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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
STATEMENT ON THE NORTHERN MARIANAS COVENANT

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The strategic importance of the Northern Marianas stems from their geographic locations--relative to Asia, the Pacific Basin, and Guam--and the value of these islands in terms of our access to them and their denial to others.

I. Importance of the Northern Marianas to U.S. Security Interests

Along with Guam, the Northern Marianas are located on the threshold of Asia, where our traditional interest has been to prevent any potentially hostile power or combination of powers from dominating the area. Since the turn of the century, the United States has given expression to this interest by several different and changing objectives, depending upon our assessment of the then existing situation. These objectives have included an open door policy for trade and commercial relations, the territorial integrity of China, the roll-back of Japanese military conquests during World War II, the containment of a Sino-Soviet threat in its aftermath, and the post-Vietnam effort to establish and maintain a regional balance of power.

Politically, economically, and militarily, it is in our national interest to be capable of maintaining an equilibrium of power in the East Asia and Pacific Region, as well as to be able to uphold our commitments to allies in the area. To do this requires a credible presence, particularly in a military sense--to demonstrate our resolve, to add substance to our political endeavors, to protect our economic interests, and to inspire trust and confidence in our defense posture. Our ability to deny the Northern Marianas to the military of other nations, coupled with the right to operate and base U.S. forces in the area is important to the maintenance of such a posture in the years ahead.

The Marianas Islands are extremely important to our maritime posture. Essential trade routes criss-cross through the area to seaports in Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Continent of Asia. The Marianas, along with Palau, also lie very close to north-south shipping lanes, linking Japan and Korea to oil resources of the Persian Gulf, via the Lombok Straits, and to the mineral resources of Indonesian, Australia, and the South Pacific Islands. Major international air routes, both east-west and north-south, also lead to the Marianas, because of its central location as a fuel stop, enroute to other countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region. The freedom to transit this area, without fear of harassment or interdiction, is an essential element of our strength as a maritime nation and our value as a friend and ally to other countries in the region.

The close proximity of the Northern Marianas to the sea and air-space surrounding Guam is an important factor in terms of the defense of this island community, which has been a U.S. territory since 1898. Our ability to exercise full authority over defense matters in the Northern Marianas is related directly to local defenses and the effectiveness of communications, surveillance, patrol, and reconnaissance activities conducted from military installations on Guam.

II. Importance of the Northern Marianas Covenant

The Covenant to establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, in political union with the United States, clearly protects our national security interests and our defense posture in the Western Pacific.

Denial of these islands to the military forces of any foreign nation will prevent the establishment of a military foothold which might be used to weaken the defenses of Guam, to interdict our commerce, to deprive our allies of essential raw materials, or to endanger the resupply of those countries who rely upon us for the production and delivery of defense material.

Access to these islands will improve our capability to sustain the military preparedness of U.S. forces during peacetime, to logistically support forward deployments from U.S. soil, if necessary during contingencies, and to provide a hedge against unforeseen changes in our base posture elsewhere in the Western Pacific.

Equally important, the Covenant reflects a desire by the people of the Northern Marianas to join the American family and to voluntarily place their islands under U.S. sovereignty. As future citizens of the United States, they fully understand and support their contribution to the "common defense."

III. Land Required for Defense Purposes

Under Article VIII of the Covenant, the future Government of the Northern Marianas will make available approximately 18,182 acres of land to the Government of the United States by long-term lease to enable it to carry out its defense responsibilities. In addition to our interest in the land as a hedge against unforeseen changes in our overseas base posture, the Department of Defense has some rather immediate requirements which cannot be satisfied by land acquisitions on Guam or elsewhere in the Western Pacific. In general, these requirements fall into three categories:

(1) Training and Readiness. With the end of hostilities in Indochina, it has become more rather than less important to provide opportunities for joint services exercises, including amphibious operations,

ship-to-shore bombardment, and weapons delivery by tactical air units. This sort of training, which is essential to our combat readiness during peacetime, was difficult to schedule for deployed units, even before the Vietnam conflict. Because of population growth, urban expansion, and other environmental factors, it is even more difficult today. Hence, we have turned to the Marianas where we currently use Tinian for small scale amphibious exercises and the island of Farallon De Medinilla for ship-to-shore bombardment. Because the latter island is completely uninhabited, it also shows great promise as a target for air-to-ground weapons delivery.

(2) Facility Realignment. There is no immediate intention or authorization to undertake a military construction program on the Island of Tinian. However, our facility planners are faced constantly with the problem of how to protect the operational capability of various overseas installations and, at the same time, protect the local residents' safety, health, and welfare. These problems stem from such factors as the gradual deterioration of some of our logistic support facilities, increasingly stringent environmental and safety criteria, and the pressure of community development, particularly around military airfields. If adjustments become necessary, as a result of such factors, the partial relocation of facilities to the Northern Marianas would be an attractive option, because there is not the pressure of urban development on and around Tinian that we find elsewhere and the long-term capital investment would be on U.S. soil.

(3) Contingency Planning. Having made the transition from a wartime to peacetime posture in the Western Pacific, we also face the problem of where to pre-position and maintain war reserve material so as to maximize our deterrent and defense capability. Tinian provides what we lack most on Guam and at many other logistic support bases in the Western Pacific--space to accommodate conventional ammunition storage facilities. Tinian also is close to our defense installations on Guam, making it possible for the two base areas to be mutually supporting. Together, Guam and Tinian would increase our preparedness to deal with a crisis in the East Asia and Pacific Region, without having to rely on a widely scattered network of logistic support bases, all located in foreign countries. This is an important option in the post-Vietnam political environment, because we cannot be absolutely sure of our access to these foreign bases in all of the contingencies which might arise.

IV. Tinian Harbor and Airfield Rehabilitation. At present, the Tinian harbor and airfield are in the advanced stages of deterioration. It is necessary to upgrade the basic infrastructure on Tinian, in order to support our training requirements and to provide for rapid expansion in the future. Thus, the FY1976 budget includes \$1 million for the planning and design of work necessary to repair the wharf, breakwater, causeway, and runway surface. When it is necessary to initiate any construction, the United States Congress will be approached for authorization and approval of any such projects.

V. Conclusions. In conclusion, the Department of Defense believes, for several reasons, that approval of the Northern Marianas Covenant by the United States Congress is extremely important and timely.

- The location of the Northern Marianas--on the threshold of Asia, at the crossroad of essential trade routes, and only 40 miles from Guam--is important in terms of our national security interests, our commitments, and our strength as a maritime nation.

- Access to the Northern Marianas for defense purposes will enable us to sustain the military preparedness of our armed forces during peacetime; to logistically support forward deployments from U.S. soil, if necessary during contingencies, and to provide a hedge against unforeseen changes in our base posture elsewhere in the East Asia and Pacific area.

- The land provided for in the Covenant will enable the Department of Defense to solve a dilemma faced at several other locations in the Western Pacific: how to protect the operational capability of our installations and, at the same time, the safety, health, and welfare of the local civilian community. The Tinian area will provide the operational flexibility we need, without violating our own safety standards and environmental protection laws.

- As future citizens of the United States, the people of the Northern Marianas fully understand and support their contribution to the "common defense." This understanding and support is of utmost importance to our defense posture and to any military presence we may establish in the Northern Marianas, now or in the distant future.

- The commitment to defend the Northern Marianas will be the same as the commitment to Guam, which shares sea and airspace in common with the islands of Rota, Tinian, and Saipan. Our access to the Northern Marianas, coupled with the denial of this area to the military forces of any foreign nation, will strengthen our defense posture in this area of strategic importance, without involving any new U.S. military commitments to any foreign country.