

**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**

“The Emerging Importance of the U.S.-Central Asia Partnership”

November 17, 2010

Since this may be the final hearing to be held by the Subcommittee during the 111th Congress and during my tenure as Chairman, I am especially pleased to welcome U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert O. Blake who will testify today about the emerging importance of the U.S.-Central Asia Partnership. I admire Assistant Secretary Blake and the work he is doing to strengthen our relationship with Central Asia, and I am appreciative that he served as our key note speaker last year on November 18, 2009 when Ranking Member Buck McKeon of the Armed Services Committee and I kicked off the Congressional Caucus on Central Asia which we established to highlight the importance of Central Asia to U.S. security and energy interests.

I was first introduced to the challenges facing Central Asia through my friendship with His Excellency Kanat Saudabayev, who now serves as the Foreign Minister and Secretary of State for the Republic of Kazakhstan as well as the Chairperson-in-Office (CiO) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), but who once served as Ambassador of Kazakhstan to the U.S. for more than 6 ½ years.

Our friendship and association has spanned almost a decade and because of him I have come to appreciate President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s leadership in championing nuclear disarmament among possessor states and preventing proliferation to new states. From 1949 to 1991, the Soviet Union conducted nearly 500 nuclear tests in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan and exposed more than 1.5 million Kazakhs to nuclear radiation. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan was left with the world’s fourth largest nuclear arsenal and the second largest nuclear test site.

While Kazakhstan could have emerged as a nuclear superpower and used its position to resolve the financial problems of a new and struggling nation, President Nazarbayev was among the first to recognize and neutralize the dangerous threat posed by the nuclear arsenal Kazakhstan

inherited. Despite threats from the Kremlin, President Nazarbayev supported the Nunn-Lugar program in its infancy and voluntarily dismantled a nuclear arsenal which was larger than the combined nuclear arsenals of Great Britain, France and China.

As a Pacific Islander, I have a special affinity for the people of Kazakhstan because from 1946 to 1958 the United States detonated 66 nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands including the first hydrogen bomb, or Bravo shot, which was 1,000 times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The U.S. nuclear testing program subjected the people of the Marshall Islands to severe health problems and genetic anomalies for generations to come. The U.S. nuclear testing program in the Marshall Islands also set a precedent for France to use the islands of the Pacific for its own testing program. For some 30 years, the French government detonated approximately 218 nuclear devices at Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls in Tahiti.

In Kazakhstan, the cumulative power of explosions from nuclear tests conducted by the former Soviet Union is believed to be equal to the power of 2,500 explosions of the type of bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan in 1945. In August 2004, I felt a deep sense of obligation as a Member of Congress who had visited the nuclear test sites in the Marshall Islands and Tahiti to also visit the Semipalatinsk test site. During my visit and in later discussions with President Nazarbayev, I learned that I was the first American legislator to set foot on ground zero in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan.

During my time in Semipalatinsk, I also met and visited with the bedridden victims of nuclear testing and I continue to be haunted by their suffering. However, I am grateful to my colleagues who stood with me during the 109th Congress in passing House Resolution 905 which called upon the Administration to establish a joint working group with the Government of Kazakhstan to assist in assessing the environmental damage and health effects caused by the USSR's nuclear testing in Kazakhstan and I am hopeful that the Obama Administration will follow up on this Resolution and establish this long overdue working group.

Currently, the Obama Administration has listed five objectives for enhanced U.S. engagement in Central Asia. These objectives include maximizing cooperation for coalition efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan, with increased emphasis on the use of airbases and the transit of troops and supplies to Afghanistan along the Northern Distribution Network; increasing the development and diversification of the region's energy resources; promoting good governance and respect for human rights; fostering competitive market economies; and preventing state failure in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan by enhancing food security assistance.

Signs of this enhanced engagement include a recent meeting between President Obama and President Nazarbayev at the Nuclear Security Summit held in Washington DC on April 11, 2010 and U.S. support for the OSCE Summit which will be held in Astana, Kazakhstan on December 1-2, 2010.

In 2007, under the Bush Administration, my colleagues and I spearheaded an effort in Congress calling upon the U.S. to support Kazakhstan's bid to chair the OSCE, and I am including this September 17, 2007 letter to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for the record. Recognizing, as David Wilshire, Head of the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly

of the Council of Europe, noted that "building a democracy is a long and hard task," I felt that the U.S. could and should offer a gesture of goodwill by assisting Kazakhstan in its bid to chair the OSCE, considering that Kazakhstan voluntarily worked with the U.S. to dismantle the world's 4th largest nuclear arsenal and has been a key ally in the war against terror. I am pleased that the U.S. finally supported Kazakhstan's bid for 2010 and, while there will always be critics intent on setting Kazakhstan back in its attempt to move the OSCE forward, all 56 member States unanimously voted in favor of Kazakhstan's chairmanship.

I believe they did so in recognition of the bold steps President Nazarbayev has taken to bring Kazakhstan out from under the yoke of communism. Of course there is work left to do but, according to polling data from an independent firm hired by the U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan during the Bush Administration, 90% of the people of Kazakhstan support President Nazarbayev and are pleased with the work he is doing and more than 63 percent of the people of Kazakhstan have a favorable opinion of the United States.

Since 9/11 and regarding U.S. coalition operations in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan has allowed overflight and transshipment to assist U.S. efforts. U.S.-Kazakh accords were signed in 2002 on the emergency use of Kazakhstan's Almaty airport and on other military-to-military relations. The Kazakhstan legislature approved sending military engineers to Iraq in May 2003 and, in his April 2010 meeting with President Obama, President Nazarbayev agreed to facilitate U.S. military air flights along a new trans-polar route that transits Kazakhstan to Afghanistan.

Now Kazakhstan is the first post-Soviet, first predominantly Muslim, and first Central Asian nation to serve in the top leadership role of the OSCE, an organization known for promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law. As Chair of the OSCE, Kazakhstan will also host the Astana Summit. The Astana Summit, like Kazakhstan's Chairmanship of the OSCE, is historic. Earlier this year, my colleagues and I spearheaded an effort calling upon the U.S. to stand with Kazakhstan in support of an OSCE Summit, and I am also making this January 27, 2010 letter to President Obama a part of the record while expressing my thanks to the Obama Administration, and especially to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Assistant Secretary Blake who are expected to represent the U.S. at the Summit. It is my intent to also attend.

The Astana Summit has been organized at the initiative of President Nazarbayev and will be the first OSCE meeting of Heads of State to take place in more than a decade. It has been 11 years since the OSCE held a security summit and the world has changed drastically since then as a direct result of 9/11. While I have serious reservations about U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan aims to use the OSCE Chair and Summit to press for a resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan and for this reason I am pleased that the United States is supporting the Astana Summit. However, given the serious importance of the Summit to U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, I hope that President Obama will make it his top priority to attend. His presence will send the right signal to our allies in Central Asia who are also putting their lives on the line for us.

At this time, I want to commend Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Latvia for providing supply routes to support U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan. Known as the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), these operations are critical

to coalition efforts. Simply put, without the support of Central Asia, we have no hope in Afghanistan. But I would hope that our partnership with Central Asia would extend past the war in Afghanistan in both breadth and depth. For over 100 years, the people of Central Asia have lived without basic freedoms and, in my meetings with the people and leaders of these countries, they, like us, want to continue their march towards democracy and it is my intent to do what I can to help them as they move forward.

Again, it is my honor to welcome our witnesses including the Honorable Robert Blake, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, and Mr. David Sedney, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. I thank them for their service to our country and especially our military men and women, and I extend to them my highest regards.