



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

My dear Mr. Dodge:

By letter dated March 25, 1953, Assistant Director Jones requested the comments of this Department on a proposed executive order of the Department of Defense entitled, "Amending Executive Order 10408, transferring the administration of the Portion of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands which includes the Islands of Tinian and Saipan from the Secretary of the Interior to the Secretary of the Navy." This draft order would transfer administration of 17 islands and islets in the Northern Marianas from this Department to the Department of the Navy, in addition to administration of Saipan and Tinian which was transferred effective January 1, 1953, by Executive Order No. 10408.


While this Department is keenly aware of the desirability, from the standpoint of efficiency and economy in civil administration, of restoring unified civilian government throughout the Trust Territory, this Department has been advised that there are compelling security reasons for the Navy to exercise civil jurisdiction over Saipan and Tinian at this time. Since the islands north of Saipan are tied closely into the economy of Saipan and can be more readily administered therefrom, this Department concurs in the transfer of civil jurisdiction over these islands to the Secretary of the Navy. However, it is recommended that the Island of Rota be excepted from the proposed Order. Responsible officers of the State and Navy Departments have, I am informed, indicated that their Departments would interpose no objection to the retention of jurisdiction by this Department over this Island.

The economy of Rota is linked primarily with Guam and its population of 750 is closely related by family and social ties to the people of Guam. The High Commissioner is convinced that he can provide effectively for the government and economic development of this Island through his liaison office on Guam and that the cost would be no greater than if administered by the Navy from Saipan, which is further from Rota than Guam. He feels that similar agricultural production for export to Guam can be developed on Rota as was achieved on Saipan and Tinian while the latter were under the High Commissioner's administration. Leaders on Rota told the High Commissioner recently that they desire to remain under his administration.

A strong foundation is being laid for cooperation between territorial and military officials in the Pacific. Furthermore, steps are being taken to establish in Washington an informal inter-departmental coordinating group consisting of representatives of the State, Defense and Interior Departments to consider matters of mutual interest relating to the Pacific territories. There will thus be opportunity to review from time to time the situation in the Northern Marianas with a view to recommending, as soon as circumstances permit, the means whereby unified civilian government of the Trust Territory can be restored under the Interior Department while fulfilling at the same time territorial requirements.

I approve the addition of paragraph 2 as proposed by the Bureau of the Budget and recommend that the proposed order be submitted to the President for his approval with the first paragraph amended to read ". . . shall include, in lieu of only the Islands of Saipan and Tinian, all of the Northern Mariana Islands of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands with the exception of the Island of Rota."

Sincerely yours,

  
Secretary of the Interior

Hon. Joseph M. Dodge  
Director, Bureau of the Budget  
Washington 25, D. C.

