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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025

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June 15, 2005

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Anthony J. Principi

Chairman

Base Realignment and Closure Commission

2521 South Clark St, Suite 600

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Dear Mr. Chairman,

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you and all of your fellow commissioners for agreeing to serve on the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. I know that your task is not an easy one. Base closures and realignments are painful for the locations that are under review, but necessary to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our military. We recognize that you and all your colleagues have already distinguished yourselves in your respective careers. None of you needed to take on this difficult task. So I do sincerely want to express my thanks to you and the other commissioners for serving.

I am old enough to remember the tragic days of World War II. Our nation was inadequately prepared for conflict and we suffered devastating consequences as a result. In the early days of that war, the strategic importance of Alaska was quickly discovered. Thousands of young Americans were sent to Alaska to stand watch in preparation to combat an enemy invasion of this region. I am sure you are aware that Alaska also served as a critical bridge allowing us to reinforce our friends in Europe and Asia when other routes proved to be extremely dangerous.

Since that time the military infrastructure in Alaska has been dramatically reduced. The DoD recommendations before you would virtually close another Alaska base, Eielson Air Force Base and transfer thousands of personnel and equipment to bases in the continental United States. I urge you to examine this matter extremely carefully because Alaska remains a strategic link today.

We all recognize in this day and age our forces can be rapidly deployed anywhere around the globe. But even so, the time to deploy can be drastically reduced by maintaining forces near trouble spots. While it may be counterintuitive to those of us who are used to looking at a standard flat map, it is a fact that Alaska is significantly closer to potential hot spots than most of the rest of the United States.

Mr. Chairman, it is hard to determine the long term strategic value of a military base because predicting future threats is challenging. In the 1960's and 70's our attention was on South East Asia. In the 1980's it was the central plains of Europe. In the 1990's it was the troubled Balkans. Today, the focus of our military leaders is on Southwest Asia, and justifiably so.

However, the battle in South West Asia is nearly complete. Our troops may not yet be on their way home, but the challenges we face in Iraq and Afghanistan are not those which are likely to require a huge influx of America's military might. In fact, for the foreseeable future there is only one area of the world which could require the nation's awesome power to be brought to bear, and that is Asia.

Today in Asia we face a belligerent dictator in Kim Jong Il. We know all too well that the North Koreans are in possession of nuclear weapons and that they have thousands of artillery pieces aimed at Seoul. They also have more than 1 million men in their military of which two-thirds are assumed to be near the border.

In fact, six of the world's largest militaries are in Asia: Vietnam, Russia, China, South Korea, India and North Korea.

So too, terrorism is flourishing in Asia. Today we face challenges from radicals such as Abu Sayef in the Philippines and the Jemaa Islamiya forces in Indonesia.

But of most concern is the potential adversary we could face from China, the only nation that is likely to develop into superpower status in the coming years. In a recent edition of Atlantic Monthly, Robert Kaplan laid out one of the reasons why we must remain vigilant in Asia. Quoting from the first sentence of that article Kaplan writes,

“The Middle East is just a blip. The American military contest with China in the Pacific will define the twenty first century. And China will be a more formidable adversary than Russia ever was.”

Mr. Kaplan goes on to argue that the awesome potential of China will present the greatest possible threat to peace and stability in Asia. Today, we see tensions between China and Taiwan. We have read recently in the press about rising tensions between China and Japan. Kaplan points out that we have no NATO in Asia as we had to match the Soviet Union. The United States is virtually on its own in this region. He notes that our counterweight to Chinese expansion rests on the forces of the Pacific Command. And the Pacific Command's strength comes from its strategically located bases.

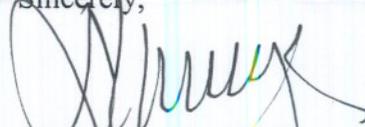
We have bases and friendships with many nations of the region, but as we see today host nations are seeking to reduce our forces in their countries. As we look at our base posture in the Pacific we must factor in U.S. plans to reduce our forces in South Korea, and the possibility that we will pull Marines out of Okinawa. The bases on United States soil in the region are the key to our strength and deterrence.

As I have reviewed the Defense Department recommendations on closing bases, in general I believe they recognized the importance of the Pacific. That is why the Eielson decision is so puzzling. Eielson is the closest United States base to North Korea. It's A-10's are designed for the type of war that might erupt on that peninsula. It's F-16's could rapidly deploy to Korea in the event of a crisis. The North Koreans are well aware of these facts. They see the forces in Alaska that are poised to defend South Korea.

We are told that the main reason to move the forces from Alaska is because it costs more to station forces there, that we cannot afford to pay the small incremental price difference. I have watched this region for many years. I know what happens when we appear to turn our back or fail to act decisively to deter aggression. For those that argue that we cannot afford to base our forces in Alaska, I would say that we cannot afford not to base our forces here. Removing our military firepower from Alaska would be costly and detrimental to our nation and its security. DCN: 2505

Yours is a most difficult assignment. Whatever recommendation you make will cause disappointment in communities throughout the United States. But this is not about jobs; this is about our security. I am confident that as you and your colleagues review the facts and consider the national security implications of this decision, you will agree that Eielson needs to remain a vibrant component in our nation's security.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Inouye', with a long, sweeping tail that extends downwards.

DANIEL K. INOUE
UNITED STATES SENATE