

INTERVIEW OF SAMUEL DEPALMA

by Howard P. Willens

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- Willens: Mr. Samuel DePalma served for several decades in the Department of State and served as Assistant Secretary of State in the early years of the Nixon Administration. Mr. DePalma, thank you very much for making yourself available for an interview on this subject, which I know was a relatively minor issue in the years that you were at the Department. As I mentioned before we went on the record, I did review your interview at the Georgetown library, and I learned there somewhat more about your education and early years of service at the Department of State. With respect to that, did you have any contact with the problems associated with the Trust Territory during the 1950s when you were with the Political Affairs Office at the International Organizations Bureau?
- DePalma: Actually, I did not. I could overhear some of the things that were going on, because I was part of the bureau that was involved. But I never actually worked on Trust [Territory] matters.
- Willens: Then I notice that in 1965 you went to the ACDA for four years. Could you remind me what the ACDA was?
- DePalma: Arms Control & Disarmament Agency.
- Willens: I see. Then in 1969 you were designated as assistant secretary, and you expressed some surprise at that appointment during your earlier interview. Could you recall for me the circumstances under which you found yourself asked to assume that position?
- DePalma: Well, I had had what I considered some onerous duty in the Arms Control & Disarmament Agency, although I was treated very well and was made an assistant director of it and so forth. But it was off the beat for a State Department foreign service kind of career, and I was champing at the bit to get out of there after we had completed the Nuclear Arms Proliferation Treaty, which was on my beat and which I was glad I was able to work with. So I was just kind of floundering around, and all of a sudden (and this is literally the way it happened), I had a call from the Secretary's office, Rogers' office, and he said would I please come upstairs. And of course I went upstairs. I had a hunch this had something to do with employment. And he was being very coy. He said he wanted to talk to me about an assignment. He hoped it would come as a pleasant surprise. Would I wait a few minutes. And I did. I sat around. He had a little back office off his regular office. He led me to the back office and opened the door, and there sitting on the couch was his eminence, the President, whom I had never seen, knew nothing about. I have to tell you very frankly, I've never been a Republican. I have sometimes strayed in my vote, but he was never one of my favorites, then or after. And I don't know why he was doing that, why he was visiting the Department. I was one of two people, I understand, that day who were conducted there and who were told by him that we would be the assistant secretaries. That usually was not done. Anyway, I never have figured out why this happened. But that's the way I became Assistant Secretary.
- Willens: Did either the President or Secretary Rogers ask you any questions about your views regarding the United Nations?
- DePalma: Well, my recollection is they didn't ask me questions. Both had the same outlook, though, and it came up in the very brief conversation. They were firm believers in the U.N., but

they wanted to be sure that we didn't go overboard, that we were realistic, and that we didn't succumb to this U.N.—it is which makes people think the U.N. comes first and the U.S. ought to adapt to it. It's the other way around. It was made very clear that we were going to be realistic in our support. We would support the U.N., but in a realistic manner.

Willens: Was there any sense that you shared that your predecessors had been not realistic with respect to the U.N.?

DePalma: No, but the flattering comment was made obviously because it was easy to say that they had felt that because of my actions in the Disarmament Agency that I knew that I was working for the U.S. government and not for any multi-national organization. I don't think they had any real basis for that, and I have to say very frankly, I am by nature sort of a skeptic. I wouldn't call myself a hard-liner, but I just don't buy idealistic things if they don't seem to work out. I'd like them to work, I want them to work, but if they don't, I'm kind of a crusty character.

Willens: Well, I gather that you were appointed then fairly early in the Administration, February or early March of 1969.

DePalma: Yes.

Willens: After you assumed those responsibilities, did you get any briefing from people in the office with respect to the situation in the Trust Territory?

DePalma: Absolutely nothing.

Willens: Were there any hold-overs in the persons of Don McHenry or Mr. Gleysteen who had worked in this area earlier?

