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STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL WILLIAM J. CROWE, JR.,
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OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
(INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS)

Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure for me to appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to testify for the Department of Defense on behalf of the Joint Resolution which would establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas.

In terms of our national security interests, the Department of Defense believes that approval of the Northern Marianas Covenant by the United States Congress is extremely important and timely.

The 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.

Our access to the Northern Marianas for defense purposes will enable us to improve 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 Region.

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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.

From a national security standpoint, I would like to stress the close proximity of the Northern Marianas to Guam--a U.S. Territory since 1898 and the site of extremely important U.S. defense installations. To a very large extent, the area is a strategic as well as cultural entity. Thus, the desire of the people of the Northern Marianas to join the American family, to voluntarily place their islands under U.S. sovereignty, and to participate in the "common defense" has our strongest support.

While there is no intention or authorization to begin the construction of any military facilities in the Northern Marianas, I know that there has been considerable speculation about the land we seek to lease and our defense posture elsewhere in the East Asia and Pacific Region. Thus, I would like to discuss this issue as we see it.

- First, the need for this land does not stem from any desire or plan to change our current base structure. Given our strategy and commitments, it is clear that the Northern Marianas could not substitute for the major installations we now have in Japan, Korea, and the Philippines.

- Second, the Marianas Covenant does not reflect any new or sudden desire by the Department of Defense to acquire land in this area. For the most part, it represents a consolidation of acreage set aside on Tinian and Saipan for military purposes more than twenty years ago, but under a new agreement which has been negotiated directly with the people of the Northern Marianas.

- Third, the continuing requirement for land in the Northern Marianas stems not only from their strategic location but also from the scarcity of and demand for land elsewhere in the Western Pacific. In some areas, a decade of rapid economic development, population growth, and urban expansion have created land pressures which have made it more difficult to operate from our current bases and to maintain the open space we need for the exercise of our forces and the storage of adequate war reserve material. We cannot allow the operational readiness of our forces to suffer as a result of these socio-environmental factors; nor can we ignore these factors in our community relations. Because Tinian has a low population density and is remote from centers of commercial activity, we currently use this area for training in amphibious warfare, and we anticipate heavier use in the future. For the same reasons, we believe that Tinian would be a highly suitable place to store conventional ammunition or petroleum stocks, at such time as it may become necessary to consolidate, replace, or expand existing facilities. To the north of Saipan, we also use the completely uninhabited island of Farallon de Medinilla for training in ship-to-shore bombardment and practice in the delivery of air-to-ground weapons.

In essence, the Department of Defense sees the value of land which will be leased in the Northern Marianas in terms of its responsibility to maintain the combat readiness and credibility of our forward deployed forces.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, the Department of Defense strongly recommends approval of the Covenant, because it reflects the political status desired by the people of the Northern Marianas; it clearly supports our national security interests; and it provides land we need for defense purposes now and in the years ahead. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today.