



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

SEP 12 1945



My dear Mr. President:

I believe that we should give immediate attention to the problems of civil administration in newly-occupied areas which may remain, or be placed, under the supervision of the United States. It would be in keeping with the traditions of the American people to devise suitable forms of civil administration, under civilian personnel, for the peace-time government of new overseas territories, with adequate provision being made to protect the security interests of the United States and to enable this Nation to assist effectively in maintaining the conditions of permanent peace.

Although I recognize that it will be some time before decisions can be made concerning either the disposition or the administration of Pacific territories, I have asked the Division of Territories and Island Possessions to make a general study of the problems of the Pacific Islands and to be ready to undertake a more detailed preparation of plans. We ought to draw fully upon expert opinion and upon the practical experience gained by the Department of the Interior which has long been the chief Federal agency responsible for the well-being of indigenous peoples in the territories. X 95-L

Army or Navy administration of civil affairs has prevailed at various times in the Philippines, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, and in all of these cases the responsibility was later transferred to the Department of the Interior. It was only in Guam and Samoa that the Navy retained complete control. By an Executive Order in 1931, President Hoover transferred the control of the Virgin Islands from the Navy Department to the Department of the Interior. In 1934, an Executive Order of President Roosevelt established the Division of Territories and Island Possessions in the Department of the Interior and transferred to that Division from the War Department the function of supervising Puerto Rican affairs. By Executive Orders of 1936 and 1938, the Department of the Interior was given jurisdiction over Baker, Howland, Jarvis, Canton, and Enderbury Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Finally, under Reorganization Plan Number 2 in 1939, the Bureau of Insular Affairs of the War Department was transferred to the Department of the Interior and consolidated with the Division of Territories and Island Possessions. By this transfer, the Department of the Interior became responsible for supervision of the affairs of the Philippine Islands. The general intention of these administrative changes in the 1930's appears to have been to coordinate the supervision of all territorial affairs under a single civilian agency.

There is every reason to believe that the sound conduct of civil administration in inhabited areas adjacent to strategic bases would support, not handicap, the activities of the defense services. Neither the security nor the prestige of the United States would be served by a policy of military rule; for such a policy would appear more militaristic than that of the old colonial powers, even more militaristic than that of the Japanese themselves whose South Seas Bureau was staffed largely by civilian personnel. The British Army and Navy have not only worked with civilian administrators but have tolerated a large measure of local self-rule in such vital outposts as Ceylon, Singapore, the Fiji Islands, and the Northwest Frontier of India.

Differences of opinion and method may arise in the normal course of business between military and civilian officials, but adequate safeguards can be provided for our military security and for the policing function. These safeguards, I believe, are: (a) strict control of the actual base areas by the defense services, as on the mainland; (b) close liaison and representation of the Army and Navy in any civilian office on any administrative level, where joint effort is required.

To be prepared adequately for the conduct of civil affairs, I believe that you will wish the work of planning to begin at once, without awaiting decisions either as to the time required to complete the tasks of military government or as to the particular geographic areas to be administered by the United States.

With your approval, I shall ask the Division of Territories and Island Possessions to draft a detailed report for submission to you as soon as possible. In the preparation of such a report, dealing with the conduct of civil affairs in new territories, I assume that the Departments of State, War, and Navy should be consulted regarding any plans or programs which they may have developed.

Sincerely yours,



*Harold L. Ickes*  
Secretary of the Interior.

The President,

The White House.

THE WHITE HOUSE,

September , 1945.

Approved: