- but also fear collapse of the regime. Their national interests are different from ours.

Even so, with the acceleration of North Korea’s nuclear and missile tests, we must persuade China’s leaders that it is in their interest to do all they can ***now*** to press North Korea to re-enter talks to denuclearize the peninsula.

But to move China – and North Korea – our policy must be clear and credible. This is no time for bluster or empty threats. Working with allies, the US must lead the international community to combine pressure and diplomacy to get North Korea to at least verifiably freeze its nuclear and missile programs and come back to the negotiating table.

What role should Congress play? Among other things, we must require the administration to set clear policy goals, and then measure whether China and others are making progress to curtail sanctions violations, signaling that we’re determined to press tough sanctions enforcement.

We should assess whether there are additional sanctions needed to help enforce those already in place, target entities that violate or evade sanctions, and counter human rights abuses.

Of course our sanctions must be contained within a broader diplomatic, political, military and economic strategy designed to meet these goals. They are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. And that end is to force North Korea to the table to negotiate, as we did with Iran.

Given our history in successfully clamping down on Iran’s nuclear program, Congress brings credibility that is especially helpful, since the administration’s credibility is undermined by its erratic behavior. The President’s threats to abandon the Iran nuclear agreement only further undermine US credibility.

And we know the North Koreans are watching closely. If we walk away from the JCPOA, why wouldn’t Kim Jong Un conclude that the US cannot be relied upon to observe its commitments on the nuclear front? Uncertainty about whether the US will keep our commitments makes us all less safe.

I welcome our witnesses today, and look forward to hearing from you.