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December 13, 1976

MICRONESIA

Q: Would you comment on Bob Woodward's article in the Washington Post on Sunday about CIA intelligence activity in Micronesia?

A: In accordance with long-standing practice, I cannot comment on allegations about any alleged CIA activities.

Q: Is it true that the question of the legality of CIA surveillance in Micronesia is currently under study?

A: As I said, we do not comment on press stories about intelligence matters.

Q: Why did the U. S. side recently request a delay in talks with the Micronesians?

A: The reason for the U. S. suggestion that informal talks be held next month was the desire to attain an inter-agency agreement on the complex marine resources--Law of the Sea issues.

Q: Is the U. S. trying to deny independence to the Micronesians?

A: No. The U. S. is committed to fulfilling its responsibility under the trusteeship agreement to provide self-government in the Trust Territory in accordance with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned. Up to now, the Micronesians have favored a free association relationship. Under this relationship, sovereignty would reside in the people of Micronesia who would vest in the U. S. for 15 years responsibility and authority over the foreign affairs and defense matters of Micronesia.

Background

In a December 12 article Woodward quoted sources in the government asserting that the State Department had protested CIA bugging of the Micronesian side in our negotiations on the future status of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. According to Woodward's sources, the U. S. had recently sought a delay in the negotiations from this month until January in order to provide time to clarify the intelligence question. Woodward also indicated that the U. S. was attempting to pressure the Micronesians to establish a free association relationship and also seeking to divide Micronesia.

Since 1969 we have been attempting to reach agreement with Micronesian negotiators on a post-trusteeship political status which would fulfill our U. N. responsibilities to promote "self-government or independence"... in accordance with "the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned." We have believed that the interests of the Micronesians would be best served by a united Micronesia. We appreciate, of course, that we cannot force any district into a unified relationship it opposes, and we have already negotiated a separate agreement with the Northern Marianas because of its close ethnic and geographic relationship to Guam and long record of seeking permanent association with the United States. We have made clear our hope that the other five districts will be able to agree on a unified solution. A Free Association relationship has been the status preferred by most Micronesian leaders in these five districts and the Congress of Micronesia.

The U. S. initialed a Compact of Free Association with the Micronesian negotiators last June. The question of the allocation of U. S. funds between the separate districts and the issue of the authority over marine resources, however, were not resolved. The head of the new Micronesian negotiating team requested an informal meeting this month. Ambassador Philip Manhard, the Acting U. S. Representative in the talks, proposed to delay the meeting until January. We sought the delay in order to try to reach an interagency agreement on the question of our position on the marine resources issue. The Micronesians replied that because of the meeting of the Congress of Micronesia in January they would prefer to delay talks until March.

Micronesia

Q: Is the United States going against the current trend of history in absorbing new territory and responsibilities in the Marianas?

A: In establishing the commonwealth relationship with the Northern Marianas, we are fulfilling our pledge to develop the peoples of the Trust Territory for self-government or independence in accordance with their wishes. The people and leaders of the Northern Marianas have made clear for more than 25 years their desire to become U. S. citizens. The commonwealth relationship will also assure that the islands do not become the object of international rivalry at some later date, and will thus enhance peace and stability in the Pacific.