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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Conversation with Senator Lazarus Salii and Congressman Ekpap Silk. (Congressman Sasauo Haruo was also present but did not participate in the discussion.)

DATE: ~~June 11, 1971~~

1. Background

a. Toward the close of a social evening at Professor Eugene Mihaly's home on June 10, Senator Salii stated that he and Congressman Silk had prepared a letter which might have some bearing on plans for the continuation of the status talks. In a vague way he referred to the need for a new American offer by the end of July as the basis for any future negotiations. I replied that I thought we should put off until our meeting the following day, discussion of this and other questions. He agreed and I was then given the letter by Congressman Silk.

b. The letter read:

"1. The position of the Congress of Micronesia with respect to the four principles on status remains unchanged. Our Joint Committee has determined that unless there is a change in the United States' position, further negotiations will be fruitless.

"2. In our view, the United States has had ample time to study the Micronesian position. We therefore ask that any new American proposal be given to us prior to the end of July. If we do not receive such a proposal by that time, we shall be forced to assume that Commonwealth remains the position of the United States.

"3. In that event, we shall report to the Congress of Micronesia that Free Association with the United States is not possible and that the only remaining alternative for Micronesia is independence."

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c. The following morning, I read the letter to Secretary Loesch, John Holdridge and Jack Armitage. An IAG meeting was called and later in the morning, I was given the guidance that I had requested in the form of eight suggested points to make in response to the letter.

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2. I opened the conversation that afternoon with some general background remarks covering my appreciation for the opportunity to meet with them in advance of my familiarization trip to the TTPI, the importance of the task before us for the long-term welfare of the people of Micronesia, the sincere intent on the part of the U. S. Government to reach an amicable solution of the status question which would serve our mutual interests, and the spirit and manner in which both sides approached the negotiations was of great importance to the successful outcome of the talks.

3. I went on to say it was for the last-named reason that I was concerned with both the tone and content of the letter which they had given me the previous evening. I said I had given it thought and in my opinion the new approach suggested would not be in the best interests of either party and it was unlikely to lead to fruitful results. I stated that our mutual objective was to seek an amicable solution to the status question and preconditions and deadlines imposed by one side prior to the next round of talks would only complicate the problem.

4. I stated that I was particularly surprised to learn of the statements that Senator Sali had made at the close of the Special Session of the Congress with respect to the submission by the U. S. of a new offer as a condition for further talks. I said that I was frankly confused since I had been lead to believe that the Joint Committee had stated its preference for a more informal approach and this position had indeed been the suggestion put forward by Senator Sali and concurred in by Congressman Silk at our April meeting. I stated further that both Secretary Loesch and I had agreed with their suggested format and I was convinced that it was still the wisest course of action to follow. I specifically said that it would be much more difficult for both sides if the talks were to be locked in to formal, written positions prior to a further exchange of views on particular issues or questions of concern to one or both parties.

5. I continued that I had therefore been proceeding under the assumption that there had been a clear prior agreement on this point, that I planned to visit Micronesia to get a better personal sense of the situation, and that I then intended to return to Washington for further consultations. Later in the summer or early fall it was my hope that we could meet for a round of informal discussion of the most important issues. I stated that I fully expected that this free exchange would include a discussion of their four principles, the Micronesian concept of free association, as well as other issues raised previously or new ones in need of two-way discussion.

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6. I emphasized that the prospects for a better understanding of each others' position could best be served by this kind of informal exchange and questioning back and forth, rather than proceeding on the basis of a "new" proposal or offer by the United States. I said the U. S. did not intend in the next round to lay out a fully defined position and they should not expect same. I said further that I respectfully disagreed with the inference in their letter, that in the absence of a new U. S. written offer by such and such a date further negotiations would be fruitless.

7. I said I could give them assurance that the matter was being given serious consideration by my government; that the U. S. had been reviewing their position as well as its own policy, that such a review took time, and they should not conclude that the U. S. had dragged its feet or intended to do so.

8. I concluded by saying I would very much regret any repercussions that might flow from their letter if its contents were to be made public. I said that in my judgment it was subject to misunderstanding or even deliberate distortion. If it were interpreted as an ultimatum, especially by our Congress, it would have the result of making our task even harder and more complicated. I said I was sure that this was not their intention and I assumed their letter was meant only as a basis for our discussion, and they might wish to consider it in the same light or withdraw it altogether. In any event, I said, I could not but believe that their own best interests would be served by standing by their earlier recommendation and the agreement reached in April.

