

Copy for Siemer - not on specific list

NY

12 MAR 24 1974

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~



ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

19 NOV 1975

INTERNATIONAL  
SECURITY AFFAIRS

In reply refer to:  
I-12130/75

Honorable Harry F. Byrd, Jr.  
United States Senator  
Washington D.C., 20520

Dear Senator Byrd:

I appreciated the opportunity to appear before your Subcommittee on November 17, 1975 as a witness in support of the Joint Resolution to establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. However, I feel that a number of statements and views expressed during the hearings require further consideration and clarification.

One aspect of the hearing that seriously concerns me is the view that training and logistic support are an unnecessary convenience for the Department of Defense; therefore, Tinian is not of great importance. I cannot stress too strongly that the combat readiness and credibility of our forces to respond to contingencies is of utmost importance. No one in the Department of Defense, civilian or military, wants to default on a commitment because of low readiness. Readiness is our primary responsibility, and the neglect of this responsibility could have a direct impact on some of our vital national interests.

With respect to training areas, I would like to reemphasize some of the operational constraints we have to deal with today and the situation we expect to face in the future

-- U.S. Forces in Korea still have access to some fine training areas. However, the availability of land for exercises and maneuvers in the offshore islands leaves much to be desired. Urban expansion and environmental pressures have forced us to curtail some air operations, to restructure our exercises and maneuvers with less realism, to use target areas which are remote from the bases which support our tactical air wings, and to reduce the amount of war reserve material at several sites. The lack of convenient training areas is a nagging problem, because we are trying to do the same job, with fewer divisions, ships, and aircraft.

-- Looking to the future, we doubt that the situation will get any better, and anticipate that it will worsen, because of the pressure to use

Classified by ASD/EAC/PR  
SUBJECT TO GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULE OF  
EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652. AUTOMATICALLY DOWNGRADED  
AT TWO YEAR INTERVALS. DECLASSIFIED ON 31 Dec 81

*Mr. Jordan*

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

10-431050

Doc 44

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

land for agricultural purposes, community development, and commercial expansion. We do not want the use of land to become an issue which might threaten our broad political and military interests in these allied countries. At the same time, we cannot allow the combat readiness of our forces to be jeopardized by these socio-environmental pressures.

In our view, the best way to solve the training problem is to look elsewhere for the open land, sea, and airspace we need. Tinian is an excellent location because of its close proximity to the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea. Moreover, it has a small population density, and it is convenient to naval and air units in transit from the United States to the Western Pacific. Convenience counts for a great deal when we are trying to do the same job with a smaller force structure. Finally, Tinian and the Island of Farallon de Medinilla will give us the capability to enhance the readiness of our forces if they are deployed to the Western Pacific in an emergency, under conditions which require the use of U.S. soil. Guam is simply too congested to permit the live firing of ammunition by troops, ships, or aircraft.

I also wish to address the view that Johnston, Midway, and Wake Islands might somehow substitute for the land we need on Tinian. The largest of these islands (Midway) is only 28 square miles in size; Johnston and Wake are both less than 4 square miles in size. In contrast, the land on Tinian totals 41 square miles, most of which is undeveloped. Also, the advantage of Tinian lies in its close proximity to Guam and the Far East. In either a peacetime or contingency situation, naval and air units can be logistically supported from bases on Guam, while using training areas in the Northern Marianas. The two island groups are mutually supporting in this and a great number of other ways.

Perhaps more important than the above issue is the long range (10-25 years) importance of the Northern Marianas to the United States. As I indicated in my testimony, we do not believe that, in the foreseeable future, we are going to be forced out of our bases in Korea, Japan, and the Philippines. Moreover, given our present strategy and commitments, we do not look upon the Marianas as a direct substitute for these bases. Nevertheless, given the uncertainties of the future and our inability to predict or control events, there are compelling reasons to secure a firm position in the Northern Marianas.

-- Over the next 10 or 25 years, there is little question that our allies will assume more and more responsibility for their own defense. In turn, while it is difficult to predict when and where, there will no doubt be reductions in our overseas bases. It would be dangerous and shortsighted

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

to assume that our present base structure will remain unchanged indefinitely. At the same time, the United States Government may well desire to retain a strong forward position in the Pacific, in support of its political, economic, and military interests in this region. We will have to look elsewhere for the land and facilities we need to support these broad national interests. Because of their location and topography, the Marianas as an entity may well become extremely important to our military posture and preparedness in the Pacific.

-- Hopefully, the credibility of our nuclear deterrent will remain high, and our allies will not feel the need to develop one of their own. Currently, the Marianas have strategic importance, because our POLARIS submarines, the SAC B-52's, and some of our strategic communications links are supported from Guam. In distant years, these force deployments may change; however, the Marianas will remain our primary communications center in the Western Pacific. In this connection, the close proximity of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota to Guam is a potential problem. No more than a year ago, we had to reject a proposal to locate a transmitter on Rota, because of the interference it would cause on Guam. This illustrates my point that the Marianas are a strategic as well as cultural entity. The United States must maintain a substantial influence over the future development and use of land in the Northern Marianas to protect our military position on Guam.

-- We also hope that our allies will continue to look upon the United States as a technically superior and politically reliable producer of defense equipment and material. They will not do this, however, unless they are reasonably convinced that we can defend our Pacific lines of communication in a hostile environment. As a minimum, we will have to indicate a strong commitment to reinforce and resupply our own territory of Guam. From that point onward, our allies may be able to protect their own shipping or contribute substantially to this protection. The reliance of our allies on overseas sources of petroleum also is a problem which should concern us, not only in the immediate future but also in the years ahead.

-- Finally, we believe that the Department of Defense will have enduring national security responsibilities in the Pacific Region. We are a Pacific Power with our own interests to protect in this region--our access to essential raw materials, freedom of the seas and airspace above, defense of our Pacific island territories, and the safety of a million Americans who reside in or travel through the East Asia and Pacific Region every year. There is no one else to whom we can pass this baton. Nor can we know what the international situation will be 20 years hence.

It has been suggested that we might protect our defense interests without giving the people of the Northern Marianas U.S. citizenship. I might agree

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

with this view, if they were totally against a permanent relationship with the United States, but they are not. To the contrary, they have wanted to become part of the American family for the last three decades; they are willing to place their islands under U.S. sovereignty; and they fully understand their contribution to the "common defense." This contribution will be land, the thing they value most. They are willing to take more than 18,000 acres out of circulation for the next 100 years. For this, they will receive an average of \$195 thousand per year or about \$16 per person, based on today's population. I find it hard to believe that we would obtain a better agreement next year or at any time in the future, particularly if we denied them their most important goal--U.S. citizenship. Moreover, any looser form of association would not protect our interests as well as this arrangement and, in the long run, would more than likely prove to be more expensive.

In closing, I would like to stress that our support of this Covenant is based on Department of Defense responsibilities to maintain the combat readiness and credibility of our forward deployed forces, the scheduling problems we face with a smaller forces structure, and a growing list of uncertainties surrounding our future access to maneuver areas and logistic support bases in the Western Pacific area. Given the above, defense planners, charged with developing a military establishment which can effectively buttress U.S. national interests, must, of necessity, be concerned about the future status of the Northern Marianas. I recall vividly how we failed to appreciate the importance of the Western Pacific before 1941 and the bitter price we subsequently paid for our neglect. From a defense perspective, it would be extremely shortsighted and dangerous to our future preparedness, if the United States Congress failed to grasp this opportunity to bring the Northern Marianas into the American family in a constructive and basically sound way.

Sincerely,



Robert Ellsworth  
Assistant Secretary of Defense  
International Security Affairs

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

10- 431053