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THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

SEP 23 1945

My dear Mr. President:



After the Secretary wrote his letter to you on September 12 and received your reply of September 13 concerning the conduct of civil affairs in Pacific areas which may remain under United States supervision, I have been informed that you have referred this subject to the Secretaries of State, War, and the Navy.

In considering the future administration of such areas as the Pacific Islands, I am sure it is your intention to draw upon the long experience of the Government of the United States in handling the problems of indigenous peoples, both on the mainland and in overseas areas. The Department of the Interior has dealt with Indian affairs for over one hundred years and is also the Federal Department responsible for the administration of affairs in nearly all inhabited overseas territories of the United States.

By maintaining naval administration of Samoa and Guam, the United States has had the dubious distinction of being the only Pacific power which governs an inhabited colonial area as a mere appurtenance of a military base. This is not, I believe, a distinction which the American people will justify at a time when enlightened opinion, at home and abroad, demands expert attention to the progress of dependent peoples.

I recognize the vital interests of the Department of State and the defense services in determining policies and methods of administration in all areas having strategic importance in international affairs. Indeed, in working out methods of government for such areas, it is advisable to treat the matter as a single United States problem; and I believe that, in the interest of American prestige, we should take into account the fact that world attention will be focused on the dependent areas of the Pacific. If we commit ourselves to the principle of civil government, we strengthen the already strong case we have for retention and control of strategic bases.

The Department of the Interior would like to assist in assuring expert civil government with a view to the ultimate attainment of democratic institutions and economic stability in dependent areas. We should like to contribute fully out of the Department's experience in territorial matters in order to assist in establishing whatever new organization and methods may be needed to protect the over-all interests of the United States and to fulfill the obligations of this Government under the United Nations Charter.

I hope that you will advise the Secretaries of State, War, and the Navy and Secretary Ickes that you wish the Interior Department to participate in the discussion of this problem. I enclose a draft letter, for your signature, which would accomplish this.

Sincerely yours,

He Fortas
Acting Secretary of the Interior.

The President,

The White House.

Enclosure 501