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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/HR

REVIEWED BY B. H. BARRAS DATE 3/25/67

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MEMORANDUM TO: The Secretary  
The Under Secretary

THROUGH: S/S

FROM: IO - Joseph J. Sisco

SUBJECT: Developments Concerning the Trust Territory  
of the Pacific Islands: INFORMATION  
MEMORANDUM

As you know, we have been seeking to clear within the Government a paper looking toward the formulation of a new policy covering the TTPI and the three United States non-self-governing territories designed to ensure their continued association with the United States under conditions providing them with a full measure of self-government and removing them effectively from international scrutiny. We suggested the appointment of a high level Special Assistant to the President who would have responsibility for developing such a program with the assistance of Interior, State and Defense and, through continuing consultation at all stages, with the cooperation of the Congress. Defense, including the JCS, has already concurred in our draft paper.

On January 19 I met with Under Secretary Carver of Interior to discuss the problem. I found substantial resistance to the idea of any change other than--possibly--to move the TTPI to the status of a non-self-governing territory. I also found strong opposition to the idea that a special White House representative should be named to develop and execute a coordinated program covering all the U.S. territories.

Briefly, Interior's opposition, as explained by Under Secretary Carver, rests upon the following views:

- (1) The present situation is satisfactory, and there is no real pressure for change in status;

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(2) in the Trust Territory it is recognized that eventually a plebiscite is required and in the meantime major efforts to improve educational, medical and economic conditions are in train;

(3) there can be no advancement in the political status of the Trust Territory which would "leapfrog" it ahead of our other territories;

(4) there is no prospect of inducing the Congress--specifically the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs--to act affirmatively on any proposal to give the three U.S. territories or the TTPI real self-government, and indeed any Executive Branch initiative in this area would be resented as an invasion of Congressional prerogatives under Article IV of the Constitution;

(5) even if Congress were disposed to grant more self-government there is no chance of it going far enough to meet UN requirement, thus ending international scrutiny and our reporting responsibility which so far as the three U.S. territories was a mistake in the first place.

To these points Interior adds a judgment that we can rely on the inhabitants to continue to look only to the U.S. and to remain satisfied with virtually their present, admittedly inferior status so that there is no question of the territories' continued availability for strategic needs. In sum, the problem doesn't now exist, and to the extent it may become a future problem, Interior has matters well in hand.

I pointed out to Mr. Carver that in our view U.S. national interests required the continued association of the territories with the United States and that in the political ferment of today's world it was only prudent to anticipate that the inhabitants of these areas would become increasingly dissatisfied if their legitimate aspirations for greater self-government were

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frustrated. With other major powers moving steadily to free themselves of their colonial areas the United States could not afford a policy of stagnation.

In the Trust Territory we had undertaken an international obligation to give the inhabitants self-government or independence. We had been reporting to the United Nations on our non-self-governing territories in accordance with the obligations in Chapter XI of the Charter. We now believed it was time to take a major step forward by initiating a program which would effectively remove all our territories, including the TTPI, from international scrutiny and bring them into close association with the United States, perhaps in some kind of perfected commonwealth status along the lines of the arrangements for Puerto Rico. We thought such a program could most effectively be developed by a high-level Special Assistant to the President.

I mentioned Ambassador Anderson's recent trip to the Trust Territory and her conviction that the growing political consciousness of the people in that area required us to promote their political advancement.

In the course of my remarks I adverted to the fact that the TTPI was unfortunately a politically and economically backward area for which we would come in for increasingly damaging criticism from the Afro-Asians and the Soviets. I mentioned also that criticism of the United States in the United Nations for our failure to make progress on political rights or economic development in an area under our tutelage was particularly discreditable at a time when we were actively promoting the concept of the "Great Society" and seeking to strengthen our influence in the developing areas of the world. The power situation in the Pacific in the face of Chinese Communist aggressiveness was also crucial and we could not afford to neglect this vital area as an important part of our commitment to Pacific security.

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While Under Secretary Carver listened to these arguments, he discounted all of them, primarily on the ground that they would not move the Congress.

Despite Interior's position I continue to believe that the points which I made to Mr. Carver must determine the direction of our own policy in the American territories. We are revising our paper and suggesting some alternative possibilities which may help overcome Interior's objections. Even if Interior maintains its opposition, we should still be able to move ahead. I have in mind in this connection the commitment in the 1966 State of the Union message to the principle of the "support of national independence -- the right of each people to govern themselves--and to shape their own institutions" and President Johnson's statement that "we follow this principle by encouraging the end of colonial rule."

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