



United States Department of the Interior

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

OCT 7 - 1976

Dear Mr. Ellsworth:

I am writing you in reference to the plans of the Defense Department with regard to the Northern Mariana Islands. As you are aware, the Northern Mariana Islands are now in the process of making a phased transition from their present political status to that of self-governing United States commonwealth. An important element of the transitional efforts has been the institution of an Office of Transitional Studies and Plans. This Office, the broad outlines of which were agreed upon during the political status negotiations, has assumed the responsibility for economic, physical and social planning for the new Marianas government. As you are also aware, it is expected that constitutional government including an elected chief executive will be installed in the Northern Mariana Islands by the beginning of 1978 under the terms of the Covenant (Public Law 94-241) and the Trusteeship Agreement.

The transitional plans and policies for the Northern Marianas are set by a Joint United States - Marianas Transition Commission of which the Director of Territorial Affairs of this Department, Mr. Fred M. Zeder, is the Federal Co-Chairman. One problem which the Transition Commission has encountered as it seeks to guide the work of the Office of Transition Studies and Plans is a lack of knowledge of the plans of the Department of Defense with regard to those portions of the Covenant, particularly Title VIII and the Technical Agreement, which relate to the lease of land for contingency national security purposes. Section 2, Acquisition, of the Technical Agreement provides that unless the United States exercises its option to lease the lands specified in section 802 of the Covenant and makes payment for same as specified in section 803 of that document, within five years from the effective date of those sections which we expect to be January 1, 1978, the United States loses its ability to lease those lands under the terms specified. It would be most helpful for this Department to have the benefit of the Defense Department's thinking as to when during the period of 1978 through 1982 it intends to seek Congressional appropriation to effect the lease. I might point out that it would appear advantageous for the United States to effect the lease payments early in the five year period since the amounts specified in section 803 of the Covenant are required to be appropriated at levels commensurate with the change in the value of the dollar as indicated by the percentage change in the United States Department of Commerce composite price index from February 15, 1975.



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To further accentuate our informational need, I might call your attention to section 803(e) of the Covenant which provides that the amounts made available by the United States for the lease of the Tanapag Harbor area on Saipan island shall be established as a trust fund by the Government of the Northern Mariana Islands for the development and maintenance of a local park which may include appropriate memorials to American and Marianas casualties of World War II. We are anxious to see proper planning for this important park and recreational area and would appreciate your views on the best time frame to anticipate the commencement of land clearing and construction.

As a related matter, I am enclosing an editorial from Guam's Pacific Daily News dated September 13, 1976. As you can see, there still exists considerable confusion in both Guam and the Northern Marianas about the intentions of the Defense Department. While we recall the substance of your testimony during the Senate Armed Services Committee hearings on the Covenant to the effect that the Defense Department has no present plans for base construction on Tinian island, we must conclude that our understanding is not shared locally.

In addition then to your kind response to the particular questions which I have posed above, I would hope that the Defense Department would give serious consideration to issuing a press release for dissemination in the Northern Marianas and Guam indicating that even after the United States exercises its land lease options in the Northern Marianas, it has no present plans to construct a major joint service facility on Tinian if such remains your intention. I believe this information would help to allay any misunderstandings which may now exist on Tinian and in the Northern Marianas generally.

Sincerely yours,

Kent Drizzell
Under Secretary of the Interior

Hon. Robert Ellsworth
Deputy Secretary
Department of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, D. C. 20301

Enclosure

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