



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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February 4, 1975

To: The Deputy Secretary
From: IO - Robert O. Blake, Acting *ROB*

Marianas Referendum

Problem

On January 21, Ambassador F. Haydn Williams reported to you the outcome of the fifth round of talks with the Marianas Political Status Commission regarding the development of terms for an eventual commonwealth status. On January 24, Ambassador Williams met with Ambassador White (USUN), Ambassador Blake (IO) and Deputy Assistant Secretary Zurhellen (EA) to discuss the UN aspects of the Marianas referendum on the Commonwealth Covenant now planned for late June, 1975. The key issue in that meeting was the matter of the language of the option(s) presented the voters in the referendum.

Background

The United Nations Trusteeship Council is expected to authorize the observation of the Marianas future status referendum. It is highly desirable to obtain a report from the UNTC that the Marianas referendum was conducted openly, freely, and knowledgeably. IO and USUN suggested at the January 24 meeting that a ballot which would offer a choice between accepting commonwealth status or remaining with the rest of Micronesia and negotiating a status agreement as part of a single Micronesian entity would have the best chance of acceptance by the United Nations Trusteeship Council which has repeatedly resolved to be in favor of territorial unity. Some felt that this type of choice might also help to limit those voting against commonwealth status to the pro-Micronesian faction. Others were

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not sure this would be the case. Ambassador Williams and Mr. Zurhellen felt that this would also run the serious risk of making unity the issue thus polarizing the opposition and giving the anti-separatist elements among the opponents of Marianas separatism both in and without the Marianas a rallying point apart from the merits or demerits of the Covenant.

The Marianas Political Status Commission in December was virtually unanimous in its preference for a simple "yes/no" vote on the Covenant. Ambassador Williams takes a somewhat different view and suggested at the January 24 meeting a modified yes/no vote in the form of a ballot which would provide for the acceptance of the Commonwealth Covenant or its rejection with the understanding that this would mean the negotiation of other alternatives, including but not specifically mentioning unification with Guam, status quo, unincorporated territorial status and the option of negotiating a common future status with the rest of Micronesia. Some felt that this type of choice might collect in one option all the opponents to commonwealth status, at greater risk to the commonwealth option's success. Others felt this was not necessarily the case, and that with an intensive political education program it should satisfy the minimal requirements for UNTC approval. It was suggested that informal soundings might be taken in New York on the acceptability of language of this sort.

It was agreed at the January 24 meeting that the language suggested should be studied further and that no final action would be taken by Ambassador Williams at the next negotiating session on this score. The entire question of how the plebiscite will be conducted is a U.S. responsibility and need not be decided prior to signature of the Covenant, although the Marianas should certainly be consulted and Ambassador Williams will suggest the formation of a joint U.S.-Marianas advisory group on the subject. He will also emphasize the importance of a favorable United Nations report on the status plebiscite if its results are to convince the Trusteeship and Security Council that the United States has met its commitments.

Drafted: IO/UNP:NWilliamson:OMSN:JMWilson:kkc:lg
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Clearance: EA/ANP - Mr. J. Knowles