

INTERVIEW OF RICHARD N. COOPER

by Bruce M. Kalk

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- Kalk: Professor Cooper, let me begin by asking you about your background before joining the Solomon Commission.
- Cooper: I was twenty-nine, I had my Ph.D., and I had worked for two years as senior staff economist for the Council of Economic Advisors. That is how I was known to whomever it was who appointed me, because I had not met Solomon before and I did not know anyone else who was on the Commission.
- Kalk: Had you had any particular background or interest in the Pacific Rim, Micronesia, or that part of the world?
- Cooper: No. Japan yes, because Japan was already emerging as an important country at that time.
- Kalk: Was there any connection in your mind between your background in international monetary policy and foreign trade issues on the one hand and your work with the Solomon Commission? Would you see a connection between those areas?
- Cooper: Well, certainly not the monetary policy. I went as the economist, as a general economist. My specialty is as a trade specialist, but it certainly was clear that if Micronesia was going to try that, it was going to need some trading help.
- Kalk: Do you know how you happened to be tapped for the position on the Commission?
- Cooper: I don't, actually. I have some suspicions.
- Kalk: You had not met Anthony Solomon or any of the others?
- Cooper: No.
- Kalk: How were the others selected?
- Cooper: I have no idea. Solomon himself has a curious history. He has become a very good friend of ours. We have worked over the years together on various measures. He had been asked to do a study of Bolivia, and it was a very good study. It was on the strength of that that he was asked, I think by Ken Hansen, who was then the Budget Director, if he would be willing to do this Micronesian thing. Tony Solomon's knowledge of the world was such that he was hoping that he was going to be near the Solomon Islands. But they are actually quite far away. Then he asked around who else would be on the mission, probably to Ken Hansen. I suspect it was Carl Kaysen who was working at the White House who came up with me as a candidate. The Navy wanted very badly to send somebody because they were former Navy-controlled islands, and they sent a transportation specialist, chosen as far as I know by the Navy. The Director of the Office of Territories was with us too because this was under his jurisdiction. As far as the other members of the Commission are concerned, we had a Navy scribe assigned to us, Gerry Mangone was the political scientist, and there was an agricultural economist who had a lot of experience in Southeast Asia who was on the Commission.
- Kalk: Cleo Shook, who was an engineer.
- Cooper: An engineer, that's right.

Kalk: Would you characterize the Commission as one that operated primarily through consensus or was there some dissent on the outcome of the report?

Cooper: The final report, you mean?

Kalk: Yes.

Cooper: I have no idea because the report was completed after we dispersed.

Kalk: Perhaps I should phrase it another way.

Cooper: I was in the Trust Territory as the advance man for six weeks. While we worked there, the standard mode of operation most of the time involved open discussions among us during the evening after the day's meetings or other investigation. We also had, not as a member but traveling with us, a correspondent. He did a series of articles on the work of the mission. He was not formally a member of the group. Each of us had an assigned area of competence: transportation, education, political science, etc. Then we would gather in the evening, compare notes, and talk about where we were going so that we were thinking of what we were saying during the day. This was a kind of integral process, as we went through and everyone had a chance to hear everyone's views. In fact as a group I think those changed over the six weeks.

Kalk: In what ways?

Cooper: We do not have any records of those conversations. But then we dispersed. We did have a week of writing in Saipan, which produced some draft sections of a report. So the final report was actually under Solomon's authority.

Kalk: So it does not necessarily reflect anyone's particular views?

Cooper: No, but it reflected the "seminar discussions" as I called them.

Kalk: Did Solomon assume the role of leadership in those? How would you assess the contributions of different members?

Cooper: Well, Solomon was the clear leader; he was a powerful man. But when I say leader of the group, he was very much in an exploratory mode. He was not imposing his views. While he was the leader of the group, he did not dominate the discussions on the subject. Matter of fact, quite the opposite. It's a long time ago and memories are untrustworthy, but I would say that most of the conversation was actually carried by me and Gerry Mangone. The other people saw themselves as more technical, narrowly focused on their assignments. They spoke up amply with respect to their particular areas, but they did not know anything about governance or the economy as a whole. I did not know anything about governance either, but I wasn't shy.

Kalk: President Kennedy had issued National Security Action Memorandum 145. I don't know if you recall any details about that. It was laid out in April 1962 ostensibly to ensure that the Trust Territory would remain a part of the United States for strategic reasons. Approximately a month after the President's Task Force on NSAM 145 reported back to him, the Solomon Commission was announced and you all went out for the study. Do you recall any particular reference to this memorandum?