9. Salii then spoke. He began by saying that indeed I was right in stating that it had been the position of the Congress of Micronesia and the Joint Committee that the next round of talks should begin with an informal exchange of views rather than following the more formal procedure of May 1970. He said further that this had been his own personal position as well as that of Congressman Silk when they met with us in April. He said he still preferred this approach but attitudes had shifted over the last few months in Micronesia and the letter reflected these changes and the views expressed at a special meeting of the Joint Status Committee which was held in May in Truk.

10. He went on to say that the Micronesians wanted to know what the U. S. reaction was to their four principles: did or did we not accept them. If not, they wanted to be told that this was the U. S. position and if this was the case, further negotiations would be impossible.

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11. I agreed that a discussion of their four principles was a legitimate request and that I was sure we would wish to explore them further through an open exchange of views. I said they should be considered a part of the larger question but that it would not be helpful to an ultimate solution to insist on a final answer to such important questions without first giving both sides a chance to explore or explain their meaning and full consequences in open discussion.

12. Salii said he saw the logic of my point and agreed that their four principles could be a subject for further discussion. He then dropped this issue but went on to say that they wanted to know whether the U. S. position was still Commonwealth or were they to assume from remarks made at the Trusteeship Council that the U. S. now accepted their Free Association concept.

13. I said it was my understanding that the U. S. Representatives had made it clear that the U. S. Government had been reviewing the entire question, that they were optimistic that an agreement would be reached, but that the specifics of the final solution would be left up to our negotiations. I said the full texts of the American statements and answers to questions should be referred to but I was sure that the U. S. Representatives did not endorse any one solution over another. What they wished to emphasize was the United States' serious intent to live up to its obligations under the Trusteeship Agreement.

14. Salii pursued this question with me, probing for some indication that the U. S. had abandoned its Commonwealth proposal and if it had not he again said further talks would be to no avail.

15. I said I could appreciate his desire to know in advance if the U. S. was planning to present a wholly new package proposal, but this was not our intent per our April understanding. With respect to the question of whether the U. S. position had changed, all I could say was that the U. S. had been reviewing the entire matter and it now wished an exchange of views on the issues which I was sure were of mutual interest and concern. I said I simply could not agree that further talks would not be fruitful in the absence of a prior indication in writing of what our position was going to be.

16. Salii surprised me by then saying that this was agreeable to him and that a simple indication that the U. S. had restudied its position and now wanted to resume the talks would satisfy their desire.

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17. I replied that this could be met by an exchange of notes following my return from the TTPI and subsequent consultations in Washington. I said that in the same note we could identify those specific issues we wished to raise and questions that we might like to ask them, and in their response they could do likewise. This would give us both time to prepare for the next meeting. I said in conclusion that the important thing was to get on with a free and candid exchange and that we should not let agenda, procedural issues, and arbitrary deadlines interfere with the substantive task at hand.

18. Salii said he appreciated and shared this view and he thought we had reached an understanding. He went on to say their letter was not meant to be an ultimatum, that it would not be made public, but that he and Congressman Silk might be asked to make a statement on the outcome of our talks since people knew they were meeting with me.

19. I said I thought it would be useful then if I were to attempt a summary of our understandings. I did so and agreement was confirmed on the following points:

- (1) The next round of talks would proceed along the lines of our April understanding. They would be informal in nature and designed to promote a free exchange of views on key issues.
- (2) In advance of the next scheduled talks there would be an exchange of notes indicating the issues and questions that both sides wished to discuss.
- (3) The talks would be held in one of the Hawaiian Islands other than Oahu per their earlier stated preference for such a site.
- (4) The exchange of views would be private and confidential.
- (5) The dates would probably be in early September.

20. Concluding observations:

- (1) Salii did all of the talking. He seemed somewhat ill at ease and uncomfortable as if the letter did not really represent his own views. He left no doubt, however, that their position had hardened and they wanted action. He inferred that the Joint Committee wanted to make a progress report to the January 1972 meeting of the Micronesian Congress and that the mood of the Congress would be ugly if some perceptible forward movement on the status question had not been made by that time.

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- (2) Silk listened intently but said very little, occasionally echoing some remark made by Salii or uttering agreement with something I had said. By the expression on his face, the frequent nodding of his head, I was given the impression that he was sympathetic to the position I was taking. He too seemed somewhat ill at ease during the discussion on the reversal of their position. Like Salii, he indicated full agreement with my summary of our understandings.
- (3) Haruo. He said not one word but he took it all in and his presence was felt. As a member of the "Independence Coalition", I had the impression that he was there to keep a close eye on Salii and Silk and I am certain that he will be making a separate report to his own colleagues.
- (4) In general, it was a tension free two and a half hours of fairly open and hopefully candid expression of views on their part. We may have skirted some points but verbal agreement at least was reached on the most important issues. If they stick to their word, we can assume that we are now back on the April track.

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