COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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STATEMENT OF
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before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

and the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, NONPROLIFERATION AND TRADE

"North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Tests and the Six-Party Talks: Where Do We Go from Here?"

June 17, 2009

On February 12 of this year, this Subcommittee held a hearing on the challenges presented by North Korea, and how the Obama Administration might remake U.S. policy toward Pyongyang. Unfortunately, in the ensuing four months, North Korea has taken a series of actions that are as provocative as any we have seen in decades. How we respond to those actions is the subject of today's hearing.

As we meet this morning, President Lee Myung-bak is winding up his successful three-day visit to the United States. His summit meeting with President Obama and his meetings here on Capitol Hill demonstrated that the US-ROK alliance remains as strong and vital as ever in promoting peace, stability and prosperity in Northeast Asia and beyond. The President's visit also reconfirmed our two countries' longstanding commitment to working as closely as possible with one another, along with our other allies and partners, in dealing with Pyongyang's provocative actions, which are increasing tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

When viewed in the context of the past 20 years, these recent North Korean actions have come in unusually rapid succession. Just before our last hearing, on January 30, Korea suspended or nullified all major inter-Korean agreements, including the armistice which has maintained peace between North and South Korea since 1953.

On March 19, Pyongyang arrested two American journalists, Laura Ling and Euna Lee, who were working near the border between China and North Korea. Pyongyang then sentenced them to 12 years in a prison labor camp for what they referred to as "grave crimes."

On April 5, defying appeals by the international community and a series of UN resolutions, North Korea launched a long-range missile. The UN Security Council responded by issuing a presidential statement of condemnation.

Citing that statement, Pyongyang promptly announced its withdrawal from the Six-Party Talks. A day later, North Korea expelled IAEA inspectors from the Yongbyon nuclear facility. And by the end of April, North Korea declared that it would once again produce plutonium and weaponize all of its fissile material.

A month later, North Korea raised the stakes even higher by conducting its second nuclear test. The very next day, Pyongyang fired three short-range missiles.

Last Friday, the Security Council responded to North Korea's actions by unanimously passing Resolution 1874, which condemned Pyongyang's nuclear test in the strongest terms. It also tightened sanctions to block Pyongyang's nuclear, missile and proliferation activities, and to widen the ban on the country's arms exports and imports.

In addition, the resolution called on UN member states to inspect and destroy all banned cargo to and from North Korea -- whether on the high seas, at seaports or airports -- if reasonable grounds existed to suspect violations. As UN Ambassador Susan Rice said, these sanctions constitute a "very robust, tough regime, with teeth that will bite."

Over the weekend, North Korea countered by stating that it would regard "an attempted blockade of any kind by the U.S. and its followers… as an act of war and met with a decisive military response."

The threats posed by North Korea are clear. Pyongyang's actions have raised tensions in Northeast Asia, and caused countries in the region to reconsider their current military and strategic interests. Japan, for example, is contemplating an increase in its defense spending and, for the first time, taking a serious look at developing an attack capability. Such a capability and other steps that may be contemplated, could well lead to an arms race in Northeast Asia. There is even discussion in some circles in Japan regarding gaining nuclear capabilities, something Tokyo could quickly achieve given its technological capabilities.

In addition, North Korea's advances in missile and nuclear weapons technology and in the production of fissile materials increase the potential for proliferation.

While the threats posed by North Korea's actions are clear, the reasons underlying them are less apparent. Yet, something of a consensus among close observers of North Korea has formed regarding two likely motivations. First North Korea appears to be

seeking advances in its nuclear weapons capability and delivery systems to demonstrate their effectiveness. Second the country appears to be in the midst of a political transition as Kim Jong-il's health problems have apparently led him to designate his 26-year-old son, Kim Jong-un, as successor. Given a need to maintain support among the armed forces during the transition, Kim Jong-il may be trying to satisfy the military's desire to test and improve its weapons systems.

The threats posed by North Korea are grave, and we must address them. How we do so is the focus of today's hearing.

Another focus is the continued relevance of the Six-Party Talks, which were initiated by the Bush Administration. Moreover, we will examine how important China's role is in this matter, and the options available to the United States to manage the current crisis

Fortunately, our bilateral relationship is as strong as ever, encompassing social, cultural, economic, security and diplomatic links between the United States and South Korea. Our two great countries share values and interests, and millions of our citizens share family and personal ties. Recently, the U.S. strengthened those bonds by including South Korea in the visa waiver program.

Our trade relationship is just as strong. Currently, South Korea is our seventh largest trading partner in the world.

On the security front, the bonds we forged in blood during the Korean War will never be forgotten. Some 33,000 American soldiers died fighting for the freedom of our brothers and sisters in South Korea. And Seoul's deployment of forces to both Afghanistan and Iraq were vital to both operations. Its pledge to join the Proliferation Security Initiative to counter North Korea's proliferation activities is similarly significant. The upgrading of Korea to a NATO+3 member state within the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program, I believe, reflects our growing security cooperation.

And now, with President Lee's visit to Washington, our two countries have once again reaffirmed our unconditional and unwavering commitment to the bilateral alliance.

As we face the challenge of North Korea, we know that we can count on our friends in Seoul, and they know they can count on us.

It is my sincere hope that together, we can bring Pyongyang back to the negotiating table, and that we can make real progress in reducing the security threats it poses to Northeast Asia, to the United States and to the world.

I remain optimistic that the unified position of the Security Council in passing Resolution 1874 offers us a chance of that occurring. And it is my hope that today's hearing sheds some light on how we can address the seemingly intractable problems posed by North Korea, including its proliferation activities – which is the reason we are

conducting this hearing jointly with the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade, Chaired by the gentleman from California, Mr. Brad Sherman. I will now turn to him for his opening statement.