Cooper: No, I have no recollection of that. I am not sure that I knew about it until now. We talked a lot about the area, but in my recollection of those conversations it was actually not stipulated that it remain with the United States.

Kalk: In the final report of the Solomon Commission there is reference to "a favorable result of the plebiscite," and so forth, an indication being that the Trust Territory would remain a

part of the United States. Was that an evolutionary result of the thinking of the members of the Commission?

Cooper: If you talk to Solomon, he may have known about this [NSAM 145]

Kalk: This is not to imply any conspiratorial....

Cooper: The group as a whole was certainly not brought in on this.

Kalk: Well, perhaps there were other instructions that the Commission received . . .

Cooper: Solomon received...

Kalk: ...that you are aware of?

Cooper: Well, you know memories—this was thirty years ago.

Kalk: Understandably so. I want to turn for a moment to the matter of some of the political judgments that you might have made based on the study. For starters, the Commission ended up being very critical of the United States government and its administration of the islands. I was wondering if you recall your contemporaneous reaction to the way that the Trust Territory was administering the islands?

Cooper: Well, I recall my reaction exactly. This was the first time in my life where I had been in a situation which could be described as Third World. That is to say that the structural situation was virtually nil. Neither of the choices before them was especially attractive. There was an inevitability about the people of the Trust Territory about how they were going to evolve. There was a tragic notion: "leave these islands the way we found them." You could almost sense that with relatively little effort, they could subsist. There was enough food. Everything was there. And so that was the structure of the situation. The dilemma was this: one could see it in the generations. The older generation was quite comfortable with their existing standard of living, their existing way of life. World War II was, by this time, nearly twenty years behind them, and they had sort of settled in. The younger generation, I would say in spite of U.S. policy, had been exposed to the lures of modernity. Three commodities sort of capture it: beer, transistor radios, and motor scooters. All of these products required currency to buy and, in the case of motor scooters, to sustain (to buy oil, to run them). And that means that in order to import they had to export. Their main export product was copra, which is the dried meat of the coconut, which is a high quality vegetable oil. The meat can also be used. They had been leading exporter of trochus shells, which are the shells which for decades, maybe centuries, men's shirts' buttons were made of. But already in the 1950s, trochus shells were being replaced by plastics in a great way. So here they were out in the remote western Pacific feeling the impact of technical change, namely the drying up of one of their traditional export products. Their second largest export when we were there was scrap metal left over from World War II. So they were mining scrap metal, a lot of Japanese sunk ships, tanks, and other things around. There had been fighting on some of the islands, but not most of them. But the Japanese, when they were repatriated to Japan, left a lot of stuff. So they [the Micronesians] were exporting scrap metal, but that obviously had a limited life on how long they could do that. Part of my task, and Daly's, the agricultural economist, was to figure out what other things they could export. We could come back to that if you like. But anyway, the younger generation was enamored of these modern products and wanted them. And yet, without continuing subsidies from the American taxpayer, basically, there is no way that they could have them. Or without immigration there is no way that they could have them. This dilemma was actually appreciated in a kind of subtle sadness that the older generation had. They knew, or at least some of them knew,

they had the perception that they were losing the spirit of the younger generation. They didn't put it this way because the Micronesians are very gentle, non-judgmental—at least in my presence. But they would say, and it is a phenomenon that many developing countries experience, that the younger generation was being corrupted by modernity. I actually don't use terms like that because I think when new possibilities are opened up, people are naturally attracted to them and there is nothing at all corrupting about that. But they require adjustments of all kinds. The other thing to say is that the Navy had had jurisdiction of this area until 1951 and then it was turned over to the Department of the Interior. So the Interior Department had been running it, except for Kwajalein and except for part of Saipan, for twelve years. The Department of the Interior in a sense had tried to isolate the area. They did not permit travel into the area, except for some plausible business reason. They did not permit travel out of the area by Micronesians, except for health reasons, or for higher education. Even for secondary school education at that time, you had to go to Guam, which was the big city. Or some businessmen could travel for business reasons. But in general, travel was not allowed either within, to, or from the area. In fact, the U.S. government was criticized directly in the U.N. Trusteeship Council, and by others indirectly, as running an "anthropological zoo," trying to preserve these traditional cultures. As you probably know, there are many of them. We're not just dealing with the Northern Marianas, but there are many cultures, many languages—nine languages, in fact.

