

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

JAN 10 1976

Honorable John C. Stennis
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Since your Committee currently has jurisdiction over H.J. RES 549, I would like to comment on the relationship between the Northern Marianas Covenant and our past, present, and future national security interests.

For the last three decades, our security interests in Micronesia have been adequately protected by the Trusteeship Agreement which Congress and the United Nations Security Council approved in 1947. Now, however, there are strong feelings, both within and outside of Micronesia, that the time has come to terminate this Agreement. From a defense perspective, we hope that this can occur without political or economic instability and without the loss of rights we need to protect our national security interests in the years ahead.

As you know, the people of the Carolines and the Marshall Islands desire a loose form of political association with the United States and the right to terminate this association after a period of about 15 years. The constitution which these people worked on during the last five months also puts more emphasis on Micronesian sovereignty than we have seen in the past. Thus, we anticipate some rather prolonged negotiations concerning our rights at Kwajalein Missile Range. It is important to protect these rights, because we have a \$350 million investment in facilities and equipment.

In contrast to the rest of Micronesia, the people of the Northern Marianas desire to join the American family, to voluntarily place their islands under U.S. sovereignty, and to contribute to the "common defense" of the United States. I believe, for two fundamental reasons, that a permanent relationship with these people would be in our national interest.

- First, there is the matter of geography. While the Interior Department has administered the Trust Territory as a single unit, the fact remains that the Northern Marianas are closer to Guam than any other part of Micronesia. Rota, the southernmost island, is within eyesight of Andersen Air Force Base. Because these islands share sea and airspace

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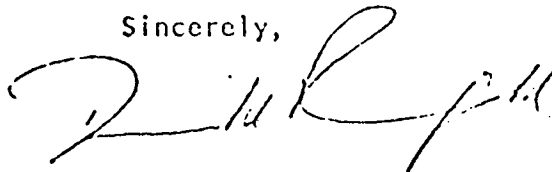
in common with Guam, we are more concerned on a day-to-day basis with what goes on in the Northern Marianas. We believe that it is important to protect the influence we currently have over defense matters in general and such specific functions as the allocation of radio frequencies, the control of military air traffic, and the demarcation of territorial waters. The federal relationship which this Covenant establishes with the Northern Marianas will safeguard these interests better than any other arrangement could. From this perspective, we would support the Covenant, with or without the lease of land for defense purposes.

- Second, there is the question of defense land requirements in the immediate and distant future. In this regard, we are fortunate to have a substantial capability on Guam--a naval station, ship repair facility, naval magazine, communications station, naval hospital, and Andersen Air Force Base. We do not have to duplicate these facilities in the Northern Marianas. However, there is a need for additional acreage to support training, logistic support, and other land-intensive functions which are apt to become important in the years ahead. Moreover, the 18,182 acres of land we lease in the Northern Marianas will provide a limited hedge against unforeseen changes in our base structure elsewhere in the Western Pacific. This is not to suggest that we are going to lose our bases in Korea, Japan, and the Philippines. It would be dangerous, though, to assume that we are going to retain our access to each and every one of these bases for the indefinite future, with the same rights we have today.

I have one final observation, which relates to the need to be as farsighted and flexible as possible in our defense planning. We not only have to deal now with a wide range of uncertainties, but we also have the necessity to plan for the sort of defense posture which will protect our national security interests in the 1980's and beyond. We know from bitter experience that it is far more effective and far less costly to use foresight in our defense planning than to approach each problem from a position of extremis. In this regard, I am convinced that the Marianas as a whole will become more and more important to our national defense in the years ahead and that we should provide for their admission to the United States on a mutually acceptable basis. The alternative is the risk of alienating a friendly people and making future defense arrangements difficult and more costly.

In closing, I urge you and other members of the Armed Services Committee to support H.J. RES 549, as amended by the Senate Interior Committee, because it reflects the political status desired by the people of the Northern Marianas; it helps us to maintain a strong forward defense and early warning capability from Guam; and it gives us the sort of flexibility we need to assure a strong Pacific defense in the uncertain years which lie ahead.

Sincerely,



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