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November 7, 1973

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Discussion of Status with DISTAD Conference, Saipan, November 5, 1973

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ON JUL 10 1985 UNDER
E.O. 12355
BY SP-6 B.K. DOLAN, USN
SPECIAL ASSISTANT

In accordance with the pre-arranged agenda I had an hour's discussion with the DISTAD Conference at TTPI Headquarters on Saipan, Monday afternoon, November 5. Although the session was scheduled for 1:30 p.m., conferees were slow in arriving and two of the DISTADS - Remengesau of Palau and Falcam of Ponape - appeared only after my presentation, but in time for some of the subsequent discussion. (DISTADS De Brum (Marshalls) and Aguigui (Yap) are not attending the conference, being tied up with other business in their districts.) Present during the full session were: DISTAD Sablan (Truk), Deputy DISTAD Gilmar and DISTADREP Ownbey (Marshalls), DISTAD Ada and DISTADREPS Manglona and Chong (Marianas), Acting Deputy DISTAD Hilary (Yap), Kusaie Deputy DISTADREP Nena and District Attorney Pound (Ponape). Pre-bidding at the meeting was High Commissioner Special Assistant for District Affairs Boyd Mackenzie. Present also were Acting High Commissioner Coleman and Special Assistant Dwight Heine, and DOTA representative Harry Brown.

I opened the session with a presentation along the lines in the attached paper prepared for the occasion. Except for the informal remarks indicated I read the full text. This paper traced development in status negotiations since the preceding DISTAD Conference of last May and included rather extensive reference to the latest confirmation of USG support for a constitutional convention, and a full presentation of the USG policy paper on the return of public land to the districts.

When discussion time came the reaction focused exclusively on the public land aspect of the presentation and was uniformly and vocally negative. With Sablan as chief spokesman, the group expressed its strong opposition to the use of any budgeted funds to defray the cost of the prospective land cadaster program. Sablan said Truk must have its airport and its field trip vessels and these in Truk's view were absolute priority. With a second from others, Sablan said district legislators had requested use of funds for such necessary projects and it would be difficult to explain the administrator's inability to take care of such priority requests from the people in order to finance a program in which they were not interested.

In rebuttal, I traced the history of JCFS demand for return of public land to traditional leaders of Palau as prerequisite to continued status negotiations and U.S. insistence that the subject must be considered for all districts. I also observed that as responsible administrators they would surely recognize that governments frequently have to spend money for purposes fundamental to the government's operation but often of less immediate appeal to the people than some other more popular, and admittedly desirable, projects. I said we could only regret that the public land problem had dragged on for so long and that surely time had come for practical steps toward its equitable solution. I stressed that the plan had been developed with the views of the people in the various districts very much in mind, such views having been expressed to the visiting teams from OMNS. I pointed out that the policy provides for an important step towards self-government in Micronesia, and implementation is flexible.

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Quite clearly those present were unimpressed with this argument. DISTAD Ada conspicuously continued to read his newspaper during most of the session. At one point he came out with the remark that presumably the paper referred to all districts except the Marianas. His tone expressed his well known disapproval of Marianas separate negotiations. I explained the situation with respect to those lands currently under negotiation, which pertain to Tinian and to some extent to Saipan, but noted that all fell within the general framework of the plan, although their disposition would await the result of the negotiations. The Acting High Commissioner observed that public lands on Rota were not involved in current negotiations.

Others present commented along following lines: Mr. Gilmar wondered if the COM Joint Budget Committee had been brought in on the planning for the priority use of funds. Mr. Ownbey lamented that he had already had to give up a needed generator on Ebeye and hoped he would not have to lose more. Mr. Pound from Ponape foresaw a "massive influx of surveyors" to accomplish the cadaster program and felt this would have an unfortunate effect. (I remarked that it seemed high time means and personnel should be made available to solve this long existing problem) and that of course steps would need to be taken to facilitate the work of the program in the communities concerned.) Mr. Remengesau remarked with a touch of sarcasm that perhaps the State Department could find the funds for the cadaster program. To this comment I explained the broad U.S. Government interest in the subject and the fact that the policy statement was a USG statement, that administration of the program, as pointed out in the paper, would be the responsibility of the High Commissioner who is, of course, responsible to the Secretary of the Interior.

