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OFFICE OF MICRONESIAN STATUS NEGOTIATIONS

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Memorandum of Conversation

Subject: U.S.-Marianas Status Talks

Participants:

- Felipe Q. Atalig            Marianas Congressman
- Antonio S. Borja        Mayor of Tinian
- Harry L. Cruz            Speaker, Tinian Municipal Council
- J.M. Wilson, Jr.        U.S. Deputy Representative

Time and Place: December, 18, 1973, Royal Taga Hotel, Saipan

Towards the close of the Marianas Political Status Commission's reception and dinner in honor of the U.S. delegation I was chatting with Messrs. Ben Manglona and Frank Hocog, Commission delegates from Rota and Guam respectively. Ambassador Williams came up and suggested I move to the other end of the table to talk to Harry Cruz, newly elected speaker of the Tinian Municipal Council, and Mayor Borja. Also aboard was the Mayor's nephew, Congressman Atalig.

(I first met Atalig last May, when I dined with him and his uncle in Guam at Ambassador Williams request to make sure the Mayor did not depart for an extended trip to U.S. bases in East Asian countries without knowing the true nature of U.S. military requirements on Tinian, which had been grossly distorted by the Guam press. I had taken pains subsequently through the U.S. military to make special arrangements for their base visits. Atalig and I met and talked on several occasions since, with and without his uncle. Our relations have always been friendly, but not close. He is not a member of the Marianas Political Status Commission, but was invited to this particular dinner along with a number of other outside guests.)

I made a deliberate effort to engage Speaker Cruz in conversation and to tell him of the progress made during the ongoing Marianas status talks. In particular I made it a point to emphasize the change in the previous U.S. position on Tinian land just announced by Ambassador Williams, wherein the U.S. now said it was no longer asking that every individual land owner sell his land to the U.S. but would be willing to have the owners keep title to their property, except where the land was actually needed for military purposes. In the latter case the displaced landowners would be offered title to comparable land elsewhere, either on Tinian or perhaps on military retention land outside Tinian.

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The speaker appeared pleased with this, but Atalig entered the conversation with a series of derogatory remarks about U.S. intentions, and took the occasion to denounce in uncomplimentary terms the U.S. action last spring asking the TT Administration to hold back homestead permits. I reminded Atalig rather firmly that there has been no cut off as he claimed but a temporary halt while land discussions were going on. Atalig disputed this vocerifously. I went on to emphasize that we had said publicly that outstanding applications could be processed, though no final deeds would be issued. I added that according to our information, supplied by the TT Administration, there were 83 agricultural and 15 village homestead applications outstanding as of the end of April of this year. However, we had been told that only a very few of these applications specified the location of the land desired by the applicants and this made it difficult if not impossible to process the applications.

Atalig again disputed this vehemently saying this was another example of the misinformation the U.S. was spreading. He went on in rather abusive fashion to question U.S. motives in the negotiation and to wonder why anyone wanted to deal with the Americans if all they were doing was to come in and take the land from the people. I reminded Atalig, again firmly, that the U.S. delegation was in these negotiations in Saipan at the invitation of the Marianas people, acting through their District Legislature, who had asked repeatedly to have the Marianas become a member of the American political family. Atalig questioned this and said loudly that he did not want to become a member of that family. I replied that there were certainly some who shared that view, as was their privilege, but unless we had such a common goal in the current discussions we could not possibly hope to reach agreement. I thought therefore that anyone who did not share that goal did not belong in that forum and should get out.

At this point I was advised that Ambassador Williams was preparing to leave and rose to depart, turning away to say good night to the Speaker and the Mayor and leaving Atalig decidedly out of sorts. I left the dinner immediately thereafter without renewing the conversation with Atalig.

The following morning, during our negotiating session with the Marianas Commission, I was advised by Colonel Smith and Mr. de Graffenried of the U.S. delegation that they had run into Atalig shortly after I had left the table the night before and that he was visibly angry, claiming I had told him to move out of his own country. Some while later, they reported, he also made noises about wanting to punch me in the nose and he proposed writing a letter to the Ambassador condemning me. He noted he intended to make this letter public by having it read over the local radio station. Colonel Smith and Mr. de Graffenried attempted to dissuade Atalig from overreacting and attempted to assuage his irritation; both were unsuccessful. The next morning they had been advised that Atalig was still angry and was threatening drastic action. He was reported to have asked the counsel for the Congress of Micronesia to draw up a resolution of censure.

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Immediately after the session I went to see Atalig in his office but was advised he was out and could not be found. I asked the secretary to tell Atalig I was anxious to see him and would appreciate a call. I advised Senator Pangelinan, chairman of the Marianas delegation, of all the foregoing at lunch. He made some uncomplimentary remarks about Atalig and was called to the phone during lunch by a phone call from Speaker Cruz and Mayor Borja who according to Pangelinan relayed special greetings to me and a message that all was under control. Nothing happened further until the attached letter was put in my mailbox at the hotel during the evening. We left the next morning for Guam where I wrote the attached reply and sent it back to Saipan via the High Commissioner for typing and delivery to Atalig. Before it arrived, however, Atalig had already given his letter to the press.

ATTACHMENTS:

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