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House Natural Resources Committee Field Hearing:  
“Peace Through Strength: The Strategic Importance of the Pacific Islands to  
U.S.-led Global Security”

August 24, 2023  
Tamuning, Guam

STATEMENT

Mr. Ricky F. Cantero  
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**Chairman Westerman (R-AR),**

**Indian and Insular Affairs Subcommittee Ranking Member Teresa Leger Fernandez (D-NM),**

**Members of the House Natural Resources Committee,**

Thank you for convening this hearing today and for providing me the opportunity to testify before you this morning. As permanent custodians of this vast oceanic region, we are pleased to welcome you to our peaceful part of the world.

My name is Ricky Francisco Cantero. I am first a long-time public servant for the FSM – proudly serving my country as the Deputy Secretary of Foreign Affairs and, in the context of today’s hearing, as the Acting Secretary of Foreign Affairs. I have had the distinct honor in serving my country in the field of diplomacy for the last 24 years.

Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of President Wesley Simina, I have the honor to share my government’s perspectives on the long-standing U.S.-FSM partnership, perspectives on opportunities to strengthen collaboration between our two sovereign nations and, perhaps, to share perspectives on the ongoing and progressive military cooperation that exists between our two governments.

Towards this end, I proudly submit to this Committee FSM's firm and concrete commitment in fulfilling its Compact Treaty obligations – obligations that are necessary to support the advancement of the United States' military readiness in our region.

Indeed, the FSM is not oblivious to the rapid changing dynamics of geo-strategic competitions that, not only lingers, but continues to spread throughout the INDO-PACIFIC region. Being surrounded by the world's most consequential relationships, behooves both our sovereign countries to reflect on regional challenges of mutual interests. In doing so, I submit the strong commitment of the FSM in performing its part to ensuring that our region and our people live in an environment that is safe – an environment that is secured. Whether bilateral, regional or global, the FSM has and will continue to stand ready to support security and defense interests of the United States. Your Interest is Our Interest; Your Protection is our Protection; Our Home is Your Home. The ever-increasing enlistment of our citizens to serve in the US Armed Forces and those that have paid the ultimate sacrifice is a strong testimony to this creed.

The FSM is dedicated to its strategic partnership with the United States, which has always been our most steadfast and consequential ally. The FSM and U.S. relationship predates the establishment of the FSM as a sovereign country.

The origins of this relationship are based on strategic defense interests following World War II, when the U.S. administered the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, a region that includes the present day-FSM. Our Compact Treaty with the U.S. reflects both the FSM's emergence as a sovereign nation in 1986 and our unwavering commitment to the U.S. and the peace and security of the region. Under the Compact Treaty, the U.S. has been granted strategic rights of denial over a vast portion of the western Pacific Ocean and the U.S. Government retains responsibility for security and defense matters in or relating to the FSM.

This responsibility includes, among others, the obligation to defend the FSM and its people from third-party military threats, the option to foreclose access to military personnel from other countries, and the right to establish and use military areas and facilities in the FSM, on agreed terms. The FSM provides the U.S. with access to our sovereign territory to protect shared security interests in the region. The security and defense elements of the Compact Treaty are also core pillars of our enduring relationship – core pillars that DO NOT have a termination date.

Mr. Chairman:

As the U.S. Administration recently articulated, *“the Compacts of Free Association agreements form the bedrock of America’s broader strategic interests and engagements in the Indo-Pacific, are key to the national security of the United States, and underpin our important bilateral relations with these partner nations.”*

The FSM is proud to play a vital role in supporting the U.S. security presence in the Pacific region and the United States’ efforts to combat foreign aggression in the region. Through our prescribed annual Joint Committee Meeting, the FSM continues to work collaboratively with the US military in identifying ways of strengthening and enriching bilateral security engagements, under the overall Title III spectrum of security and defense. Among many other initiatives, this also includes FSM’s Treaty commitment to provision our precious and limited land to support interests of the US military to establish military defense sites on our soil.

The FSM conducts its own foreign relations in ways that are very consistent with the terms of the Amended Compact Treaty. The FSM maintains the U.S. as its primary partner while also having diplomatic relations with over 90 countries throughout the region and around the world – thus, providing true testimony to our constitutional creed of extending to all nations what we seek: *Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, and Love in our Common Humanity.*

Additionally, the FSM and U.S belong to many of the same international organizations, including the United Nations, where voting practices of the two nations are aligned and remain extremely consistent.

The FSM remains firmly dedicated to its strategic partnership with the U.S. and looks forward to the continuation of this dedication far into the future, through the renewal of economic assistance during the next 20-year Compact period.

Mr. Chairman:

The FSM and U.S. ties are strong, ongoing and will always persevere. Beyond Congress' consideration of the Compact renewal legislation to extend expiring provisions for 2023 to 2043, there are also limitless opportunities for enhanced collaboration at all levels.

The FSM welcomes intensification of joint activities with the Department of Defense which, among many others, includes planned military construction projects in the FSM. For many years, the Department of Defense deployed Civilian Action Teams (CATs) in the FSM to support civil engineering initiatives on our islands.

Noting that the CAT program was lapsed in 2003, the FSM is pleased to see recent U.S. congressional efforts advocating for its restoration. Similarly, the FSM fully supports ongoing efforts to restore the U.S. Peace Corps program in the FSM – an essential program in direct support of people-to-people engagements. Among many others, Mr. Chairman, these are few initiatives that very important to strengthening and enriching our existing ties with the U.S.

We look forward to working with the Committee on ways to enhance our enduring partnership with the U.S. and on efforts to advance the Compact legislation, expeditiously; And, to bring into existence a new chapter in the FSM/US Treaty partnership.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering a few questions.