Kalk That in fact have relatively little in common with each other.

Cooper: Right—that had nothing in common with one another, except maybe way, way back, centuries and centuries ago. So the problem was: here was a policy of isolation predicated implicitly (I don't think it was ever explicit) on the "isles of paradise" notion and that these people are comfortable and have a comfortable, traditional, natural existence. But already with short wave radio and with the fact that there were American administrators on the island, who of course had modern things, and younger people went to Guam for secondary school, where they saw lots of modern things (because Guam is a territory of the United States) and they came back wanting these things. And so it was a policy that was well motivated but non-sustainable.

Kalk: The policy of the "anthropological zoo"?

Cooper: The policy of isolation was well motivated but non-sustainable. People could go away to secondary school, but it was not universal. The educational system was awful. There was I think mandatory primary school education—six grades. English was taught from the third grade on, if I remember correctly, but English was mainly taught by non-English speakers, so you had teachers of fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders who had only sixth-grade education themselves. They may have had two or three more years of high school but were not native English speakers. So the English that was being taught was terrible. All of the six administrative centers had functioning school systems, but on the outer islands the school system was very haphazard. So the people were not being prepared for anything other than traditional existence either. And yet they were being propelled into modernity.

Kalk: When would you date this transformation to a modern cash economy, or at least the desire to participate in the modern market economy? During the Japanese period in the 1930s and 1940s?

Cooper: I don't have any idea. My understanding of the Japanese era was that the Micronesians were pushed into the hinterland. Japan did not merely run the area, but colonized the area.

Kalk: Right.

Cooper: Mostly with Okinawans. In 1939, and this has nothing to do with the military buildup, although they did fortify. And I knew most about it on Saipan. The Okinawans were willing to work at tilling land; the Micronesians said “no thanks.” So in that sense, they were on the fringes of the Japanese empire, except in Palau. Palau was the imperial center and some Palauans engaged in administration. In fact, in my experience, the Palauans were far and away the most sophisticated of the Micronesians.

Kalk: That’s an interesting comment. Even more than the Marianans?

Cooper: More than the Marianans, yes.

Kalk: My impression had been that even in the 1960s, the stage of economic development in the Marianas was more sophisticated and more western. Would you disagree?

Cooper: No, that is true as of the mid-sixties. Palau was the Japanese headquarters. There was a lot of infrastructure built for the Japanese community but also for the Palauan community there. I assume that the Palauans had been drawn into Japanese activities more as junior functionaries and so forth. But anyway, they had a more worldly view of the world. The Japanese were thrown out in 1945, and Palau had physically deteriorated for the intervening eighteen years. You could see it. You could see the Japanese waterworks, the Japanese sewer works, and so forth, roads which had grown over and not been maintained at all. Saipan was the American headquarters in 1963, but it hadn’t been headquarters very long. I’ve forgotten.

Kalk: I think in 1962 the headquarters moved from Guam to Saipan.

Cooper: Right, they originally were in Hawaii, then they moved to Guam, and then they moved to Saipan. But CIA had run a big training center on Saipan. Saipan had been heavily developed by the Americans in 1944 and 1945, because that was a major air base. Then the CIA at some point—I suppose 1950 or 1951, I don’t know, but after China became Communist and the Navy withdrew—CIA took over the old air base and made a big training center out of it. So there was this major U.S. operation there which was highly secret, which brought in Taiwanese basically and who knows what others, for training, and the Chamorros were kept away from that entirely. There were some funny stories. One Chinese on one occasion got an acute toothache and the Americans didn’t have a dentist. So they had to in the middle of the night rouse this dentist in . . .

Kalk: Not Saipan? Tinian?

Cooper: No, this is a town on Saipan. it begins with a “G”. Anyway, they had to take this guy in the middle of the night and rouse the dentist up to get his teeth fixed. So obviously the Chamorros knew that something secret was going on, but they no direct contact with it and it was all wired off. While there was this American operation there, it was isolated from the Chamorros. It was only when the Trust Territory government moved, and that was only a year before we got there, that contact opened up, indeed that many Saipanese got even to see this CIA facility. The CIA withdrew and the reason that the Trust Territory government could move from Guam to Saipan was that all the structures were there, the office buildings and quarters for the American administrators, the roads.

Kalk: Especially given the reputation for a bloated bureaucracy that the Trust Territory government had, did the move of the U.S. headquarters foster economic development on Saipan?

Cooper: It created certain source of employment, as indeed all of the regional headquarters did, because all of the junior positions were filled by Saipanese. The Americans did not try to exclude the Micronesians from jobs. There was, as always, the issue of differential pay, in any colonial situation.

Kalk: I wanted to turn to that in a moment or two.

Cooper: And I was absolutely against raising the Micronesians' pay. But we can come back to that.

Kalk: What was your reasoning on that?

Cooper: On the grounds that the economy could never sustain it. The economy itself could not sustain, in my judgment, the pay that the Micronesians were then getting from the U.S. government. And of course that pay was much lower than what the American administrators were getting. I hesitate to remember numbers, but I think it was \$2 a day that was being paid to the Micronesians at a certain level. In my judgment, the natural economy could not sustain that level of pay. This is a standard problem in all colonial settings. You have the colonialists with their pay linked to their home country, as it has to be in order to get them to go out there. Then you have the colonial peoples who, particularly if they are doing similar-type jobs, for example clerical jobs, they want to know "why is the American getting four times what I am getting?" That strain means pay is very good for the colonized peoples and the private economy cannot sustain that level of pay. It means that when people get a little schooling, they aspire to get a civil service job because that is the best-paid job, it is assumed to be an easy job. This is a problem that exists all through Africa today, it exists through South Asia today, it's a terrible legacy of any colonial power. I don't know what got into the final report, but I didn't mince any words about this question with whomever I talked to, including Micronesians.

Kalk: Well, there is a related comment that I was going to mention that did get into the final report to the effect that there was the problem of higher appropriations for the Trust Territory government. One of the comments in the report was that the Commission was leery whether the islands would be able to economically sustain the vast increase in appropriations.

Cooper: Right. Exactly. Well, that's a bigger question than just the pay question. The pay question can, and I would be tempted to say has, devastated many colonial territories, including Micronesia. Anyway, I was alert to that. It's a genuine dilemma. I don't want to undermine the dilemma, but what I want to say is: doing what most people consider the decent thing is absolutely wrong, namely to give decent pay, paid for necessarily by the American taxpayer. But my main interest was not protecting the American taxpayer, because the sums were small. My main interest was protecting the viability of the Micronesian economy. It seems to me completely unhealthy when you have a situation when everyone wants to work for the government and no one wants to produce anything.

Kalk: Which, in fact, it would appear took place.

Cooper: Which is exactly what has taken place in the Marianas if my information is correct.

Kalk: Did you see as well a movement among Micronesians away from the outer islands towards the district centers? That that's where the economy was relatively booming?

Cooper: That was not an issue in the Northern Marianas because there were no outer islanders except for three hundred people on Tinian and some people on Rota. Those were the only three islands that were populated. Other parts of Micronesia, the answer is: to a lesser extent. Micronesians are remarkably close to their land. The only place we went where I

would say that was really true was the island of Truk. It was overcrowded, and you could see Malthusianism in action. This was a coral reef.

Kalk: It has the largest lagoon in the world, if I recall?

Cooper: No, but Truk has a very big lagoon.

Kalk: Okay, let's see if we can move on from that point. I was also going to inquire about some of the social problems that you may have seen in the islands, particularly in light of the 1962 polio epidemic in the Marshall Islands.

Cooper: There is a huge logistical problem. But basically the technique was when somebody you could not take care of in a more traditional way radioed, you would send a rescue lift. That obviously is a tenuous operation. The Marshalls were three thousand miles away [from Guam].

Kalk: What about the Trust Territory government? What was your impression of the government and its level of competence?

Cooper: Somewhat plodding. Not a lot of imagination, varying degrees of experience, and by the standards of Washington, where I had just worked for a few years, very slow. Very slow. What struck me about the Americans there was that almost none of them were from the forty-eight states. They were from the fringes of the United States. The High Commissioner, as I recall ...

Kalk: Bill Goding?

Cooper: ...was from Alaska. There were Puerto Ricans there, there were people from the Virgin Islands, from American Samoa—this is in the Trust Territory government. So that there were people from the fringes. That was very striking. Some people had gone to the lower forty-eight and left as though "life in the fast lane" was too fast. I found some people [in the Trust Territory government] who I actually considered very wise. There was a conscious program to bring Micronesians along.

