

OVERVIEW OF U. S. POLICY

By

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I have recently written a couple of papers about American policy, or the lack thereof, in the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. I have argued that the United States has never had a consciously conceived or a coherent policy that has actually been implemented and then actually followed in the islands. I have also attempted to counter the notion that there have been two policies, each with its own time frame. What are these two supposed policies?

For the first period, it is sometimes claimed that the United States had and followed a policy that has been referred to as the "ethnological zoo policy." The time frame was from immediately after the second World War until the early 1960s, or one could say, the "zoo" was maintained during the first one and one half decades of the American administration. It is claimed that the Americans wanted to keep the islands out of the mainstream of world events and wanted to protect and preserve Micronesian cultures. Now it seems to me to be quite obvious that the United States has never been particularly concerned about the preservation of other societies. I feel reasonably certain that American

Indian peoples know this. With regard to European immigrants within the United States and since the last century, a "melting pot" philosophy has prevailed, and the attendant notion has been that everyone should become 100% American. With regard to peoples and cultures abroad, the general American lack of sensitivity to other societies was the concern of a popular book, The Ugly American, about a quarter of a century ago.

The second period began during the John F. Kennedy administration, about 1962 or 1963, and it continued until the late 1970's. It is argued that the zoo policy was cast aside, and a new policy of entrapment was initiated. The notion is that the United States set out to entrap the peoples of Micronesia in a vast web of dependency in order to keep the islands firmly within the American sphere of influence. There are better reasons for arguing that there was indeed such a policy of entrapment rather than the zoo notion.

In the early 1960's, the United States had fallen under severe criticism by the United Nations. The U.N. had sent a visiting mission to the Trust Territory, and the results were devastating from the American point of view. The destruction of war remained evident in many places. Almost nothing had been accomplished in the way of economic development. There had been little movement in the direction of self-determination. No attempt had been made to foster a pan-Micronesian identity. In general, things were judged to be in a deplorable condition, and it correctly appeared that the U.S. lacked any sense of real direction for the territory.

President Kennedy was clearly embarrassed, and the situation was further complicated by other matters. In the post war years, it was no longer respectable to have colonies, and Kennedy had gone on record that the U.S. opposed colonialism. The U.N. team essentially had said that the U.S. was maintaining a colony and doing a poor job of it at that. Further embarrassment occurred when a polio epidemic swept through the Marshall Islands and out of neglect or lack of foresight, vaccine had not been made available in Micronesia.

Kennedy wanted some positive action, and he appointed a study commission to be headed by Dr. Anthony Solomon, a Harvard economist. Solomon was instructed to make an investigative tour of the territory and come back with a set of recommendations. Solomon went out to the territory in the early part of 1963, and it was assumed from the outset that it was absolutely necessary for the islands to remain in the U.S. camp. Upon the completion of his study, Solomon believed that if the U.S. initiated greatly improved education and health systems, launched an ambitious scheme of capital improvement projects, and stimulated economic development with a substantial emphasis on agriculture, then the Micronesians would easily be persuaded to elect to remain under the protective wing of their benefactor. He urged that all of this be accomplished quickly and that a plebiscite be held early. Indeed, he believed that it could all be settled within five years. With the wisdom of hindsight, Solomon's optimism seems quite naive today.

Some observers now claim the Solomon Commission's recommendations were actually followed. Journalist David Nevin in his book, The American Touch in Micronesia, outlines the incorrectness of such a claim. First of all, Kennedy had already begun to launch some new initiatives in the territory prior to Solomon's involvement. Kennedy had authorized increases in expenditures for the territory to augment programs in education and health. The point is, the flow of U.S. dollars which was to become massive in scale in future years had commenced prior to and without the advice of Solomon. Solomon submitted his report in late 1963, and very soon thereafter, John F. Kennedy fell to the assassin's bullets. There is no evidence that the subsequent administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson took the report seriously. A third period of the American administration of the TTPI was to begin in the very late 1970's when self-government began to be achieved by the four separate political entities that were to emerge in the territory.

Prior to the late 1970's, however, there were two distinct and quite different eras of American rule in Micronesia, and they were as I have briefly described them above. The first period lasted from the end of World War II to about 1963; it has been labelled as the period of the ethnological zoo, or alternatively, the period of benign neglect. The second period has been referred to by some as the one in which the U.S. pursued a policy of entrapment, and it continued up until the late 1970's. Each of these two periods may be examined in greater detail.

