

A Step Backward

President Truman's Order No. 10408 transferring civil jurisdiction over Saipan and Tinian from the Interior Department to the Navy Department on January 1, 1953, accomplishes nothing from a security or other standpoint and will create a messy situation for the United States in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and in the United Nations. The transfer was unnecessary, even assuming that classified activities are being conducted or planned on Saipan and Tinian, because:

1. The Navy, by agreement with Interior, has maintained control over the entry of persons, vessels and ~~planes~~ to Saipan and Tinian as well as to all other islands in the Trust Territory.

2. The Interior Department has agreed to make available all the land needed for military use on these and other Trust Territory islands.

3. No security demands have been made by the Navy or any other agency which have not been met and there have been no suggestions from military agencies that the manner in which civil jurisdiction was being exercised could be improved from a security standpoint.

4. The only additional step which could have been taken to give the Navy as much security control in these islands as exists over the most highly classified military installations anywhere under the American flag, was for the President to close the islands or the parts used for classified purposes, in accordance with Article 13 of the trusteeship agreement with the UN. The Visiting Mission of the United Nations Trusteeship Council which will visit the Territory in February could thereby be kept out of such "closed areas" and the Trusteeship Council otherwise prevented from exercising its functions therein. Closing an area for security reasons need not interfere with the continued exercise of civil jurisdiction by the civilian government of the Territory. For example, Eniwetok Atoll, where top secret atomic experiments have been carried out, was "closed for security reasons" and, through cooperative arrangements between the Atomic Energy Commission and the Government of the Trust Territory, the latter continues to exercise civil jurisdiction in the Atoll. Saipan and Tinian have not been "closed" and the right of the UN, including its visiting missions, to exercise its functions in these islands still exists. Thus, nothing has been gained from a security standpoint by placing these islands back under Naval Government.

5. Civilian administration has done an effective job in the Trust Territory. Public services have been carried out by more highly

qualified personnel under Interior administration and at a cost to the Federal Government of \$1,500,000 less annually than the Navy. Agricultural production and marketing have improved so much in Saipan and Tinian since Interior took over that for the first time since the war these islands have a favorable balance of trade. The Saipan District was in fact one of the best administered of the six Trust Territory Districts and it is therefore unlikely that the Order was issued in order to better care for the needs of the islanders.

This transfer not only was unnecessary but also will have these harmful effects:

1. A messy and costly situation in the Trust Territory will be created with the establishment of two separate governments in the Territory, each with its own laws, policies and government machinery. The Navy will replace many of the expert civilian personnel with Naval officers and enlisted men and maintain a government separate from that of the rest of the area.
2. Saipan and Tinian have the greatest agricultural potential of any of the Trust Territory islands and should be used for settlement of young people from overpopulated islands. They are also the sites of an insane asylum and a leprosarium for all the Trust Territory, and it is the Navy's desire that Interior seek funds to build new facilities elsewhere. The people of Saipan and Tinian are among the most highly advanced of all the people of the Trust Territory. Splitting them and their islands away from the rest of the Territory will thwart the political and economic advancement of the Territory as a whole.
3. Saipan and Tinian, having a combined population of 5,500, are only two of a chain of 21 islands forming the Northern Marianas District whose people, numbering 6,500, are closely related politically, socially, and economically. Separating these islands governmentally would be most unfortunate. A new order has been prepared to place all the Northern Marianas, including Saipan and Tinian, under Navy jurisdiction. This new order affords the President an opportunity to review the entire situation again and if he finds, as we think he will, that the original order was unwise, it is hoped that he will revoke it rather than extend the area of Naval government to the whole of the Northern Mariana District, which constitutes almost one-fourth of the land area and has over ten percent of the population of the entire Trust Territory.
4. The United States will be subject to severe criticism in the United Nations Trusteeship Council for creating two governments in the

Trust Territory. And since the Council only recently commended the United States for transferring the area to civilian administration, questions may be raised on the return of part of the area to Naval government. Now that colonial issues in North Africa and Southeast Asia are being hotly debated in the UN, the United States can ill afford to get itself on the same rack as the European colonial powers.

5. The transfer renews the Navy's hopes of regaining governmental power throughout the Pacific Islands and may renew the controversy over whether the well established American principle of civilian as against military control of governmental affairs should continue to apply in the Pacific. It is ironical that in the closing days of his administration President Truman should leave this blemish on an otherwise laudable record of establishing civilian administration throughout the Pacific Island area.

6. The transfer to Navy establishes an undesirable precedent. Never before in American history has civil jurisdiction over any part of a territory been placed under military rule after civilian government has been established, except when martial law has been declared.

President Truman has stood firm in his support of civilian government, and its effective establishment in Guam, American Samoa and the Trust Territory is a tribute to his administration. He can avoid a messy situation in the Trust Territory and in the United Nations for the new administration and safeguard the principle of civilian government by revoking Executive Order 10408--and if necessary closing Saipan and Tinian--in lieu of further extending Naval jurisdiction to the rest of the Marianas.