Kalk: Into the Trust Territory government?

Cooper: Into the Trust Territory government. There was no attempt that I am aware of to exclude Micronesians.

Kalk: The ultimate report from the Solomon Commission was fairly critical of the Trust Territory government. My colleague and I have been able to read documents from the Defense and State Departments which in essence concur with many of the recommendations of the Solomon Commission. We have not been able to locate the reaction of the Department of the Interior, which is somewhat surprising since ostensibly they were the most directly affected department. Do you recall any response on the part of Interior?

Cooper: Yes, I recall their response exactly. They weren't satisfied with us. President Kennedy was assassinated just two weeks before Solomon was to turn in the report of the Commission. I was pressed that all of my notes, draft material, be sent by government courier because it had all been upgraded to classification "secret."

Kalk: From the pressure from the Department of the Interior?

Cooper: That is a sure sign, a sure sign that they were shelving it .

Kalk: What was your reaction toward the native elites? You commented briefly on Micronesians in the Trust Territory government, but what about the traditional and emerging young elites? Did you have any contact with them during the mission?

- Cooper: I had contact with lots of people because I took a statistical turn and I took it upon myself to do a complete business census. I talked with every businessman in the islands.
- Kalk: What about political savvy or the efficacy of self-interest and that being turned into public policy?
- Cooper: Almost completely absent. They made a comment along those lines, I remember, that “We just hope that in the next great war we are on the winning side for a change.” They were with the Spanish in the Spanish-American War, the Germans in World War I, the Japanese in the Second World War. I think they recognized that they were dependent on society as far as their contact with the rest of the world was concerned. They were a very gentle people. Even their criticisms of the American administration were somewhat muted. Their criticisms mainly went to promises that were made.
- Kalk: What about the Congress of Micronesia, instituted in 1965, a brand new effort at least towards the direction of self-government. Did you see anything of particular interest or a sense of an emerging political consciousness coming from that?
- Cooper: I don't get the impression that self-government was terribly serious.
- Kalk: There was a comment in the ultimate report that struck me as interesting, which was a reference to appropriations for the islands as a “strategic rental.” I don't know if that was your terminology or someone else's on the Commission. In effect, the appropriations function to subsidize a part of the world that the United States government sought to deny to other powers and that the function of economic development on the islands was such that it would hopefully bring down the price of the “strategic rental.” If the islands became more economically self-sufficient, the need to provide more government appropriations would decrease over time.
- Cooper: As I recall, the amount [of U.S. government appropriations] was \$6 million. Pitifully small.
- Kalk: It was just getting increased [during the Kennedy Administration]. It was just that year [1963] that Congress raised the limit—I think doubled it.
- Cooper: The amount of money we were putting in—”we” meaning the Office of Territories—nothing was happening; we were just leaving them alone. So it was clear that either we would have to put more money in or that we would do some development on the islands, or both. I am not sure to what extent that is reflected in the report because there was actually no economic hope, by that I mean for higher standards of living for most of the Trust Territory. The exceptions were the Marshalls (they were exporting services to the United States there) and the Northern Marianas, which had two possibilities. One was tourism.
- Kalk: Do you feel then that the idea of economic development programs to increase levels of education, health care, and infrastructure, etc., were a waste of breath?
- Cooper: Not from their [the Micronesians'] perspective. But if there was any expectation that they could make the islands self-sustaining, then I don't believe that, with the possible exception of the Marianas—Saipan and Tinian.
- Kalk: Let's turn to the Marianas in particular for a moment, because that is the focus of our study. We are especially interested in the emergence of the separatist movement on the islands. Did you have any awareness of that when you were there in 1963?
- Cooper: An awareness, yes. How seriously to take it was not at all clear. When somebody talks with his extended family about “these guys up the hill have nice housing” but they don't do

anything for us, keep in mind, there were only 8,000 people on the island, and there were only three hundred on Tinian, and I don't know how many on Rota. So you're talking about 8,000 people, half of whom are children, so you're talking about 4,000 adults.

Kalk: There was a longstanding interest, as I understand it, on the part of the Marianas with being reintegrated with Guam, in part because they shared a common ethnic past. As I understand it, they were Europeanized by the Spanish in the sixteenth century and their populations were merged in with those of European stock.

Cooper: They all had Spanish names.

Kalk: Did you recall any mention of that particular issue?