With regard to the first period, it must be understood that the territory was not like most colonies of former times. The islands had no economic resources that were valued by the United States. America's main concern was strategic, and this was very clear after the war. Indeed, Micronesia was the only strategic trust territory of the eleven that were created within the framework of the U.N. following World War II. As long as its military interests were served, the U.S. had no other particular concerns for the area. The Marshalls were used for the U.S.'s nuclear testing programs, and the northern Marianas, particularly Saipan, were used for covert C.I.A. operations. Foreign nationals were kept out, and even the entry of U.S. citizens was restricted. There were no pressures from other sources to do anything else with regard to the area. Most Americans did not know that the U.S. had a trust territory, and those who did evidenced little in the way of tangible concern. There certainly was no political lobby or interest group concerned with Micronesia, and the U.S. Department of Defense had what it wanted.

Nonetheless, and even though there was little direct concern shown about the islands [outside of the military], American values played a crucial role in determining what occurred. This was manifest in two ways. First, the manner in which Americans thought about themselves had important consequences for the administration of Micronesia. Secondly, American values helped to determine the kinds of programs that were actually initiated.

How did Americans see themselves? Certainly at the end of World War II, Americans saw themselves as the defenders of democracy and the free world. The war had been fought to defeat the imperialistic expansion of Japan and Germany, and there was some justification for the image that the Americans held of themselves. But this is only part of the story. Gaining possession of the bulk of Micronesia from Japan was not thought of as an act of colonialism. Most Americans have never thought of their nation as being a colonial power. The U.S. was born with a war of independence, a revolution to throw off the shackles of British colonial rule. Early in their schooling, Americans are taught that their country has only fought to defend freedom, independence, and democracy. All nations have their myths, and the American myth makes it inconceivable for the vast majority of Americans to perceive themselves as citizens of a colonial power. That the original thirteen colonies expanded across much of the North American continent incorporating the indigeous inhabitants into their nation is not viewed as an act of colonial expansion by most Americans. The acquisition of the Philippines in island Southeast Asia, American Samoa, Guam, and Hawaii in the Pacific, and several entities in the Caribbean has not been viewed as colonial expansion. Alaska was not viewed differently.

The point is, the vision of Americans has been obscured by their myth. As one consequence, the nation has never seen the need to create a colonial service. It follows that there was never a need to develop a

colonial policy. In part, all of this explains why a clear cut policy was never formulated and implemented for the Trust Territory. Reflecting American notions about the U.S. as a colonial power, the Secretary of War argued in 1946 that:

Acquisition of (Micronesia) by the United States does not represent an attempt at colonization or exploitation. Instead, it is merely the acquisition by the United States of the necessary bases for the defense of the security of the Pacific for the future world. To serve such a purpose they must belong to the United States with absolute power to rule and fortify them. They are not colonies; they are outposts. (Quoted from Fluker, et. al., 1978:89)

Turning to the impact of American values, those programs that were launched early in the American administration were very dear to the hearts of Americans. The U.S. Navy administered the Trust Territory until 1951 when it was turned over to the Department of Interior and thus civilian control. With regard to military rule, the Navy's charter was very vague; there were no clear instructions. Nonetheless, programs were initiated in three areas which reflected values at the core of the American character.

First, Americans are committed to universal education. It is simply assumed that education is absolutely essential for happiness and success in the world. Navy officers assumed that an American model of education was suitable for the small island communities of Micronesia, and the possibility that some modifications might be more appropriate for

island life was apparently not raised. Actually, education amounted to little at the time. Navy enlisted men attempted to train Micronesians to serve as classroom teachers; the training was quite brief, and it is an understatement to say that the teachers were little equipped for their chores. Nonetheless, most communities had small one room schools built of local materials, and children spent a few (often a very few) hours some days in those structures. The important thing, however, was the fact that the notion became implanted that every Micronesian child had the right to be educated in a Western style.

Secondly, there are similar values with regard to medical care. It was inconceivable to Navy personnel that medical care would not be available in every community. Accordingly, a health aide was trained and placed in most every village and settlement. The training was modest, but for the first time, some medical care was immediately at hand for Micronesians. Along with the modest skills of the health aides, penicillin and other drugs and medicines were made available. Death rates, and most importantly, infant mortality rates were reduced. The rate of population growth rapidly increased, and universal medical care came to be accepted as the due rights of all.

