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Office Memorandum

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : The Secretary
THRU : S/S [Signature]
FROM : FE - Mr. Allison
SUBJECT: Future Disposition of the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands.

Mr. Allison
Please follow No 2

DATE: March 18, 1953

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The NSC policy paper on Japan, which was approved by the President on August 7, 1952, left unresolved the question of the disposition of the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands as a result of a difference of opinion between State and Defense. Subsequent extensive staff discussions have revealed no change in the Defense position, the JCS having determined that retention of all of these islands in their present status is essential to United States strategic interests.

As a result of the reporting from the Embassy on this subject and the detailed discussion with Defense of the strategic factors involved, we have reached the following tentative conclusions.

1. It would be undesirable to apply for a trusteeship. Not only would there be numerous difficulties created by United Nations requirements, but the application would intensify our political problem with the Japanese, who would regard this action as a step away from the return of sovereignty to them. Defense concurs in this position.

2. On the islands and in Japan the question of their status remains an acute political issue aggravated by the fact that an inadequate job is being done for the inhabitants in such important areas as education. The issue is most acute with respect to the Amami group, which, both racially and politically, has been more closely tied to Japan.

3. As our main military base in the Far East, and as the base from which our long-range strategic bombers operate, Okinawa is of such major strategic importance that we should retain it in its present status while the tensions in the Far East continue. This has advantages for the Japanese, too, since it will enable them to disclaim responsibility if we should have to utilize the base for operations in Indochina and on the mainland of China.

4. The Bonin Islands include a submarine base, but the case for the strategic necessity for their retention is weaker than for Okinawa. In addition, approximately 7,000 former inhabitants of the islands who were evacuated during the war and want to return, constitute a political problem. The Navy has been unwilling, for security and economic reasons, to allow them to return.

Bureau of
Far Eastern Affairs
Assistant Secretary
Department of State
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5. The strategic factors are least important for the Amami group. The only military considerations appear to be the necessity for stations which will form part of the radar warning network and the existence there of the best typhoon anchorage in the area. These problems could readily be handled by agreement with the Japanese whenever it is decided to return these islands to Japanese administration.

6. There is an urgent necessity for an improved civil affairs directive which will make possible more adequate administration of the islands over which we retain control, which will give an increasing degree of self-government to the inhabitants, and which will allow the Japanese to perform certain functions, such as the provision of consular services for Ryukyans travelling abroad. The Bureau of the Budget is interested in this problem, and has urged reconsideration of the present arrangements. Defense is prepared to proceed with a modification of the present civil affairs directive as soon as the basic policy question is settled.

These conclusions are reinforced by Telegram 2968, of March 13, from Tokyo, Tab A. Ambassador Murphy reports General Clark's private opinion that retention of the Amami group is not necessary to our strategic interests, although he is precluded by the JCS position from saying so. Ambassador Murphy also reports the continuing agitation in Japan over these islands, the special difficulties being created by the failure to provide adequate educational services, and the fact that the Japanese Government seems willing to differentiate between Okinawa and the Amami group. He recommends early action to ease the pressure for total reversion by arrangements for the return to Japan of administration over the Amami group.

On the other hand, representatives from both the Australian and New Zealand Embassies, here, on instructions from their Governments, have informed us of their reluctance to have us yield our control over the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands and of their desire to be consulted before any alteration in the present situation. Although this question is likely to be a hot domestic political issue in both countries, we think that the problem will be reduced to manageable proportions if we retain control over Okinawa.

Last month, Dean Rusk talked with us and subsequently with you about the possibility that the Rockefeller Foundation might finance a quick but thorough study by the Council of Foreign Relations of this whole problem. The study would lay a solid factual basis for decisions by the Government. I understand that you told him that developments in Washington within the next month or so might make such a study unnecessary. In light of the attached telegram from Tokyo, I believe that the time is at hand when we must make our decisions, and make a public announcement of them, probably at the Presidential level.

Recommendations

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Recommendations

I therefore have the following alternative recommendations:

(1) that I be authorized to arrange with Mr. Rusk for the financing by the Rockefeller Foundation of a 4-month study by the Council of Foreign Relations of the situation of the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands, or

(2) that I develop a paper for presentation either to Defense or to the National Security Council, making specific recommendations with respect to the disposition of the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands along the following lines:

(a) Okinawa should be retained in its present status while the international tensions in the Far East continue.

(b) The Bonin Islands should be returned to Japan, or arrangements made to allow the repatriation of those inhabitants who want to return.

(c) The Amami group should be returned to Japan at an early date, after agreement with Japan on the necessary rights there for military purposes, the precise timing to be determined with a view to obtaining the greatest possible political advantage.

(d) The civil affairs directive for the retained islands should be modified to provide increased self-government for the inhabitants and improved administration.

(e) After the decisions have been made, a public announcement should be made by the President of our intentions.

Attachments:

Tab A - Telegram 2968 from Tokyo.

RJGM
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