The TT central administration offered no support for the program. Its spokesmen too focused entirely on the aspect of funding the cadaster program. For example, Mr. Mackenzie spoke for Ponape in the absence of Mr. Falcam and expressed full agreement with the strong reservations of Mr. Sablan and raised the spectre^{of} what he saw as a vital loss of CIP funds. He said of course there would be no complaint if the cadaster program were funded with money over and above the TT budget and its presently contemplated supplemental. Mr. Heine expressed the view that perhaps by attempting to solve this one problem of return of public lands with the accompanying cadaster program, "we would be creating so many other problems that it would mean further delay." Mr. Coleman assured all present that the High Commissioner was fully aware of the problem involving probable loss of CIP projects in order to fund a cadaster program, and said it was clear that the TT administration could go only so far "and then Washington takes over."

I returned for a few minutes to appear at my request before the DISTADS on Tuesday morning, November 6th to let them know that the policy paper and background statement on the return of public land, distributed to them on the preceding day on a restricted basis, were now being released to the press today. I said I would like further to make some specific points in connection with their study of the policy paper:

1. This U.S. administrative policy decision was taken in response to a Micronesian request to the USG, endorsed by the Joint Committee on Future Status, that the U.S. return to local control the public land the U.S. has been holding in the districts in trust for the people.

2. The new policy provides for the return of public land to each district if the people of the district so desire.

3. The text of the U.S. policy statement has been provided to Senator Salii and the JCFS.

4. Within the next few days the implementation of this policy will be discussed in Washington between the Department of the Interior and the High Commissioner and his staff and between Ambassador Williams and the JCFS.

COMMENT: In assessing this general and very strong opposition on the part of the TT Administrators, there are, it seems to me several points to be taken into account.

1. The spoken opposition was directed entirely toward means for funding the land cadaster program and what the DISTADS saw as a consequent loss of the desired CIP projects in their districts. They had not had the opportunity to study the policy paper and the background statement which I distributed to them only at the end of my presentation. I used this timing in order that, hopefully, their attention might be on the presentation rather than ruffling through the pages of the papers during the time it was being given. They seemed, however, to have little interest in the details of the plan or in discussing what the return of the public lands would mean in their districts. They were considering that such return, being a step toward self-government and responsibility for the district legislatures was also a step toward their own demise or denigration of authority.

While Juan Sablan is the most articulate of the DISTADS on almost any subject, it is also to be noted that his district has relatively little public land and has expressed even less interest in its return to the district. But his vigorous lead was followed by the rest, although Yap remained silent.

2. The negative reaction pointed up the general disinterest, if not opposition, of the Trust Territory administrators toward getting on with status negotiations. I think we have to bear in mind that these administrators represent an entrenched group with a strong personal interests in the perpetuation of the present system. (An American resident for 3 years on Truk has remarked with some amusement: "Juan Sablan just loves being King of Truk and isn't about to abdicate.") They personally have everything to lose and nothing to gain by the inauguration of self-government and a future status for Micronesia along the lines which we have envisaged. They showed no interest, whatever, in the part of the presentation which dealt with U.S. support for a constitutional convention.

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I think even their casual attendance at this session which was billed as "Status Discussion" indicates something of their lack of support for the general subject.

It is to be borne in mind that under the decentralization policy the DISTADS have a very wide range of authority. They have a responsibility to supply their outer islands, for example, and are naturally interested in the availability of field trip vessels. Their daily work is directed toward the interests and operational function of their district apparatus, and in a sense the more conscientious and efficient the DISTAD is in his immediate tasks, the less he is interested in the long-term development, represented in the present instance by the policy for the return of public land. Since he sees this policy as a threat to his position, he is even more opposed to the thought of financing the accompanying land cadaster program at the expense of his district's economic development projects.

I believe we have to face up to the fact that as far as U.S. presence and activity in Micronesia is concerned we may be moving down two different streets. If so, this situation would exacerbate the tension between the executive and legislative branches of the TT Government, with the latter ready to exploit any division. Clearly this situation must be resolved urgently if we are to be able to deal in anything like an effective and coordinated manner with the Micronesians.

Enclosure:

Paper on Status presented at DISTAD Conference November 5, 1973

COPIES TO: Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams
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November 7, 1973

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