Thirdly, and holding true to their cherished myth, Navy men felt that they had no alternative but to attempt to introduce American forms of democratic government. They started at the village or community level. Young naval officers informed Micronesians that they should elect

local magistrates and councils to govern their communities. The Navy administration wanted to conduct its relations with the people through such elected leaders and felt uncomfortable with the notion of hereditary chiefs. Quite commonly, the Americans thought they were successful when they were not. Chiefs and other traditional leaders appointed themselves as magistrates and councilmen, and the Americans were pleased that the Micronesians were so quick to grasp the essentials of democracy. Nonetheless, the seeds were planted, and eventually, Micronesians would prove fervent in their desire to elect legislative bodies at the local, district, and territory wide levels.

The important point is, some very important trends were begun early in the first period of American rule. There was no overall plan or conception of what should be done. Rather, initiatives rooted in American values were launched with a faith in their correctness. The entire enterprise was certainly not thought of as a colonial venture. Also important for later years, no attention was given to economic development.

In the second period of the U.S. Administration of the Trust Territory, there are several things which help us explain what occurred. There was an increased commitment to efforts in the areas of education, health care, and the fostering of democratic institutions. Also, there was a very marked increase in the number of capital improvement projects. These increases reflected another very basic American notion. There is the idea that almost any problem can be solved if enough money

is spent. In many respects, this was the notion behind John Kennedy's "New Frontier" and Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society." In both cases, it was thought that social problems could be solved if only enough money were made available. Both programs spilled over into Micronesia.

An increase in funding initiated by Kennedy was continued under the Johnson administration. Around 1960, there was a ceiling of 7.5 million dollars in the Trust Territory budget, but the actual funds appropriated by the U.S. Congress never reached that amount. In 1962, funds were more than doubled and reached \$16 million. By 1967, the budget had risen to \$25 million, and it was doubled to \$50 million by 1970. By the end of the 1970's, the Trust Territory budget was in excess of \$100 million dollars.

Somewhere around the middle 1960's, the effort to develop the Trust Territory literally went out of control. In 1966, Peace Corps Volunteers were sent to Micronesia, and their numbers were greater per capita than any other place in the world. Federal welfare programs continued to increase, eventually numbering 166 separate programs. The Peace Corps and the federal programs were in addition to and not included as part of the territorial budget.

What were some of the results? In education, a massive amount of money was spent. American teachers were recruited to teach the English language and a public high school was created in each administrative district. Project Head-Start was implemented for tiny youngsters, and college scholarships became easily available for those freshly out of

high school. No thought was given as to what all the education was for, and educated youths returned home to unemployment and disappointment.

In the area of health care, again massive sums were spent on sophisticated equipment which often as not went unused and eventually deteriorated. Almost nothing was initiated in the area of preventive medicine, and overall, it is an unfortunate fact that health care has probably gone down in quality in the last decade or so.

In the political arena, district legislatures were founded in the 1950's. They began as advisory bodies, but eventually evolved into true legislatures. In 1965, the Congress of Micronesia was established. One of its earliest actions was to inaugurate negotiations regarding the future political status of the territory. Those negotiations have led us to the current political situation. Three Micronesian entities, the Marshalls, Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia (Kosrae, Ponape, Truk, and Yap) will probably become states in free association with the United States. The Northern Marianas will become a U.S. Commonwealth.

Numerous capital improvement projects were funded with the flow of federal funds. Schools, airports, roads, and water catchment systems were built. However, there was little or no coordination of what was constructed, and one community in Truk District was equipped with fire hydrants with no water supply system. No thought was given to long term maintenance of the physical plant. Money was being spent, and there was a notion that progress was being made.

A third period of the American administration may also be identified. This is the era of self-rule. In the late 1970's, the four political entities noted above began to assume some measure of self-rule. As noted earlier, it appears likely that there will be three states in free association with the U.S. and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. The Micronesians have taken to heart the lessons about democracy, and they are understandably anxious to take more control over their own affairs.

To sum up, I have attempted to provide a review of the United States' administration of the Trust Territory. I have tried to put two myths to rest. The United States has never had a clear policy regarding Micronesia. There was no "zoo policy" and there was no conscious plan to entrap Micronesia into a state of dependency. I have argued that an American myth has prevented Americans from seeing themselves as a colonial power, and that some very basic American values shaped the courses of action that have been implemented. Those values and their appropriateness for island life were never questioned.

It is ironic that while little was actually planned, the end result of American rule is that the Micronesian states are very dependent upon the United States - much as the Solomon Report envisaged. While there was no conscious design, it is certain that some observers in Washington, D.C. were aware of the direction that events were taking. No one blew the whistle, and the new political arrangements with the Micronesian states do provide the strategic requirements wanted by the Department of Defense.

REFERENCES

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