

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
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**STATEMENT OF  
THE HONORABLE ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA  
CHAIRMAN**

**before the  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC, AND THE  
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT**

**“A New Beginning for the U.S.-South Korea Strategic Alliance”**

**April 23, 2008**

Today’s hearing is entitled “A New Beginning for the U.S.-South Korea Strategic Alliance.” The choice of title is not accidental. This hearing follows on the heels of the successful visit to Washington last week by South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak, who assumed office on February 25 and chose the United States as the destination for his first official overseas trip. President Lee also became the first South Korean Head of State to be invited to join the U.S. President at Camp David.

During President Lee’s visit, there were several noteworthy accomplishments that will have a tremendous effect on the U.S.-South Korea strategic alliance. Among these included the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), the agreement on the full re-importation of U.S. beef into South Korea and support for the elevation of South Korea’s Foreign Military Sales (FMS) status to that of NATO+3. I am sure that these topics will be addressed in detail during today’s discussion.

The term “a new beginning” should not be interpreted to suggest there is a discontinuity in U.S.-South Korea alliance. Indeed, the history of relations between our two countries -- which can be traced back to a treaty of friendship more than 125 years ago -- has been marked by longevity and mutual solidarity.

The strong alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea has been a pivotal one since we fought side by side in the Korean War over half a century ago. Out of that conflict was born one of the most significant dividing lines of the Cold War, a demilitarized zone on the 38th parallel that splits the Korean Peninsula between communism and democracy.

The partnership between our two countries has successfully defended freedom in South Korea for more than five decades. As we approach the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Korean War armistice on July 27<sup>th</sup>, let me state emphatically that it is my dream to one day see South and North Korea peacefully reunited in my lifetime.

With respect to our “strategic alliance,” the Republic of Korea has remained a steadfast U.S. ally. It has contributed troops and pledged reconstruction funds for Iraq, and its forces have also been deployed to Afghanistan and Lebanon. As a key member of the Six-Party Talks to denuclearize North Korea, it shares an important responsibility for broader security in Northeast Asia. Together, we are committed to compelling the North Korean regime to not only fully declare but to also eliminate its nuclear program.

During the Camp David Summit this past weekend, President Lee defined the U.S.-South Korea strategic alliance as one “based on freedom and democracy, human rights and the principle of market economy.” I am in agreement that the foundation of our partnership should encompass all three of these tenants as we concurrently aim to upgrade the alliance through several important, practical initiatives.

First, I believe that the Republic of Korea should be fully admitted into the Visa Waiver Program as soon as possible. I was encouraged by the signing of the memorandum of understanding last Friday and hope that the Department of Homeland Security will be able to certify South Korea’s participation before year’s end. There are over two million Korean Americans living throughout the U.S. and South Korea’s entry into the VWP will bring untold benefits from mutual business, tourism and other people-to-people exchange.

Second, with the announcement of the full re-importation of U.S. beef to South Korea, I believe it is time for our Congress to consider the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA). This agreement is our most commercially significant FTA in over a decade and I wish to underscore its geopolitical importance in the most economically dynamic and fastest growing region in the world.

Third, I believe the time has come for Congress to elevate the Republic of Korea’s FMS status to that of NATO+3 member countries. This status elevation is long overdue and would correct the unfairness of affording preferential FMS treatment to other key U.S. allies but not South Korea. I am a proud cosponsor of H.R. 5443, introduced by Rep. Ed Royce who is a member of this subcommittee, and I appreciate that Chairman Berman has agreed to incorporate it as part of a larger Security Assistance bill that is expected to be marked up in full committee next week and eventually passed by the House.

Fourth, I believe that the ongoing transformation in our military alliance including the relocation of U.S. Forces Korea from Seoul to Pyeongtaek, transfer of wartime operational control, and the pause in the reduction of our troop presence deserve support.

In conclusion, the U.S.-South Korea strategic alliance is worth strengthening. A generation ago, when I was in Vietnam, South Korea was one of few friends who were willing to put their action where their talk was by sending 320,000 soldiers to fight alongside U.S. forces in that terrible conflict. That experience cemented my longstanding appreciation and affection to the leaders and to the people of South Korea as they were there with us when we needed help. We must never forget that the foundation of the U.S.-South Korea strategic alliance remains solid and I am hopeful that, together with President Lee's administration, we will strengthen this partnership.

I look forward to hearing from our principal witness today, Mr. Alexander A. Arvizu, the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. I fully expect his remarks to be informative and to lay the groundwork for a productive discussion of the many aspects of the U.S.-South Korea strategic alliance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.