

February 20, 1946.

MEMORANDUM for Hon. James F. Byrnes, Secretary of State
Hon. Robert P. Patterson, Secretary of War
Hon. James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy
Hon. Oscar L. Chapman, Acting Secretary of Interior



The following proposal of the Department of the Interior for administration of the Pacific islands is submitted in accordance with the resolution adopted on January 30 by the subcommittee of the committee of four Secretaries which was appointed by the President on October 20, 1945.

1. It is proposed that military government should be replaced by civil government in all Pacific islands under the control of the armed services of the United States, with the exception of islands or parts of islands which may be designated as military reservations, subject to any future international agreement as to the status of these islands. The proposal will apply to Guam and American Samoa and to the other islands which are already under United States sovereignty; to all of the Micronesian islands which were formerly under Japanese mandate, including the Marianas, the Palau, the Carolines and the Marshalls; and to the Ryukyus, the Volcano, the Izu and the Bonin. It will also apply to any additional Pacific islands which may from time to time be brought under United States administration.

2. The administrative agency for the islands will be the Department of the Interior. Through its Division of Territories and Island Possessions, the Department of the Interior is already responsible for administration in nearly all overseas territories of the United States. For over 100 years, the Department has dealt with the problems of indigenous peoples, both on the mainland and overseas. Under its jurisdiction, the Philippine Commonwealth is preparing for independence; Hawaii and Alaska for statehood; Puerto Rico (under the bill supported by the President and the Department) for such status as its voters may choose; and the Virgin Islands for a rapidly increasing measure of self-government. By maintaining Navy rule in Guam and American Samoa for the past 45 years, the United States has had the distinction of being the only power in the Pacific which treats an inhabited area as a mere appurtenance of a military base. This is not 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.

Department of the Interior
Office of the Secretary



3. The Department of the Interior recommends that, even if some delay in transferring jurisdiction is anticipated, the decision to employ civil administration in islands under United States control should be made and announced at once. Such a decision would correct a belief which is prevalent, both at home and abroad, that our military interest in this area tends to ignore the civil rights and the economic welfare of the island inhabitants. The announced intention of this Government to employ civil administration in areas under its supervision will strengthen, not prejudice, our claims for military or administrative responsibility in the Pacific, and it will place this Government in a sound position to insist upon the adoption and maintenance of proper standards of civil administration in areas under the control of other powers.

4. The decision and announcement concerning civil administration will permit immediate steps to be taken by the Department of the Interior to prepare the necessary plans. The transfer from military to civil administration should be made, as an interim arrangement, as soon as the necessary preparations can be completed. Such an arrangement would, of course, be subject to subsequent international agreements. Nothing done under an interim civil administration would stand in the way of sound decisions concerning military use or concerning the future disposition of the Pacific islands or concerning trusteeship or other terms under which the islands are to be governed.

5. An immediate decision to replace military by civil government at an early date and to begin planning to that end will have the further advantage of easing the necessary final adjustment which will have to be made by the Departments and the personnel concerned. It would help to remove the impression that exists among civil affairs personnel and island peoples alike that the present island program is a temporary one. It would also help to give a sense of continuing responsibility to those concerned with carrying out the administration of island affairs.

6. American experience in the Micronesian area already strongly suggests that any division of the islands for administrative purposes would multiply the difficulties in the way of economical and efficient government. If the taxpayers of the United States (or those of some other administering power) are to be relieved largely of cost in connection with island affairs and if the islanders are to have the benefit of an adequate control of conditions affecting their welfare, it would be essential to regard Micronesia, including Guam, as a single administrative unit, subdivided only for purposes of local administration. Some of the islands have agricultural, mineral and fish resources which may be used for the maintenance of the population and as a source of taxable revenues.



Other islands may be deficit areas which, if left to their own resources, might become a charge upon the budget of the administering power. To treat the whole region as a single unit for the purpose of dealing with the practical and difficult problems of transportation, communication, food distribution, public health, and public finance will provide a sound basis for economical administration.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Military government should be replaced by civil government, with the Department of the Interior as the administering agency, in all Pacific islands under the control of the armed services, with the exception of islands or parts of islands which may be designated as military reservations.
2. The decision to adopt civil government should be made and announced at once. The Department of the Interior should then proceed accordingly, with the assistance of other departments concerned, to prepare plans of administration.
3. The transfer from military to civil administration should be made, as an interim arrangement, as soon as the necessary preparations can be completed. Such an arrangement would, of course, be subject to subsequent international agreements.
4. In the interest of economical and effective administration, the Micronesian area, including Guam, should be regarded as a single unit, subdivided only for purposes of local administration.

proposal of the Department of the Interior, received in draft form at the Subcommittee meeting and subsequently withdrawn by the Interior member for correction. Thereafter, the Subcommittee's recommendation that no action be taken on the subject by said Committee until such time as the status and title of the Pacific Islands concerned should be determined. The Interior Department representative voted in favor of this resolution.

The President,

The Senate,