

November 4, 1975

SIGNIFICANT CRITICISMS RAISED
BY OPPONENTS OF THE COVENANT

Following are some significant criticisms that have been raised by those opposed to the Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands:

Criticism: The U.S. Government enticed the people of the Northern Mariana Islands to join the U.S. through the promise of large benefits that would result from a proposed military base on Tinian?

Proposed Answer: The desire of the Marianas people for unity with the U.S. predated any United States military proposal for Tinian. The desire of the Marianas people for unity with the U.S. goes back some 25 years. Detailed plans for a multi-service base on Tinian were first presented to the Marianas delegation at the second round of talks in May 1973. When plans for Tinian changed, the Marianas Political Status Commission was immediately informed so that their negotiations for a new political status would not be based on false expectations. Regardless of the change in military plans on Tinian, the Marianas people voted overwhelmingly for the Commonwealth. Furthermore, there is no need to change the status of the Marianas for military base purposes, the U.S. right now has full authority to use the area for military purposes and to construct a base if it so desires.

Criticism: The Marianas Covenant in large part represents a military land grab on the part of the United States.

Proposed Answer: There was no need to change the Trusteeship status of the Marianas for military purposes, since under the Trusteeship the United States now has full authority to use the area for military purposes. It is nonsense, to assert that the Marianas Covenant was negotiated for this purpose. At the opening round of status negotiations with the Marianas Political Status Commission, the Commission Chairman made it clear that the MPSC wanted to discuss the military's actual present land needs as well as future needs. In response to the request of the MPSC, the Department of Defense analyzed its current and future requirements and these requirements were discussed with the MPSC throughout the course of the negotiations. The early wish of the Marianas negotiators to discuss military land requirements reflects not only their early concern

regarding land matters; but also a sophisticated, mature approach to the question of military land requirements. The United States land requirements necessary for defense purposes were obtained, while at the same time, the concerns of the people of the Northern Marianas were fully satisfied.

Criticism: The strategic importance of Micronesia and the Northern Mariana Islands is highly questionable today, given the fact that the United States will not lose its major forward bases in Japan, Korea and the Philippines.

Proposed Answer: The United States has longstanding national interests and responsibilities in that part of the Pacific Ocean in which the Northern Mariana Islands are located. The Northern Marianas will be important to our national security no matter what our national strategy may be in the next fifty years or beyond. The denial of the area to military forces of other countries is particularly important in terms of international security commitments, our defense responsibilities for Guam, and our strength as a maritime nation. U.S. Government interest in land lease arrangements for possible military use in the Marianas is an important complement to, not a substitute for, U.S. forward bases in the Pacific region.

Criticism: Approval of the Covenant will mean an extension of U.S. federal programs and welfare to "new" U.S. citizens at a time of economic austerity in the United States.

Proposed Answer: Federal social programs are now extended to almost all U.S. territories. The Northern Marianas will receive equal treatment by being authorized to participate in these federal social programs. Due to the small population (only 14,000) in the Northern Marianas, its level of these federal programs will be quite small. It is important to note that the Covenant only authorizes the Northern Marianas to participate in federal programs. They must initiate a request for a particular program and then meet all federal requirements for the program such as matching grants, creation of local authorities, population ratio requirements, and a certain degree of competency to run the program. The level of U.S. funds under federal programs is of course subject to the annual scrutiny of OMB and to the final review and approval of the U.S. Congress. In austere economic times, the Northern Marianas will receive no more federal programs than other U.S. territories. Currently there is full employment in the Northern Marianas and the average family income is \$4,425.00.

Criticism: The Marianas Commonwealth Covenant is against the wishes of the Carolinian minority.

Proposed Answer: There is no indication that the Carolinian community in fact opposes the granting of Commonwealth status to the Northern Mariana Islands. The leadership of the United Carolinian Association did not oppose the Commonwealth status during the campaign leading to the June 17 plebiscite, but they did come out at the time against certain provisions in the Covenant. On this point, Covenant opponents argued that they supported Commonwealth status, but that specific sections should be renegotiated, namely the level of U.S. financial assistance and the degree of local autonomy.

Criticism: The United States is violating the spirit and letter of the United Nations Trusteeship Agreement.

