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7-22-65

TO : S/P - Mr. Rostow
FROM : S/P - Ernest K. Lindley
SUBJECT : Future of the American and American-administered
islands in the Pacific.

The speech made, without warning, yesterday by Senator Fong and promptly supported by Senator Gruening and Yarborough seems to me to offer a golden opportunity to yank the problem of the Future of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (and Guam and Samoa) out of the doldrums in which it has been floating around for three years.

The essential immediate step, as I see it, is to get the Secretary to urge the President to choose a suitable person, to be attached to the White House staff, probably as a Special Assistant to the President, to give full time to this problem: not only to get agreement within the government on a plan but then to see it through. Three years of experience have demonstrated that it is not feasible to get fast forward movement on a comprehensive plan under the Interior Department, which has the civil authority for administering the territory. And the highly possessive House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs and the appropriations subcommittees will not permit State to take over the responsibility. The Defense Department also has a lively interest in the matter, and HEW too gets into the act through various welfare programs for the islands.

The only way to break out of the doldrums is to fix the responsibility in the White House under one man -- some such person as Carlton Skinner / who as Governor of Guam, managed the transition there and is now senior U.S.

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member of the South Pacific Commission. (I don't know that he could leave his private affairs to give full time to this but he should be consulted on the choice of man.)

The Administration must react in some way to the Fong speech. His specific proposal, in the judgment of State's experts on the areas, would not meet with the approval of the people of Guam and the Mariannas. But it is important not to react negatively to a proposal which offers the opportunity to set things in motion -- and which may make them move on even if the Administration were to try to hold them back.

I proposed this morning to Dave Cuthell, Director of the Office of Southwest Pacific Affairs, that FE and IO and S/P join in recommending to the Secretary that he urge the President to move immediately -- indicating to Fong and others interested that he intends to choose a man, to be attached to the W.H. staff, to devote full time to this problem, then of course finding the man.

Cuthell responded favorably. He brought in a representative of IO, which is still revising a paper on the future of these islands. The IO representative was hesitant. But I said it was necessary to have agreement on a final Departmental position on plans for the island -- that the Department's detailed recommendations could come along later. The upshot was that IO will consider the proposal. I think the response is likely to be favorable because IO too is weary of the bureaucratic-Congressional stalemate.

I also talked with Colonel Evans, who has been handling the problem for G/PM. His response was emphatically favorable -- let's seize this opportunity.

I hope you approve. I moved somewhat further than I intended to go without consulting you. But the responses I got seemed to indicate something close to a departmental consensus at the "working level" that this is the time to push for a break-through.

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