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FORM 6163-2149

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
ACTION MEMORANDUM

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March 27, 1974

TO: Chairman, NSC Under Secretaries Committee

FROM: EA - Arthur W. Hummel

Micronesia: Need for Further Steps toward Self-Government

Background

From FSO Robert Immerman's excellent report on his observations of our problems in Micronesia (already sent to you, copy at Tab B) and numerous other reports, it is clear that our problems in Micronesia strongly relate to the fact that our administration is more a liability than an asset in terms of its effectiveness. A separate memorandum addresses this problem, and recommends replacement of the High Commissioner as an initial remedial step.

However, the foregoing represents only half the problem and solution (aside from the status negotiations). The other half relates directly to the fact that Micronesia's highly-educated political elite seeks far greater self-government than we have thus far been prepared to concede. The situation is made more difficult by two factors: (a) Micronesia today has the least self-government of any territory in the Pacific, and Micronesia's leaders are well aware of that fact. All other major territories will be independent or fully self-governing by the end of this year. (b) The separation of powers concept which we have installed in Micronesia guarantees "confrontation politics" in the present circumstances where the legislative branch is Micronesian and the executive

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and judicial branches are U.S. controlled. These factors result in an increasingly embittered and alienated Micronesian leadership, and an atmosphere guaranteed to sour the atmosphere surrounding the status negotiations.

In short, we have reached a stage in Micronesia's political development where the issue is not only U. S. administrative competence and effectiveness, but also the right of the Micronesians to greater participation in their own government. The argument sometimes advanced that Micronesia is not ready for self-government does not bear close examination. The level of education of Micronesia's leadership, and the availability of Micronesians trained and experienced in government administration, assure that these islands are probably better prepared to govern themselves than is a large proportion of UN member states. The Micronesians already do effectively administer Micronesia at the district level--and perform better than the top-heavy territorial administration headed by a U.S. High Commissioner.

Arguments for Transitional Change

The major advantages, in our view, of early introduction of steps toward self-government are as follows:

-- With the responsibilities of a major degree of self-government the Micronesians will increasingly focus on their own internal problems and relationships, and start taking the decisions that are necessary to resolution of their future status.

-- Prompt but paced moves to self-government will assure an orderly transition to termination of the trusteeship. At the present rate of change termination of the trusteeship is likely to be accompanied by an abrupt and chaotic transfer of authority and responsibility.

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-- To the extent that the governance of purely Micronesian affairs is transferred to Micronesians, the friction points between the U.S. and Micronesia which now negatively affect Micronesian attitudes and the status negotiations will largely disappear. The present adversary relationship might be replaced by something more akin to a healthy working partnership.

-- A major degree of self-government, and the responsibilities and problems that go with that status, could be one of the most effective arguments in Micronesia (at least among the political elite) of the continuing utility of association with the U.S., and for the view that such association is more beneficial than onerous. To paraphrase Trudeau, the flea will learn to live with the elephant.

Implementation Problems

It already is U.S. policy to introduce transitional change toward self-government. The problem has been lack of implementation owing to parochial concerns of various U.S. Government agencies, foot-dragging on the part of the U.S. administration in Micronesia, and a general interagency inability to come to grips with the problem and take decisions which will result in action. The transfer of any real authority to Micronesians over the past three or four years has been very slight, and there are no immediate prospects for change in this situation.

In the circumstances, we believe a directive from you to the Micronesian interagency group may be the only means to obtain early movement in the right directions.

Recommendation:

That you sign the memorandum at Tab A which requests the Interagency Group on Micronesia to

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submit by no later than May 15 a report which:
(a) assesses the need for transitional change;
(b) recommends to the NSC Under Secretaries
specific measures for increased Micronesian self-
government; and (c) recommends a timetable for
implementation of those steps.

Attachments:

Tab A - Ltr. to Mr. Wilson

Tab B - Memo on Impressions
of the TTPI

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Drafted: EA/ANP:JCDoerrance:mhs
3/26/74 - X20870

Clearances:

IG/UNP - Mr. Kimball
L - Mr. Johnson
S/P (USC) - Mr. Grove

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Dear Mr. Wilson:

In reviewing the current state of affairs in Micronesia, it would appear that a factor strongly affecting attitudes toward our administration, and the atmosphere surrounding the status negotiations, is Micronesian pressure for a greater role in the governance of their own affairs. Many of the measures the Micronesian legislative bodies seek in the way of expanded local authority are also appropriate transitional change steps leading to ultimate termination of the trusteeship.

Given the importance of this issue within Micronesia, and the character of its impact on Micronesian attitudes and the status negotiations, I would like to have the Interagency Group on Micronesia address the questions involved, and report to the NSC Under Secretaries Committee by May 15, 1974. The report should offer recommendations for decision and implementation.

The report should address the following specific questions.

-- The impact of the self-government issue on the status question and negotiations, including the pros and cons of early major moves toward self-government.

Mr. James Wilson, Jr., Chairman,
Interagency Group on Micronesia,
Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations,
Department of the Interior

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-- Specific steps toward self-government that can be implemented in the immediate future, and in any event before the Micronesian constitutional convention.

-- Specific steps toward self-government that might be implemented during or following a constitutional convention.

-- A recommended timetable for transitional change to self-government.

-- The applicability of recommended changes to the Mariana Islands, and the possibilities for separate transitional change in those islands directed at ultimate commonwealth status.

-- The need, if any, for U.S. Congressional action.

In considering specific self-government recommendations, attention should be given to the following proposals which have been made by the Micronesians at various times.

-- Early appointment of a Micronesian cabinet or executive council, and of high court justices.

-- Appointment of a Micronesian Deputy High Commissioner.

-- Restrictions on the High Commissioner's authority, especially with respect to the veto of Micronesian legislation not affecting U.S. foreign affairs and defense responsibilities.

-- Chartering of elected district governments.

-- Expanded budgetary authority for the Congress of Micronesia.

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-- The possibilities for a phase-out or reduction of U.S. citizen employees of the Trust Territory Administration in connection with "Micronization" of the Public Service.

-- Establishment of a "Micronesian Government" with the U.S. High Commissioner to retain only reserve powers relating mainly to U.S. foreign affairs and defense authority and responsibilities.

I understand that some of these questions are being addressed in the ongoing interagency study on "Long Term Aspects of U.S. - Micronesian Relations", and that much of the groundwork for response to this current request has already been laid. I do, however, consider the question of early transitional change to self-government as being sufficiently urgent to warrant the requested separate report. There will be no need to cover the same subject again in the "long-term" study.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Rush
Chairman

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