DePalma: Yes, but very briefly. McHenry had had a little exposure to it, as I recall. Of course, he was not in my bureau. And the young man, Peale or whatever his name was, in our bureau who worked on trusteeship matters had been familiar with things. Gleysteen, when he came in, picked it up very quickly. But we hadn't really any long, detailed history, at least not that I was aware of. There again, to be very frank, Trusteeship matters had already been relegated almost to the background, because the major [U.N.] trustee things had already occurred. And this, when I came in the bureau, was not one of the things that I was exposed to. Usually when the new person takes over a bureau, you quickly run through the major issues. This was not even mentioned, I'm sure, when I came in. It was resting there quietly, and one or two officers in the part of the bureau that handled this were, of course, engaged, but it was some time before I really got into the project.

Willens: Was Sam Peale one of those who were actively engaged?

DePalma: Yes.

Willens: Incidentally, do you know where he's located presently?

DePalma: I have no idea.

Willens: Well, your memorandum of early March to the Secretary that I have provided you carries the date of March 14, 1969. It's under Tab 1 in the book. It seems to have been drafted by Mr. Peale. It is designed to alert Secretary Rogers to what is characterized as a deteriorating political situation in the TTPI. Do you have any recollection as to what prompted the writing of this memo to the Secretary and the request that he forward a memorandum to the President and contact Secretary Hickel on this subject?

- DePalma: Really, I have to tell you I don't have any kind of recollection of that kind. I have a vague remembrance that the matter was first broached to me in the sense reflected in this memo that things were going to heat up. The question of Micronesia was now coming to the fore. And there were people who were already stirring around doing things, mainly Interior and Defense and so on, and we in the State Department had been very quiescent on this matter for a long time, and we just better get involved because of our responsibility for seeing to it that it was done in accordance with the U.N. Charter. It was just that kind of a vague approach that I recall. And the memo is just an effort to let the Secretary know that we are going to have to get involved in this because apparently the Department had done nothing on this for years, to my knowledge.
- Willens: What's interesting about that is that the Department in the earlier years had really tried very hard to press its view and reach agreement with the Interior Department as to how to implement Executive Branch policy. And it was unsuccessful.
- DePalma: I'm glad you reminded me. You see, I'd completely forgotten that. And then after that, we just sat back.
- Willens: Well it finally got President Johnson to propose a presidential commission.
- DePalma: That's right.
- Willens: But Congressman Aspinall and others vetoed that prospect. There is some evidence in the documents that there was concern within the Executive Branch generally that the Micronesian Future Status Commission was about to issue its report, and there were some preliminary indications that it was going to favor a status of free association or independence. Do you recall any discussion within the Department about that report?
- DePalma: Not that report. I do recall the concern about the issue, but it's not in my mind focused on any report. Nor can I relate it to a particular set of meetings. As I've said, this was not something I was paying daily attention to. These memos came to me periodically. It was not until we were two-thirds through this exercise that I had been through enough of the drill to have been really involved and actually participated in meetings. But I was never a principal player personally in this.
- Willens: Do you recall whether Secretary Rogers approved the recommendation in this memorandum and forwarded the draft memorandum to the President on this subject? There's no indication on the draft that I have that he approved it. There was some action that followed this memo, however, and so it looks to me as though he responded favorably, but I wonder whether you have any recollection.
- DePalma: I have no actual recollection what he did on this.
- Willens: Do you recall any initiative coming from the Defense Department in 1969 on this subject? At this point, of course, we're in the depths or heights of the Vietnam conflict, and I wonder whether the Defense Department was assuming any initiative in trying to resolve the future status of the Trust Territory.
- DePalma: I don't recall Defense Department initiatives early in the exercise, the part that I was concerned with. It doesn't mean that there wasn't. But it did not come to my attention. And I wasn't really knowledgeable at all of the strong Defense Department interest. I knew it was there, but I didn't know of a specific interest until really midway in this particular exercise.
- Willens: One thing that interests me is the fact that the National Security Council was reorganized early in the Nixon Administration, and the Under Secretaries Committee began to assume

a role with respect to Micronesian policy. Did you play any role in the reorganization of the NSC?

DePalma: No.