Cooper: I'd be inclined to interpret it literally as "Let's get rid of our isolation."

Kalk: So if you were to assess—if I am understanding your comments correctly—the level of consciousness in terms of a separatist movement, you don't seem to feel as if there is something that you can necessarily take too seriously as of 1963.

Cooper: Yes.

Kalk: By 1972, the Marianas agitated for separate negotiations with the U.S. Government to remain with the United States.

Cooper: Well, I knew that, and they succeeded. Is that what you meant by "separatist"?

Kalk: Yes.

Cooper: Oh, I'm sorry, you meant "separate from Micronesia" or did you mean "separating from the United States"?

Kalk: Okay, separating from the rest of Micronesia.

Cooper: I think it's fair to say, just to repeat what I said, the Micronesians as a group never had any sense of unity. I use the example of the Marshallese, but it could just as well be the Chamorros.

Kalk: So you don't see that [the political situation in the Marianas] as any different from the other islands?

Cooper: No. This was an artificial construct, the "Trust Territory".

Kalk: Did you get a sense that the Marianas were the most westernized of the islands and perhaps in a sense the most inclined to be "pro-American" in an economic and political sense?

Cooper: Well, that's probably right. It depends on what you mean by westernized. I said before that Palau was I think the most sophisticated of the Micronesians in terms of their conversance with modernity.

Kalk: Do you recall the response to the Marianas as a distinct entity, either in the other districts or from the Trust Territory government? Any concerns of the Marianas Islands breaking away from the rest of the Trust Territory being an issue in the other districts or in the Trust Territory?

Cooper: No.

Kalk: I turn for a moment to just a few of the problems that were raised at the time. One that quickly comes to mind was in the final report; the Commission commented that perhaps two to five percent at most of the Micronesians would have been inclined towards independence in 1963. We know that by 1969, just six years later, the islands seemingly

erupt in a pro-nationalist movement to separate from the United States and ultimately acquire independence. Would you say that something very significant took place during those six years or that perhaps the Commission may have misread the intentions of the islanders?

Cooper: No. You're talking about 1969? Well, first, I don't know about anything that happened after 1963. But as soon as you say 1969, what strikes a bell is that there was a worldwide insurrection in 1969—Stockholm, Paris, the United States. Now, an interesting question is how it got to Micronesia. That was a worldwide phenomenon, everywhere—Japan, the University of Tokyo.

Kalk: But here's a place where there wasn't that much consciousness of self-government, let alone seeking independence to become an independent nation.

Cooper: But everywhere, everywhere, young people were dissatisfied with the system. In the U.S., we associate it with Vietnam.

Kalk: Paris in 1968, the student strike . . .

Cooper: Paris, Stockholm, Tokyo, Ireland, Micronesia. It was a worldwide phenomenon. Vietnam happened to be the lightning rod for dissent here. In Italy, it was the archaic university system; in France it was the "autocraticness," for different reasons in different places.

Kalk: Then one might view the emergence of feelings toward independence as an ascendancy of the younger elite.

Cooper: And a reaction against the status quo.

Kalk: That's an interesting comment. Often, we have been dealing with this from the perspective from the movement away from colonialism in much of the world.

Cooper: Yes, that was true too in 1963.

Kalk: That is another problem raised in the Commission's final report, because in the final analysis the report states that if the objective is to integrate the islands within the United States government, this runs somewhat counter to the trend in recent years away from colonialism. What comments do you have about that? First, did you have a sense by the end of the study that in fact these islands should necessarily remain integrated with the United States?

Cooper: What seemed most important, to me, as an objective, was that these islands not fall into the hands of another world power. We talked about the various ways to accomplish that objective, one of which was to tie them intimately with the United States, and another of which was to tie them loosely with the United States.

Kalk: And that was not an overriding concern of the Commission?

Cooper: Independence would be just a way station to some other association. On the colonial part, when you keep in mind that the Asian colonies had all become independent, and most of the African colonies had by 1963 (all of the French had except Algeria) . . .

Kalk: 1962.

Cooper: 1960-62. Kennedy's concern was that from a formal point of view, the U.S., with its tradition of anti-colonialism, would be the last colonial power. "Formal" meaning with the U.N. Trusteeship Council. More and more attention was to be focused on the colonial power of the United States, and there's an historical irony in that which Kennedy was aware of.

