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March 21, 1968

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TO : The Under Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM : IO - Joseph J. Sisco
SUBJECT: Congressional Reaction to TTPI Status Commission - INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

Because of your direct involvement in the pending legislation for establishment of a Status Commission for the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI), I think you should be aware of the situation I found during my appearance last week before the Insular Subcommittee of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. The executive hearings were held to permit those members who recently visited Micronesia to report and representatives of State, Defense, and Interior to comment on the Subcommittee findings. With hardly an exception the reports were extraordinarily critical of our administration of the Territory, particularly in the economic and educational fields. Several stressed that the U.S. could not afford such a poor performance and at the same time expect satisfactory political evolution in the Territory.

The predominating view in the Subcommittee was that the people of the TTPI did not feel ready--and, in fact, were not ready--to make an intelligent choice regarding the Territory's future. There was also a pronounced concern that we should not insist on maintaining Micronesia as an entity since it distorted more natural political and economic alignments in the area. Much of the political discussion was marked by a degree of contradiction in the views of Congressmen who argued that the Administration was guilty of dragging its feet while rushing Micronesia toward a goal for which it was not ready. Subcommittee Chairman Carey characterized

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the Committee's general feeling by saying: "The Micronesians don't know what the future holds for them, nor does the Congress know what the Executive Branch has in mind for the TTPI."

Little favorable was said about the Administration's proposal for a Status Commission. Several members asserted that arrangements could be made more quickly through a relatively informal process of Executive-Legislative consultation concentrated in the Interior Committee. Chairman Aspinall was candid enough to comment that the Status Commission would be controlled by the Executive Branch and that Congressional members of the Status Commission would be drawn from Committees other than his own even though only his Committee had both the expertise and competence.

Although Assistant Secretary Anderson of Interior was not asked to testify, Interior's administration was subjected to a blistering attack. Comments about the Peace Corps, while generally favorable, reflected a Congressional concern for better orientation of the volunteers. Defense was subjected to severe criticism. Deputy Assistant Secretary Steadman was regrettably uninformed on most points of interest to the Committee, including future defense requirements in the TTPI, its strategic significance, apparent slum conditions created as a result of military acquisitions, and existing and apparently discriminatory defense policies which several Committee members attacked.

I began my own testimony with a statement of our broad objective of permitting the Micronesians to exercise their right of self-determination in such a way as to remove the Territory from further UN surveillance and to enable us in our national interest to arrange a permanent association of the TTPI with the United States. I indicated that the pending resolution was intended to provide a mechanism through which all executive agencies involved, the Congress and the people of Micronesia could work together to achieve

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this objective. In the ensuing questioning I believe I succeeded in convincing the Committee members that the State Department not only understood the strategic factors involved but had also been very active in designing a program which would achieve sovereignty over the Territory. I think I also succeeded in dispelling any lingering concern that we might be unduly preoccupied with adverse reactions in the UN to our expected course of action while simultaneously making it clear that there were certain minimum criteria which we would have to meet before we could reasonably expect to terminate the Trusteeship.

Some points to which I had to return time and time again were:

(a) Undue delay in settling the TTPI's political status would run the risk of fostering conditions which could be exploited by hostile elements to jeopardize our defense interests;

(b) The UN Charter and the Trusteeship Agreement necessitated that we offer the Micronesians a choice of at least self-government or independence;

(c) A non-self-governing territorial status would not be consistent with our international obligations or UN practice but we would have considerable latitude in devising satisfactory arrangements for the TTPI;

(d) We would have to maintain the entity of Micronesia up to the point of self-determination, though not thereafter;

(e) Our interest in a Status Commission was primarily as a means of insuring cooperation between the Executive Branch and Congress, but we are prepared to consider other means to achieve this.

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The reaction to my testimony seemed favorable in the sense that Subcommittee members realized the State Department does not have horns and has a major role to play. Regrettably, however, I also conclude that getting the Interior Committees to cooperate in our program is going to be tough, calling for a great deal of missionary work. I plan to speak individually with each member of the Subcommittee, and I think the same process is going to have to be repeated on the Senate side. Moreover, I think you and Secretary Udall will have to work on the Committee Chairmen.

Although the present mood of the Interior Subcommittee is unpromising, I still see no better way than the Status Commission to get at the intricate problem of developing and implementing a satisfactory political program which will enjoy Congressional support. We may, of course, have to forsake the Commission idea in favor of something less satisfactory, but I think it is worth a substantial effort on our part to bring it about. In any case, we should try to develop the arguments that time is not on our side in this matter and that a Status Commission is best suited to insure Executive and Legislative Branch cooperation in the program we must offer the TTPI.

I will have some concrete recommendations for you at an early date after I have consulted Interior.

cc: H - Mr. Briggs

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