Willens: Do you have any understanding as to what prompted the reorganization, which I assume was stimulated by Dr. Kissinger?

DePalma: I don't really recall why it happened. There was a push also from the State Department that I'm aware of, but of course we were not in control of the reorganization. But I know there was a concern about having the right place in the White House where matters of this kind could be treated. Kissinger obviously did it, but I don't know where the concern actually first came from.

Willens: There is some reference in the first of these memoranda to Ambassador Pederson, who reportedly was in touch with Dr. Kissinger, and the question of the TTPI is being actively considered for discussion by the National Security Council. Who was Ambassador Pederson?

DePalma: Pederson was our man in New York at the time. I didn't just place him right there. Yes, he must have been ...

Willens: Was he the Ambassador to the U.N.?

DePalma: Not to, but one of ...

Willens: One of the mission?

DePalma: ... one of the mission. And the second-ranking man, as I recall. And so he was getting the input from there and alerting the Department and others that this is a matter that we had to turn our attention to because people were already talking about this in the islands. He was not aware that there was any current policy on this.

Willens: And there was a Trusteeship Council scheduled for May of that year.

DePalma: Yes.

Willens: One of the efforts of the Department of State in the early years had been to try to get White House involvement. And what's interesting here is that under the reorganization of the NSC, the under secretaries did get involved, and it became then a mechanism through which the Executive Branch could submit their views and an Executive Branch position could get put before the President for his approval or disapproval. Did you regard the Under Secretaries Committee as a useful mechanism for framing Executive Branch positions on a subject like Micronesia?

DePalma: Oh yes, and particularly on this kind of a subject. This subject would never have interested their principals, the secretaries. They would have relegated it to some very low level, because it was just too peripheral for them. But having the Under Secretaries Committee there meant that you couldn't bury a subject like this. Even the Under Secretaries Committee, if it chose to send it down, it would retain cognizance of it, so it was a very useful device. And it could work in many other areas after that. It was an indispensable thing. You can't have secretaries of various departments meeting periodically. Who had the time? And if they did, they wouldn't be briefed well enough because they're carrying so many other things. To do the job, you need an Under Secretaries Committee.

Willens: Some more cynical evaluators of the situation suggest that Dr. Kissinger set about to organize a variety of committees and involved the bureaucracy in studying those issues while reserving to his own staff some of the more important issues.

- DePalma: It's certainly true of his attitude. I don't believe that the initiative for establishing the Under Secretaries Committee was motivated by that. Even if Kissinger did it, it was very badly needed. There was a big gap in the way the secretaries of the various departments got their information. And when they were forced to deal with it, they were talking to underlings that they hadn't dealt with. So I wouldn't accuse Dr. Kissinger of any ulterior motives on that one. I know how he used them, and so on, but that's another story.
- Willens: Where do you think the impetus came from for establishing an Under Secretaries Committee?
- DePalma: I'm really not sure. I know that there was interest in the State Department, but I'm not sure that we played the principal role. I honestly can't tell you.
- Willens: All right. There was apparently a meeting of the Under Secretaries Committee on March 24, 1969, and reference to it is contained in the memo under Tab 2 from you to designated people at Interior, Defense and the White House. Do you recall attending the meeting of March 24, 1969 as reflected in this memorandum?
- DePalma: I really have no specific recollection of attending the meeting.
- Willens: There seemed to be two recommendations that are summarized in the first paragraph of your memorandum prepared by Mr. Peale dated March 28, 1969. One recommendation of the Under Secretaries Committee was to recommend that the President appoint a special representative to work on matters relating to the future status of the TTPI. Do you recall any opposition by Interior to that recommendation at the meeting?
- DePalma: No, I don't. I mean I don't recall the discussion at the meeting at all, to be very frank.
- Willens: Subsequently, Under Secretary Richardson wrote a memorandum which I did not provide you indicating that Hickel was not only opposed to the creation of a special representative but also to the fact that you had been designated as chairman of the Inter-Agency Working Group. Do you recall Interior expressing views to you personally or to your colleagues on that subject?
- DePalma: Yes. Well, I don't quite know how it got down to me, but yes, I do, and it didn't surprise us at all, because Interior did not want the center of the action to be in the State Department. We were not at all surprised by the attitude. It was a constant kind of problem all the way through the exercise.
- Willens: As I review the documents, it appears as though the committee under your chairmanship did draft a policy paper that I presume basically followed the outline. It's attached to your memorandum. But subsequently it looks as though Assistant Secretary Loesch assumed the chairmanship of an Inter-Agency Work Force. Is that more or less what happened?
- DePalma: Yes. That's right.
- Willens: Do you recall any personal discussions with Mr. Loesch or other Interior representatives on that issue?
- DePalma: No. But I do vaguely recall a discussion with the Secretary of State about this kind of development and vaguely remember that we were telling each other this has to go that way. There's no point in trying to assert a State Department primacy here because it will only give rise to people who would then start going to the President and trying to get around this. We might as well try to ease this situation. I remember vaguely some sort of attempt to accommodate ourselves to that situation.

