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United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

12/1/72

Memorandum

To: NSC Under Secretaries Committee  
Attention: Mr. Feldman, Room 7312 New State

From: Assistant Secretary - Public Land Management  
Department of the Interior

Subject: Micronesian Status Negotiations

We have carefully reviewed Ambassador Williams' memorandum dated November 22, 1972, to the Chairman of the NSC Under Secretaries Committee on the subject of the Micronesian Status Negotiations. This memorandum was in response to Dr. Kissinger's November 1, 1972 request for a reassessment of the situation and a presentation and analysis of the options available to the USG at this time.

In general, we found that the November 22, 1972 memorandum to the USC did not present the full range of options available at this time to the USG. Rather, it gave inordinate attention to immediate tactical questions within Ambassador Williams' existing mandate, such as, first, whether to seek a seventh round of discussions with the Micronesians in December in hope of completing the Compact; second, how to field queries on the U. S. position on independence in such December meetings; and third, whether to send a land survey team to Palau. Moreover, we found the answers to these questions to be generally vague and non-substantive; subsequent actions will apparently be based on subjective criteria which are not made clear in the memorandum. For these reasons, we do not believe the paper presents sufficient substantive consideration of the courses of action available to the USG at this time to serve as the basis for a decision by the Under Secretaries Committee or the White House.

We are concerned in particular by the lack of serious consideration given to the important question of whether

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we should continue to deal solely with the Congress of Micronesia, or whether it would be preferable to bypass the Congress and seek some other solution not involving a joint negotiating approach. Indeed, the need for such consideration on our part was the principal rationale given by Ambassador Williams at Barbers Point for not going ahead with the drafting of the Compact at that time. There has, to our knowledge, been little in the way of analysis of alternative approaches made in the two months since the Barbers Point talks, despite the fact that the November 22 memorandum recommends resumption of negotiations with the Congress of Micronesia. Indeed, the only discussion of this important issue in the November 22 paper follows the conclusion stated in paragraph (9) on page 6 that we should "continue the joint approach unless it becomes clear that nothing further can be gained thereby."

[REDACTED]

We believe that this critical issue should be considered in much greater depth, for the very reasons given by Ambassador Williams at Barbers Point.

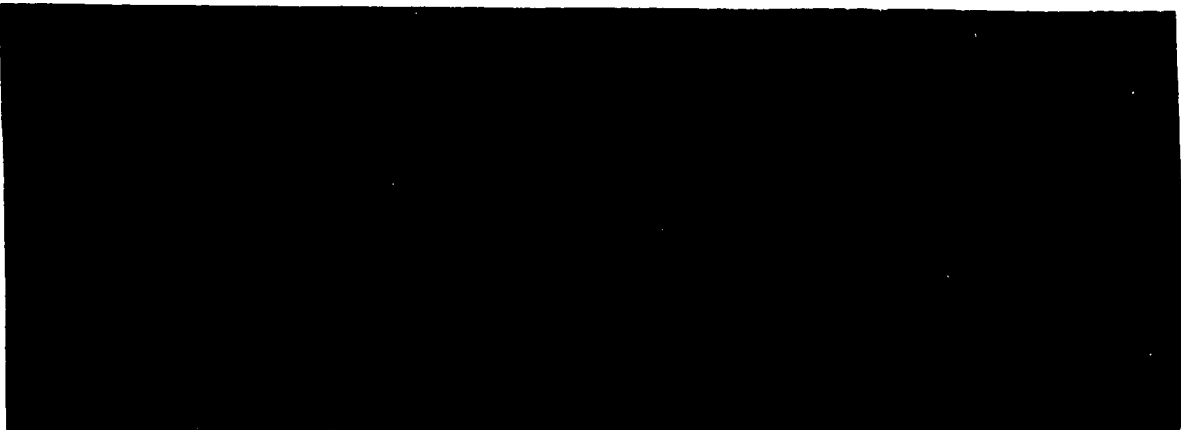
The foregoing comments have dealt with what we consider to be serious substantive omissions from the November 22 memorandum. We wish now to turn to the two principal areas in which we disagree with the positions taken by that document.

Our first area of concern is with the general position taken on the resumption of talks in December. Although we consider this a tactical matter, as noted before, it comprises most of the paper and we are compelled to comment. We do so even though we believe the subject to be largely academic at this point, due to the passage of time.