Proposed Answer: The according of Commonwealth status to the Northern Mariana Islands is consistent with and in fulfillment of the obligation of the United States under Article VI of the Trusteeship Agreement "to promote the development of the inhabitants of the Trust Territory toward self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of the Trust Territory and its peoples and the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned".

Criticism: There is no mention in the Covenant of a United Nations role in the approval of the Covenant or in the termination of the Trusteeship Agreement.

Proposed Answer: The Covenant is an agreement between the people of the Northern Mariana Islands and the United States. The Trusteeship Agreement, on the other hand, is between the United States and the United Nations and the role of the United Nations in the termination process is not a matter between the people of the Northern Mariana Islands and the United States. The Trusteeship Agreement itself does not speak of any United Nations role in termination. The Covenant provisions that will be put into effect prior to termination of the Trusteeship Agreement generally provide for the self-government of the Northern Marianas and are a major step in fulfillment of the U.S. obligation under the Trusteeship Agreement. The United Nations Charter and the Trusteeship Agreement provide ample authority for the United States and the people of the Marianas to order the relationship between them as provided in the Covenant.

Criticism: Bringing the Marianas into a Commonwealth with the United States is just another form of neo-colonialism.

Proposed Answer: The Northern Marianas have not been and will not be a colony of the United States under the Commonwealth Covenant. Under the terms of the Covenant, the Northern Mariana Islands will have the right of local self-government and will govern themselves with respect to internal affairs in accordance with a Constitution of their own adoption. The Constitution will provide for a republican form of government with separate executive, legislative and judicial branches. Both the executive power and the legislative power will be vested in popularly elected officials. The Constitution or laws of the Northern Mariana Islands may provide for the appointment or election of a Resident Representative to the United States, who will be entitled to receive official recognition as such representative by all departments and agencies of the United States Government. With the extension of U.S. sovereignty to the Northern Mariana Islands, certain responsibilities and obligations, as well as rights and benefits, pertain to each partner of the Covenant. Sovereignty in no way implies a form of colonialism. Through self-determination, the people of the Northern Marianas freely expressed their desire for a close association with the United States as embodied in the Covenant.

Criticism: The United States for its own national interests induced the Marianas to separate from the other districts and seek American territorial status.

Proposed Answer: From the time the U.S. started thinking seriously about the future political status of the Trust Territory, it was our policy to encourage unity and for several years we attempted to negotiate an agreement which would create a single relationship between the entire Trust Territory and the United States. When it became clear that the Congress of Micronesia was seeking a looser and more flexible relationship than Commonwealth status, the leaders of the Northern Marianas became alarmed and began seeking separate negotiations which would lead to the close and permanent ties they had long been seeking. The U.S. did nothing to encourage this sentiment and acquiesced to the desires of the Northern Marianas only after it became apparent that it was beyond our power to negotiate a single document which would meet both the desires of the Northern Marianas and the rest of the Trust Territory.

Criticism: Congressional action on the Marianas Covenant should await conclusion of negotiations with the rest of Micronesia so the U.S. Congress can deal with the issue as a whole.

Proposed Answer: The people of the Northern Marianas have long been united in their desire for a close and permanent political union with the United States. Their preference is clear and they have acted on that preference. To delay this agreement would be an injustice to the people of the Northern Marianas and would conflict with our obligation under Article VI of the Trusteeship Agreement to promote "self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of the Trust Territory and its peoples, and the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned". To shackle these people to the future of the other districts whose diversity and multiplicity of purpose has contributed to preventing conclusion of negotiations after seven years of continued effort, would constitute an indefensible inequity in the eyes of the Marianas people.

Criticism: The Commonwealth Covenant which brings the Northern Marianas into political union with the United States and separates it from the rest of the Trust Territory is opposed by the Congress of Micronesia which represents all the people of the Trust Territory.

Proposed Answer: In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on November 5, 1975, spokesmen representing both the Senate and House of the Congress of Micronesia, said they supported H.J. Res. 549, to approve the "Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America". Earlier, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of the Congress of Micronesia cabled the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee stating that they acquiesced to the popular will of the people of the Marianas District.