

Committee on Resources

Full Committee

Testimony

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International Security Affairs
Oversight Hearing
House Committee on Resources

May 11, 1999

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I am honored to join this distinguished assembly of Marshall Island and United States Government officials to discuss the status of nuclear claims, relocation and resettlement efforts of the governments of the four nuclear-affected atolls in the Marshall Islands. My responsibilities as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Affairs include the Freely Associated States, specifically the Republic of the Marshall Islands. While I have not visited the Marshall Islands, my staff has, and I have worked closely with the Republic of the Marshall Islands Embassy here in Washington.

Background on the Defense Relationship

The Department of Defense has a deep appreciation of the current significance and past history of our special relationship with the Freely Associated States; the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau. We cannot, and should not, forget the price we paid in liberating these islands from Imperial Japan in World War II and the role some of the islands and peoples played in developing crucial US defense programs in the 1950s and 1960s. Our relationship is founded upon the unique role of U.S. defense responsibilities to the sovereign nations of the Freely Associated States under the terms of the Compact of Free Association.

The Compact and subsequent agreements obligate the United States to provide for the defense of the Freely Associated States in perpetuity, unless mutually agreed upon to terminate the arrangement. We are committed to provide security to these nations and their peoples "as the United States and its citizens are defended." This level of defense commitment goes beyond any other U.S. treaty or alliance. In return for this fundamental security guarantee and other DOD obligations, we retain the right for certain military uses and access, as well as the right to veto access to third countries.

In the absence of the Compact or the Security and Defense Relations Title of the Compact, the Mutual Security Agreement still provides for defense obligations, military access, and denial of military access by third countries. Although it may appear that the termination of the Compact would result in little change, it is clearly in the best interests of the US to maintain the full range of military access and security engagement options the Compact provides. One of the most important aspects of the Compact is the foundation it provides for our day-to-day working relationship with the people of the Freely Associated States.

In preparation for the upcoming Compact renewal negotiations, the Department of Defense has conducted a

study to determine our defense interests in the Freely Associated States for the post-2001 era. This study, which will be finalized in mid-1999, has considered many issues of mutual concern, such as continued access, current and future threats, and roles the Freely Associated States may play in future scenarios.

The overriding defense interest in the negotiations will be continued use of the Kwajalein Missile Range and the facilities on Kwajalein Atoll. The requirements of our missile defense and space surveillance programs combined with the uniqueness of Kwajalein's location, infrastructure investment, and real world treaty restrictions, make this an issue of the highest priority.

Under the Military Use and Operating Rights Agreement, negotiated subsequent to the Compact, the United States retains the right to automatically extend the use of Kwajalein for an additional fifteen years to 2016. However, the Compact and use of Kwajalein are not that easily separated. While the agreements may be negotiated separately, proviso's of the Compact help provide the basis for the support of the Marshallese, who in turn provide not only much of the labor force, but also a positive local environment which is critical for continued success at Kwajalein.

If the goal of the Compact is to maintain a unique relationship with the Freely Associated States while helping them become financially self-sustaining democracies, then a renegotiated Compact, in some form, is in the best interests of the United States and the Freely Associated States. It will help the Freely Associated States continue to work toward their national goals, while serving our national defense interests.

Nuclear Claims, Relocation and Resettlement

As part of the U.S. Government's acceptance of responsibility "for compensation owing to citizens of the Marshall Islands ... for loss or damage ... resulting from the nuclear testing program ... conducted ... between June 30, 1946, and August 18, 1958," the Department of Defense participated in the clean up of Enewetak Atoll. Contaminated matter was deposited in Cactus Crater on Runit Island and the Army Corps of Engineers constructed a concrete dome over the crater for containment.

Pursuant to the terms of the Compact of Free Association, the Republic of the Marshall Islands bears full responsibility for maintaining and monitoring the dome and Runit Island. Any issues dealing with Runit dome are best addressed to the Department of Energy for technical expertise.

The Department of Defense has cooperated with the Republic of the Marshall Islands' quest for historical data dealing with nuclear testing and clean up efforts. Most recently, in the fall of 1997, the Embassy of the Republic of the Marshall Islands was authorized to communicate directly with the Defense Special Weapons Agency as a means to refine requests for both classified and unclassified information. To date, this working relationship has not been utilized.

The Department of Defense bears no obligations for matters dealing with relocation or resettlement.

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