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Subj: Marshallese Separatism - Possible U.S. Reactions

Introduction:

The failure of the COM during its most recent sessions to accept legis-
lation sponsored by the Marshallese Delegation to return 50% of all taxes
derived from each district has incited the District Legislature, the Nitijela,
to inform the U.N. that the Marshall Islands intends to negotiate separately
on the future political status of the district with the U.S. and request
"assistance and advice".

The Palau and Marianas Districts supported the Marshallese in their
attempt to gain a larger share of tax revenues. Along with this were the
warnings from Congressional leaders of Palau and the Marshalls that the only
acceptable form for a future government of Micronesia would be that of a loose
confederation of districts - i.e., the powers of the central government would
be severely restricted.

Even if Palau refrains from a formal request for separate status negoti-
ations, it is clear that the problem of political unity in Micronesia has
become more critical since Ambassador Williams made his statement at Majuro
in May of last year.

In this statement, which came on the heels of a similar but less resolute
manifestation of Marshallese separatism, the Ambassador said that the problem
of political unity is basically one which the Micronesians must resolve for
themselves and that we had pursued the status negotiations with the JCFS in the
hope and expectation ath a common status -- a united Micronesia -- would be
forthcoming for the Marshalls and the Carolines. He added that "we continue
to believe that despite considerable cultural diversity and differing local
problems and interests, a unified Micronesia would best meet the economic, social

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and other needs of the people concerned.."

The U.S. has already explained its willingness to recognize the Marianas case - the long history of its requests for separate treatment and irrefutable evidence of public support for a permanent association with the U.S., etc.

Discussion

There is a possibility that the leadership in the Marshalls is testing us or is hoping to improve its bargaining position when the COM reconsiders the issue of revenue sharing. Recent reports from the Marshalls, however, indicate that the Marshallese leaders are very serious about breaking with the other districts, but are unlikely to take any immediate drastic steps - at least not before May when Senator Kabua returns. One could surmise therefore that they will strongly resist and resent any attempts by the U.S. to divert them.

The Marshalls case for separate negotiations is patently less persuasive than that of the Marianas. While their culture is different from that of the other districts they have never been administered separately; nor have they obtained a truly popular mandate for an alternative status, one which promises to endure or to meet the fundamental needs of the people. In this regard, the Nitijela is somewhat suspect as a truly representative body - most of its members are clearly under the control of the Kabuas.

With regard to status, some leaders in the Marshalls, e.g. Amata Kabua, seem to favor union with Nauru, the Gilberts and Ellice Islands, in a separate confederation; but it is not clear from recent statements whether this status alternative is favored by a majority of the leaders to some form of association with the U.S.

According to Bethwel Henry quiet steps are underway to bring about a compromise in the Congress; although Senator Pangelinan told Miss Trent that "this is it; they have made up their minds. They will not turn back".

Policy Options

Three alternatives seem to be worthy of consideration -- (1) attempt to quash the Marshall's request or refuse to entertain their request for separate negotiations and oppose it in the U.N.; (2) Accede to the Marshallese request for separate negotiations and support that position in the U.N.; (3) avoid taking a public stand - procrastinate by: (a) encouraging the Marshalls to strengthen their case through a popular referendum; (b) working behind the scenes for a compromise at the next session of the COM; or (c) getting the Trusteeship Council of the U.N. to appoint a fact finding commission.

The first option would be consistent with the Majuro statement and would be welcomed by the JCFS and by most members of the U.N. as evidence of our support for Micronesian unity.

If we were to be receptive to the Marshallese demand we would undermine the chances of political unity among the four districts, and might stimulate greater political instability within the remaining districts.

However, if the Marshallese leaders are as serious about a divorce from the other districts as reported, a negative U.S. response might be strongly resented by them and could lead to local demonstrations and agitation calculated to cause the U.S. to accept their "legitimate" demands for separate status.

An adverse U.S. reaction could stimulate the Marshallese to attempt to duplicate the Marianas precedent, thus forcing the U.S. to enter into separate status negotiations.

With regard to the second option - a positive response to the Marshallese initiative - it can be argued that separate status agreement with those districts desirous of special relations would over the long-run be more advantageous to the U.S. than a single status agreement with a badly divided Micronesia. While additional status negotiations would be time-consuming and unpopular in the U.N.

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- we would be branded in many quarters as the "Portugal of the Pacific" - such a course would possibly result in closer ties and a more stable relationship with those districts of greatest strategic value, Palau and the Marshalls.

