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Memorandum of Conversation

Participants: Senator Olympio Borja (Marianas Islands, Territorial Party),
Vice President of the Senate, Congress of Micronesia

John C. Dorrance, Political Advisor

Date and Place: November 5, 1970, Senator Borja's Office, Saipan

Subject: Congress of Micronesia Elections and Future Political Status

Background: I called on Senator Borja to pay my respects, explain my role in the TTPI, and to elicit information on the Senator's views on future political status. Immediately on my arrival Borja launched into a harangue about how he and all other Chamorros in the Marianas "loved" America and "Would die for America." In most explicit terms he damned those Micronesian Congressmen seeking "free association or independence" as being both unrealistic and ungrateful. He reserved special venom for the Palauans. He emphasized that the Marianas sought permanent association with the U.S., "not a marriage of convenience with divorce in mind." After calming down a bit he made the following more specific points on future status, and on the November 3 Congress of Micronesian elections.

Elections: Borja noted that he had not been up for re-election, and said that he was grateful this was the case. Although he is a leading member (and former President) of the Territorial Party, he could not support that party's endorsement of "free association". He has openly endorsed Commonwealth status with a few reservations. He blamed the defeat of all four of his party's candidates on Senator Frank Palacios' emotional defense of free association and attacks on Commonwealth status. Beyond this, he believed that his party's support of the income tax legislation adopted by the last Congress had done damage. Further, he felt that delays in enacting the "single pay scheme" for Micronesian Government employees had hurt all incumbent candidates, especially in the Marianas where a very high proportion of voters is on the government's payroll.

Commenting on the four Popular Party candidates elected to Congress, Borja said that "you can depend on all of them to support the Commonwealth concept."

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Reintegration with Guam: Asked whether "reintegration" had been a major issue in the election campaign, he said that this issue is "dead" for the time being because of Guam's rejection of such a move in the most recent referendum on the matter. However, he added, it could come alive should Guam ever change its mind. He said he was personally opposed to reintegration because the Marianas would be treated like a "poor relative" by Guam, and would have inadequate legislative representation to protect their interests.

Future Political Status and the Land Issue: Borja made the following rather random comments and points on future status.

1) His main objections to the "four non-negotiable principles" on status which had been adopted by the outgoing Congress, are (a) the insistence on the right of unilateral termination, and (b) the suggestion that the TTPI would have the right to associate with any country, including Japan. He feared free association based on these principles would mean the Marianas could be dragged, against their will, into independence, or into association with Japan. He said the Marianas would never agree to any form of association which incorporated the above principles.

2) He favored Commonwealth status with certain reservations. For one thing, he accepts the principle that sovereignty resides in the TTPI, and that the TTPI has the right to determine its own destiny - but this must be a "permanent choice". Some other aspects of Commonwealth status bother him and others in the Marianas. While the Marianas would welcome (and in fact seek) U.S. military installations, he believed the right of eminent domain must "reside here" and not with the U.S. Government. He did not elaborate on his other reservations, although they obviously exist.

3) Asked whether the Marianas could accept the unilateral termination principle, if it were carefully hedged procedurally and provided for individual districts to opt to remain associated with the U.S., he offered an unqualified yes. (I emphasized this was a purely theoretical question and was not based on any policy thinking in Washington.)

4) Returning to the land issue and U.S. military use of lands, he attacked the U.S. Government and particularly the Defense Department for holding on to large areas of land (military retention areas) while having no specific plans for those areas. He said that all lands not

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in use, or for which there are no plans for use in the near future, should be released for homesteading or other economic use. "The military will never have any difficulty getting needed land, but they cannot sit forever on land we need and they don't."

5) While still on the subject of land, he emotionally attacked the present homesteading system which permits "foreigners" to take up much of the best land in the Marianas. ("Foreigners" meant Caroline islanders and particularly Palauans.) He hinted that, should the Marianas ever break away from the TTPI and form a separate territory associated with the U.S., steps would be taken to repatriate all "foreigners".

6) Turning back to status, he remarked that a majority of the outgoing Senate favors independence, but that the House is more cautious. Nevertheless, almost the entire house would favor the concept of "Free association or independence" as against the May Commonwealth proposal. Outside of the Congress, he claimed that "everyone who knows anything about the subject in the Marshalls, Truk, Ponape, and Palau districts, supports either free association or independence." Yap, however, is sitting on the fence. The Yapese leaders, both traditional and elected, probably prefer some form of association with the U.S.; their main interests are not abstract principles, but rather protection of Yapese culture and tradition. They will accept any form of status which achieves that end.

7) Asked whether he had any views on future negotiating tactics on the status question, he suggested that the Micronesian side should move away from abstract, broad principles, and the U.S. side should move away from tabling "all or nothing proposals." Rather, both sides should first focus one by one on specific issues. He added as an aside on the land question, "You might as well forget about eminent domain. You will never get it in any of the other districts, and I am not sure you could get it in the Marianas."

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