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The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

Problem

The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) is administered by the United States under a Trusteeship Agreement with the United Nations Security Council, approved by the President on July 18, 1947, pursuant to authority granted by a joint resolution of the Congress. The terms of this unique "strategic trust" give the United States full authority over the Territory, including the right to establish military facilities. However, the United States does not have sovereignty over the TTPI, as it does in the case of the non-self-governing territories of Guam, the Virgin Islands, and American Samoa. Moreover, the agreement specifically commits the US to promote the development of the Territory to "self-government or independence."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff have determined that they consider it essential for strategic reasons that the Territory be associated with the United States on a permanent basis. The Administration has decided that the only way to reconcile our explicit international commitment to promote the Territory's

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self-government or independence with our strategic requirements is to undertake a prompt program of self-government and self-determination by which the people of the Territory will choose association with the United States and permit termination of the Trusteeship Agreement. The sooner the Micronesians can be given an opportunity for self-determination, the more certain we can be that we will get the answer which will best protect our strategic interests. President Johnson in August 1967 proposed the establishment of a 17-member commission with Congressional representation to study and make recommendations on the future status of the Territory, looking toward a plebiscite not later than June 1972.

Apart from prospects for this legislation, there is already in motion a chain of events which make it essential that we continue to address urgent attention to this problem. Defense is developing plans for greatly expanded facilities in the TTPI for use in the event of withdrawals from Okinawa and elsewhere in the Far East. The Micronesians have established their own status commission and are apparently determined to pursue the question of their political future. They are disappointed with both the failure of the US Congress to act on the

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Administration's proposal and the quality and pace of development programs in the Territory. Finally, there is increasing international pressure in the UN for the TTPI, as one of the remaining two territories (the Trust Territory of New Guinea is administered by Australia), to be given the right of self-determination.

There are two distinct but not separate aspects of policy which need to be addressed: (a) substantial improvement in US administration of the Territory so as to help insure a favorable outcome in a plebiscite; and (b) the mechanics of accomplishing the objective of extending US sovereignty over the Territory. Some progress has been made on each. However, both our administration and our failure to resolve the Territory's political future continue to be strongly criticized by the Micronesians, the US Congress, and the UN.

Improvement of Administration

Authorizations for expenditures have increased from \$7.5 million in 1961 to \$50 million for fiscal years 1970 and 1971. However, the Territory continues to be plagued by shortages of funds, compounded by inadequate administration and the unsettled status of the Territory. Development plans abound but practical results are few.

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Within the Executive Branch responsibility for the Territory is divided. The Department of States is responsible for the international aspects of the Trusteeship Agreement and must defend US administration in the United Nations while civil administration of the Territory is the responsibility of the Department of the Interior, which in turn administers the Territory through a High Commissioner appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. Administration has sometimes been made more difficult by the handling of certain Defense activities resulting in the creation of conditions and attitudes in the Territory inconsistent with overall US objectives. Finally, the Congress, while critical of administration, has not made funds available in a manner which would allow concrete and practical long-term planning.

Mechanics of Accomplishing Objectives

With regard to the future status of the TTPI, the Senate acted favorably on the Administration's proposal for a joint Commission and early plebiscite, although the time of the latter was changed from 1972 to "as soon as possible." However, the House Subcommittee on Territories of the Interior Committee prevented House action on the proposed legislation. While

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recognizing the need to extend American sovereignty to the Territory, the Subcommittee is inclined to downgrade our international obligations. It appears reluctant to extend to the TTPI in the near future the degree of self-government necessary to terminate the Trusteeship Agreement. The Subcommittee believes that a new status for the Territory can best be worked out by informal consultations between the House Interior Committee and the Executive Branch. Such a procedure would not achieve our objectives.

Alternatives

Although the Administration's proposal seems to be the best means of engaging Congress and harmonizing the diverse views within the legislative and executive branches on the future of the Trust Territory, in light of the attitude of the House Subcommittee, it has been necessary to explore other means to move ahead on development programs in the Territory and on a determination of the Territory's future political status. The options are:

(a) Some kind of status commission which does not include Congressional participation and therefore runs the risk that its recommendations will not be adequately supported by the Congress.

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(b) The development of status proposals through informal consultations between the Executive Branch and the Congress, an approach which would maximize the capacity of certain elements in the Congress to argue for short-cut features which would not permit us to meet our international legal obligations under the Trusteeship Agreement.

(c) Assignment to a single individual of the responsibility for overseeing both improved administration and the development of a future political status. An individual may be the most practical substitute for a joint commission. Inherent in this alternative is the choice of a prominent individual with sufficient authority in terms of his personal standing with the President to coordinate diverse views within the Executive Branch and to conduct effective consultations with the Congress.

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