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United States Department of the Interior

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

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MEMCON - 18 DECEMBER 1972 - OKURA HOTEL FOR LUNCHEON

Participants:

Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams
Senator Lazarus Salii
Representative Timothy Olkeriil
Captain William J. Crowe, Jr.

1. When Senator Salii appeared he was accompanied by Representative Olkeriil and announced that they would both be going to Palau in the morning.
2. The conversation started out in a polite but formal vein and turned very quickly into an extremely frank discourse on Palauan politics. Both Salii and Olkeriil stressed that land was a delicate subject in Palau and that the recent campaign had generated some rather severe distortions regarding the U.S. land requirements. The bulk of the damage was done by Senator Salii's opponent, John Ngiraked and they referred to him as an outright liar. With unusual candor Olkeriil said that Lazarus did not have the rank or family connections of Ngiraked. According to him Salii was rather low on the hierarchical scale and this made it difficult to counter his opponent's charges or to discredit him. Despite this rather frank declaration made in front of Salii it was still crystal clear that Olkeriil is a strong supporter of Salii's and that he trusts Salii. He was just explaining that in the strange world of Palauan politics even though Salii had won he was not in complete control of the situation and that his opponent was still continuing to stalk Salii.
3. Olkeriil's initial reaction to the idea of Ambassador Williams' visit appeared to be negative. He said that the people of Palau won't believe you. They think that you and Salii have cooked up a deal and in his opinion it was unlikely that Ambassador Williams' word would be accepted. However, the more the situation was discussed the more Olkeriil shifted his thinking. In essence they both felt that nothing could change the mind of the die-hard anti-Americans and the pro-Ngiraked faction. Nevertheless, they acknowledged that there is a large group of people who do not have loyalties to either side but have been misled by some of the exaggerations and are genuinely concerned about U.S. plans. This group they both felt, could be influenced by the Ambassador's visit and that this consideration alone justified the visit.
4. This led to a short discussion of the effectiveness of the media. Both Salii and Olkeriil said that Uludong and that group were recognized for what they were and enjoyed little success in shaping opinion within Palau. If the people read the local newspaper, they were not very impressed. On the other hand articles written by outsiders were accepted as gospel. Roger Gale's speech on U.S. military plans for Palau was

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cited as an example. For some reason, the local people endow outsiders with unusual perceptiveness and automatically lend an ear. This is an interesting point with important implications for our status effort.

5. The Ambassador asked Salii what he should say or do in Palau in order to realize the most impact. He went on to suggest some lines of argument. Olkeriil mentioned that in the meeting discussing the land declaration, the Mayor of Koror (who subsequently signed) had said that if giving the U.S. 40 acres in Malakal would lead to the return of the public land in Koror to the people he would not sign the declaration. In other words, he would be willing to strike a bargain - return the public land and they would agree to U.S. military land needs. A long discussion followed of the problems connected with land disputes and the failure of the government to return these public lands. It was generally acknowledged that (a) this was the number one land problem in Palau and (b) if this problem was resolved the U.S. could probably get its military land. They both said that the Ambassador would hear a great deal about it during his visit. The clear implication from Olkeriil was that this was an area where the U.S. had some leverage and that a deal was possible. This theme kept recurring throughout the three hour conversation.

6. When Ambassador Williams discussed the strategic rationale as a justification for a U.S. presence and a comparison with the Japanese, Salii quickly said that such talk would not impress Palauans. Right or wrong they felt that military forces either for offensive or defensive purposes were all the same. Palauans just don't make fine ethical distinctions where the military is concerned. This led to some discussion as to where this attitude arose. Recent anti-U.S. propaganda has had some influence and also some U.S. troops in Koror after the islands were taken had destroyed a few installations which caused some bitterness in Koror. But these were minor influences compared to Palauan experience with the Japanese military. Both Salii and Olkeriil agreed that the suspicion of the military was a holdover from that period and that the people generalized their experience to apply to all military. Salii said several times that many (not all) Palauans genuinely were frightened by the military and of the prospects of once again having military bases on Palau.

7. When the traditional chiefs were mentioned, Olkeriil said flatly that the Reklai was powerless. According to Olkeriil, the Reklai now leans very heavily on Termeteet and Ngiraked and is too feeble to act alone in a resolute manner. In any event, they did not put much stock in the Reklai's independent influence on Palauan affairs. If he and his advisors are all in agreement on a matter then he can still be an influential force.

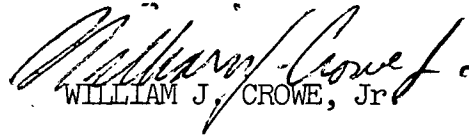
8. Salii and Olkeriil agreed that the Ambassador should see a cross section of leaders in Palau and offered to make the necessary arrangements. They suggested the Executive Council of the District Legislature as number one priority. The Ambassador expressed a desire to see Chief Reklai and the acting Ibedul. Salii didn't know whether this was possible but would attempt to arrange it. They indicated that the new Ibedul had not been definitely confirmed. It is customary after the family makes a choice for the village elders then to approve or disapprove. They said that many

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thought the young man (in the U.S. Army) chosen by the Ibedul's family was a little too immature and that also he might not be back to Palau for a number of years (He has talked about going to college after leaving the Army). In any event, the issue seems to be in doubt and Mr. Yano, the acting Ibedul, is still hopeful of being made permanent Ibedul.

9. The entire evening was forthright, friendly and relaxed. I have never participated in a conversation with Micronesians where touchy intra-Micronesian political matters were discussed with such candor.


WILLIAM J. CROWE, Jr.

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