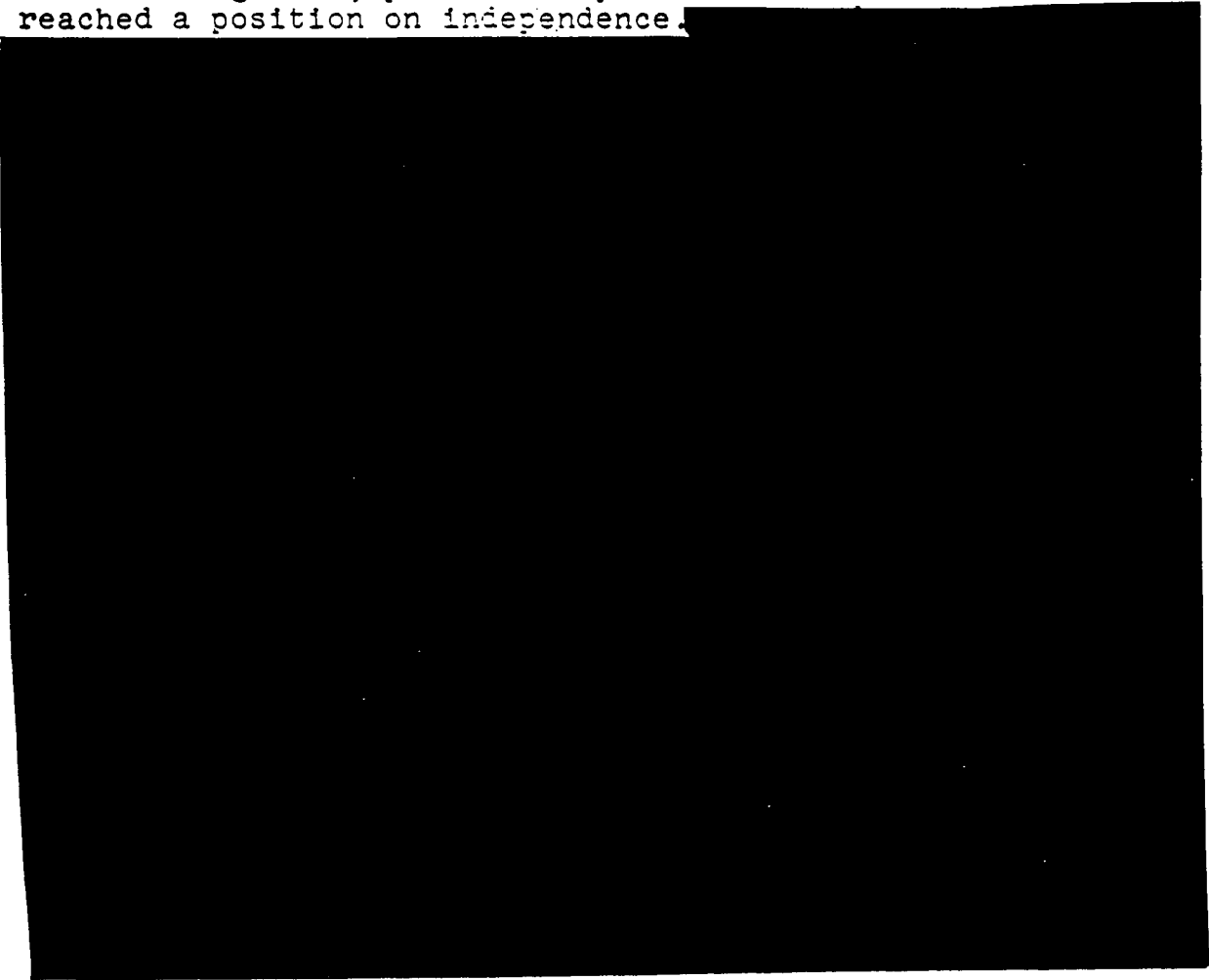
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Our second area of great concern is the handling of the independence question in future talks with the Micronesian Delegation, particularly if the USG has not then reached a position on independence.



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We believe that it is important in any event to get approval of an IAG position on independence from the White House as soon as is realistically possible. From a tactical standpoint, an offer of unconditional independence would greatly benefit our negotiations on free association by providing the stark contrast we all desire.

[REDACTED]

While we cannot make any recommendations at this point without the benefit of an options paper on independence, we think this approach deserves serious study, as does an independence option with conditions attached. Further, there must be careful study of the strategy for presenting an independence option to the Micronesian delegation.

There is another area in which further study is necessary. We believe there is substantial question as to whether the Congress of Micronesia is institutionally or politically capable at this time or in the near future of endorsing an actual, concrete political status of any sort, be it free association or independence. The members of Congress have favored status alternatives in abstract, but have carefully avoided any commitment to the Compact, for example. We believe there is a basic inability to "bite the bullet" which will continue to make agreement impossible and back the Congress into the more extreme position of independence, despite our belief that there is substantial public sentiment against this alternative.

As a result, at the same time as the independence position is being developed, we believe serious consideration should be given during the next few months to ways in which we can effectively bypass the Congress and get a favorable expression of public opinion, which might indeed help the Congress make up its mind. We believe this is more feasible than before by reason of the equivocal position taken by the Congress in its adoption of SJR 117; the United States has the right now more than ever to ask the people of Micronesia what they want. Possible courses of action which should be considered include the holding of a territory-wide informal straw ballot on the various abstract alternatives, and the holding of a more formal and serious plebiscite based upon a choice of alternatives to be structured and publicized by the United States

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Government. Other similar courses of action should likewise be considered for possible implementation beginning next spring.

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