- Kalk: Did the members of the Commission feel pressures to find ways to mitigate against that?
- Cooper: Oh, yes, absolutely. Kennedy did not want to be seen as the presider over the last colonial empire, so we were looking for some form of self-government. The position we came away with was the conviction that the status quo was not desirable. Some change would have to take place.
- Kalk: What was the aftermath of the report? Do you recall conversations with any policymakers, anything of that nature?
- Cooper: No, none. Solomon was going to report to Kennedy at the time. [At this point that Professor Cooper discusses his opinion that someone in the Department of the Interior probably engineered the classification of “secret” for the Solomon Report as a “sure sign” that it would be shelved, presumably because the report was critical of Interior’s handling of the Trust Territory]
- Kalk: It is ironic that you mention that. The report states that the Peace Corps [in Micronesia] should be a “spectacular success.” Many commentators have later said that in fact some Peace Corps volunteers helped foster ideas toward independence. But you don’t have any remembrance of that?
- Cooper: No, no. I know that we recommended it [sending the Peace Corps to Micronesia].
- Kalk: It’s interesting to speak with you because I almost get the impression that once the mission was completed and you prepared your notes to Anthony Solomon, but in terms of the overall report, the final draft, you really had minimal contact.
- Cooper: In fact I never saw it. I never saw the final report until I asked to see it when I was in the State Department. But I never saw the final report then [1963]. I continued to be friends with Tony Solomon.
- Kalk: Do you recall what is contained in the body [of the report] that remains classified? The summary and the introduction have been declassified, but that’s the only portion of it that to this date is available.
- Cooper: Well, as I say, I’ve never seen the report, and so I don’t know. My piece of it, as I recall, was about one hundred thirty pages long. Gerry Mangone, I think, worked with Solomon on the final report.
- Kalk: Why do you think this was classified so long, and remains classified? Can you think of any part of it in particular that you think should remain closed to the public?
- Cooper: Absolutely not.
- Kalk: To what extent do you feel that the report was implemented as a matter of policy by the Johnson Administration?
- Cooper: I have no idea. As I say, I lost track of it entirely. It was buried, as far as I was concerned. Then I subsequently learned that the Peace Corps volunteers—well, I knew that the budget had gone up, so that they were doing something with infrastructure.
- Kalk: But you have no knowledge of Johnson’s approach towards the islands?
- Cooper: The next time I caught up with it [Micronesian policy] was in the 1970s when somebody in the State Department was negotiating with them for their future status.
- Kalk: There was some criticism in 1971 of the Commission in Micronesia itself. An article appeared in a newspaper called the Young Micronesian, which somehow had gotten hold of the summary and the introduction of the report. It made the report out to be a

colonial-promoting document, one that would encourage dependency on the part of the Trust Territory and one that would encourage it to remain within the United States. Do you have any familiarity with these criticisms?

Cooper: None, but I think in some sense they're right. My feeling, repeatedly—being a really hard-nosed view, a sharp-pencil view—was these islands are unsustainable in modern society. I mean, they're sustainable as traditional islands. So anyone of a mind to do it could write what you said they wrote, and I would be happy with such a person anytime to sit down and defend colonialism. That does not exclude self-government.

Kalk: A final question for you. In the intervening years, marine policy, particularly underwater mining, has become an increasingly interesting and viable economic prospect for the South Pacific. Particularly I am referring to the manganese nodules under the Marianas trench and other parts of the Pacific. I know that Professor Mangone has since acquired quite an interest in strategic minerals and underwater mining, and I even noticed that you have written a report for the Trilateral Commission, I don't know if it was on this or not.

Cooper: I have an interest in the management of the oceans.

Kalk: Did that [strategic minerals and underwater mining] figure at all in 1963?

Cooper: There was nothing on the horizon whatsoever on mining. Nothing. Now on the issues of fisheries, we accepted the U.S. position.

Kalk: But there was nothing in the report on seabed mining at all?

Cooper: Oh, I am sure there was nothing on seabed mining. Seabed mining is no longer an issue.

Kalk: But in the 1970s and early 1980s it was.

Cooper: It was thought to be a big issue involving the jurisdictional limits of national waters and the impact on the fishing industry. That has greatly extended the resources of these islands in ways that we did not anticipate. If somebody had suggested that to us, we would have rejected that.

Kalk: Do you have any final comments on the aftermath of the report?

Cooper: My guess about tourism in the Marianas was correct.

Kalk: Professor Cooper, thank you for your help.