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EXCISE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: June 13, 1962

SUBJECT: Future of the Pacific Islands

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PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Laking, Embassy of New Zealand  
Mr. R. M. Miller, Counselor, Embassy of New Zealand  
IO - Assistant Secretary Harlan Cleveland  
IO - Deputy Assistant Secretary Woodruff Wallner  
SPA - Mr. E. C. Ingraham  
UNP - Mr. M. H. Newlin

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Ambassador Laking called at his request for an exchange of views on the future of the Pacific Islands.

Mr. Cleveland said that the United Nations had not taken a great deal of interest in the Pacific territories to date. We had, he thought, a year or two of grace while the UN focused on the white settler territories of Africa. The difficulty in the Pacific was that the (South Pacific Commission) looked like an archaic arrangement. In the present international political climate, the SPC appeared to be a cartel of the metropolitan powers. Unless the indigenous population was given a greater role, the South Pacific Commission would sooner or later attract unfavorable attention.

Ambassador Laking said that

Mr. Cleveland interjected that the islands in our Trust Territory were of strategic use, particularly with respect to our outer space program, and that over the next few years their importance to us might actually increase.

/Ambassador Laking

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Ambassador Laking said that,

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Mr. Cleveland said that we had been trying to figure out how to relate our Trust Territory to international political developments. Our tentative conclusion, after an examination of the remaining bits and pieces of the dependent territories system, was that there probably was no more sensible destiny than some kind of free association with the metropolitan powers. At present, the world community generally recognized only two categories: dependent and independent states. It was important that some formula be found which fitted the individual situations facing us.

Ambassador Laking

Mr. Cleveland recalled that the Secretary had told the Ambassador that the United States was taking a new look at the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Traditionally, we had been uncertain as to their destiny, and as a result, certain things — for example, in the field of education — had not been done. We were now embarked on a program to raise the indigenous inhabitants to some reasonable educational standard. We were going to treat them like people, even like Americans. In the Trust Territory an act of self-determination lay ahead in the indefinite future. Looking forward to that time, it was ridiculous to think in terms of a choice between continued dependence and independence. We should give them a choice which would realistically fit their unique situation. In developing this new status, it was important that we not get in each others' way. Ambassador Laking thought that,

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Mr. Cleveland observed that the only other dependent area problems the United States had were with the Virgin Islands. Puerto Rico was a special case and, speaking personally, he did not think that Congress would favor granting Puerto Rico's status to other areas under U.S. administration. In response to Ambassador Laking's question, Mr. Cleveland said that Congress

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would probably not wish to again deny to itself certain privileges which it enjoyed under the Constitution with regard to American territories other than Puerto Rico. Mr. Cleveland said it was hard to imagine that the islands of the Trust Territory could develop a polity and economy of their own.  
Ambassador Laking

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Ambassador Laking thought that

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Mr. Cleveland wondered, if the problem were divided into three parts, if New Zealand had in mind Government-to-Government consultations or consultations within the framework of the South Pacific Commission. Ambassador Laking was

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Mr. Cleveland cited the example of the case of the Caribbean Organization, whose representatives were now indigenous residents of the member territories. If the South Pacific Commission were a frame for action, it would be necessary to move in a similar direction over a period of time.

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Ambassador Laking thought that

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Mr. Cleveland said that if the political destiny of the territories were some form of free association with the metropolitan powers, but short of full independence (that is, a status similar to Puerto Rico's), the main task of an international body in the area would presumably be to promote interchange of technical assistance, trade and public health information among the various entities. He thought the South Pacific Commission would, under these circumstances, develop into something like the CCTA which coordinated technical assistance in Africa.  
Ambassador Laking cited

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Mr. Cleveland thought that this should be done in a way which flowed from that assumption rather than from no assumption, which was the present case. B1, A3

Mr. Cleveland inquired if, apart from Fiji, there was any other candidate for independence in the area. Ambassador Laking thought that while there was B1, A3

Mr. Cleveland thought it would be useful to develop and get acceptance of the concept of free association with a metropolitan power. If a territory were to opt for such status rather than independence, it should be recognized that it was emerging from the category of dependent territory. In the case of Puerto Rico, we were able to have the United Nations recognize that it was no longer a non-self-governing territory.

Ambassador Laking cited B1, A3

Ambassador Laking invited Secretary Udall and Mr. Cleveland to visit Western Samoa during their trip to the South Pacific Conference in July. Mr. Cleveland said that he would pass the invitation on to Secretary Udall and that, if the schedule of budget hearings permitted him to make the trip, he would like to visit Western Samoa.

Turning to the question of the election of a new Secretary-General of the South Pacific Commission, Mr. Cleveland inquired if New Zealand supported Australia's candidate, Mr. Forsyth. Ambassador Laking said that B1, A3  
Mr. Cleveland said that he had been very favorably impressed with Mr. Seddon, the number two man in the SPC Secretariat. Ambassador Laking confirmed that B1, A3

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