The disadvantages of this alternative, aside from the problems it would cause in the U.N., are several - those in Micronesia and in the U.S. favoring political unity or independence for Micronesia would loudly charge "foul", accuse the U.S. of "divide and rule and with violating our international obligations. Also, the U.S. Congress might object to a third set of negotiations, on the grounds that there is no justification for another separate Pacific entity in the U.S. political family.

Finally, a positive U.S. attitude would probably end any chance of reaching agreement with the JCFS, and would sabotage any chances of the upcoming constitutional convention reaching agreement on a governmental structure for the new Government of Micronesia.

The third option, procrastination, offers several potential advantages. For example, this alternative would test the depth of Marshallese sentiments on this matter and might weaken Salii's resolve to "hang tough" in the status negotiations. We could explain our equivocation on the grounds that we have not yet received a formal request to open separate negotiations or, if we do, that we must have time to study seriously the factors which lead to the Marshallese request. We might also indicate willingness to enter into talks once the people of the district have voted directly on the status alternatives, hopefully, after another round with the JCFS. Another variant would be to promise a definitive response after the COM has had an opportunity to reconsider the Marshalls' request - this summer - or until all five districts have had a chance to reach agreement on a constitution - 1975.

On the other hand, any indication of U.S. receptiveness to the Marshalls initiative could well touch off a chain of events that would make further fractioning of Micronesia inevitable. We might be faced with multiple demands for separate but preferential treatment, or demands for independence from one or two of the remaining districts, e.g., Palau, or other developments which could delay an agreement with the Marianas and cause us considerable pain in New York and on the Hill.

Nor is there any assurance that an ambiguous U.S. position would cause the JCFS to be more reasonable. In any case, a Marshallese defection would weaken Salii's bargaining position and could cause him to break off the talks indefinitely.

In conclusion, the arguments for abandoning the Majuro position seem to be less cogent than those which favor its support. However, we should consider the advisability of qualifying our response to a formal request. For example, we could indicate a willingness to consider a Marshallese request for separate negotiations following the next session of the COM, assuming that by then, they have clarified their position on status and strengthened their case for ^{separate act of} self-determination, e.g., by means of a referendum.

Alternatively, we could inform the Marshallese that we have seen nothing to indicate that they desire a relationship with the U.S. materially different from that sought by the other four districts. Their problem appears to relate to internal relationships within Micronesia and therefore should be addressed in the forthcoming constitutional convention.

The timing of the U.S. response is important. Should we, for example, move quickly against the Marshallese initiative in order to "nip it in the bud" and to reassure Salii; or, alternatively, should we accept Dwight Heine's advice and "play it cool", keeping Salii in doubt while avoiding any premature confront-

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tation with the Marshallese?

If pressed, however, it would appear that we have little choice but to refer to our Majuro position and advise the Marshallese to attempt to work things out with the other districts.

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APPARENT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE MARIANAS AND MARSHALLS'
CASE FOR SEPARATE STATUS

The following appear to be the principal differences between the positions or rationale of the two districts regarding separate status negotiations:

1. Lack of a history of agitation for a separate political status in the Marshalls, as evidenced by their failure to petition the U.N. or to make a formal request to the U.S. for separation or separate status talks.
2. Absence of a popular mandate on this issue, i.e., Nitijela has not gone to the people on this issue. This is particularly serious given the popular view that it is controlled by a "political elite", a small minority of leaders in the District whose accountability to the people is suspect;
3. Vagueness of the Marshalls' status objective or goal, i.e., is it a "close association with the U.S. or something else?"
4. Lack of any kind of COM or JCFS endorsement or recognition of the legitimacy of the Marshallese position, in contrast to the Marianas case which Sali recognized publicly at Hana;
5. Fact that the Marshalls district has never enjoyed a separate administrative status;
6. Absence of the Guam alternative, i.e., the attraction of an eventual union of Guam and the Marianas District or commonwealth;
7. Formal U.S. recognition of the Marianas case as opposed to statements favoring the unity of the remaining five districts -- "a single solution" covering the other five districts. (Ambassador Williams' statements during Washington round and in the Marshalls, Majuro, last May).

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Note: Despite the above, the Marshallese can claim that based on Article 6 (1) of the Trusteeship Agreement they are entitled to the same positive response accorded the Marianas--they plan to invoke the obligation of the Administering Authority to respect the "specific circumstances and freely expressed wishes of the various cultural, ethnological and linguistic groups..plus other parts of the U.N. Charter relevant to the principle of "self-determination" - e.g., Chapter 12, Article 73 of the U.N. Charter.

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