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Opening Statement

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this important hearing on America's relationship with Japan. The U.S.-Japan alliance, which has been the bedrock of America's engagement in East Asia, remains as important today as it was during the height of the Cold War. Now, as we face a radically changing Asia full of new challenges and opportunities we must ensure that this alliance remains relevant and robust.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize the important contributions that the people of Japan have made to support America's actions in Afghanistan and in Iraq. For example, the Japanese navy is actively supporting our brave men and women in Afghanistan by providing critical refueling support in the Persian Gulf. With regard to Iraq, Japan has taken steps to cancel almost all of the \$7.5 billion outstanding debt that Iraq owes, and Japan continues to offer billions of dollars worth of development aid to help the people of Iraq. Americans must never take for granted the contributions made by our Japanese friends given the restrictions their constitution places on its military.

On the economic front the U.S. enjoys a largely positive economic relationship with Japan, with exception of the beef issue. In the northern Illinois congressional district that I am proud to represent, foreign direct investment by Japanese firms is responsible for a considerable number of American jobs. For example, Nissan Forklift has its North American headquarters in Marengo, Illinois. Mitsubishi has a subsidiary in Rockford that makes rice and sesame crackers. This firm, called T.H. Foods, is the only producer of such crackers in the entire country. In fact Japan's overall investment in the U.S. is responsible for over 600,000 jobs.

With regard to beef, I strongly urge the Government of Japan to do its utmost to resolve this issue as soon as possible. Indeed, we have come a long way since the trade frictions of the 1980s to where we are today. Thus, I remain hopeful that a workable compromise can be achieved so that we can put all our disagreements on trade behind us. I look forward to the day American beef will be sold again in Japanese stores and restaurants.

Mr. Chairman, I am worried that the broader U.S.-Japan relationship is experiencing a sustained period of benign neglect as a result of the shifting geopolitical forces in Asia. The rise of China, in particular, is causing some policymakers to reexamine the long-term viability of America's alliance with Japan. Even in the Six Party Talks process, the decline of this once close relationship is evident where Japan is no longer participating as a full fledged partner because of a lack of progress on abduction issues. Finally, realignment of U.S. forces in Asia is another issue that is causing discomfort between our two countries.

The U.S.-Japan alliance is a relationship that was built over time and is critical to U.S. national interest. As current and future Administrations consider America's role in Asia, it is important to remember that Japan's partnership is vital to our success. That is why I am pleased that you have called this hearing today, Mr. Chairman, to highlight the importance of our relationship with Japan. I look forward to the testimony of our distinguished guest.