- Willens: As it happened, a special representative was not appointed for another two years, until Haydn Williams was appointed in early 1971. What's your assessment looking back about the need for a special representative and whether an earlier appointment might have been a useful decision to make?
- DePalma: Oh, it's hard for me to say. Just off the top of my head, I would say that things were in too messy a situation at this very point. Maybe a year later into the exercise, maybe we shouldn't have waited as long as they did. But the exercise was so formless and it would have been very difficult to get agreement on the person and for him to have actually done anything very useful until more of the issues had been sifted. I think he was appointed a little late, but I don't think it would have helped too much if he'd been appointed fairly early on.
- Willens: With respect to the study that was done under your chairmanship by the committee, I do have copies of it. It seems to reaffirm the national security interest in trying to reach some status for Micronesia that would provide the United States with denial to foreign powers and fall-back positions for military bases. But as you recall, there was no greater sense of urgency expressed by Defense than they had for several years.
- DePalma: Not at that early point. The Defense sense of urgency seemed to increase as the meetings went on, and I think Defense didn't believe anything much was going to happen for a while. At least they didn't have enough people involved in it to develop that kind of a sense. It wasn't until they saw that something was going to have to happen that they really came on very strong, but not at the very beginning. It was Interior that was really pushing it.
- Willens: What do you think was motivating the Interior personnel to push forward?
- DePalma: Frankly, I think it was personalities. There was somebody—I can't even remember—but there was somebody dynamic who had got hold of this subject. It was his subject. He was doing something with it. I didn't feel until halfway in the exercise that Interior really was involved in the sense of the top people. To be perfectly frank, even then, I think Interior regarded this as an onerous thing. There was nothing in Micronesia for the Interior Department except a headache.
- Willens: Well, there were two people that seemed to play very active roles at the sub-cabinet level. One was Assistant Secretary Harrison Loesch.
- DePalma: Yes.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection of dealing with Mr. Loesch?
- DePalma: Only just vaguely. But I remember an active, firm, dynamic kind of person. You should take this with many grains of salt. My impression is that it was a person who got on to this subject, made it his own and rode it hard, and kept Interior really involved in it. I didn't have a sense until late in the exercise that Interior at topside really felt very strongly about this issue.
- Willens: There was a Foreign Service officer who was later assigned to Interior, Stanley S. Carpenter. Do you have any recollection of Mr. Carpenter?
- DePalma: No.
- Willens: After the policy paper was prepared, it was submitted to the Under Secretaries Committee, and the discussions and documents reflect some differences among the agencies. One of the most important was whether independence was an option that ought to be definitely provided to the Micronesians in the course of selecting some future status. Did you feel

that the State Department position on this was important and required by the obligations of the Trusteeship Agreement?

DePalma: Well, yes. Our position was that we had to make clear that this option was not arbitrarily foreclosed or we wouldn't get the kind of vote we needed in the Trusteeship Council. So we had always to hang on to that particular issue. But in point of substance, in point of fact, we in the State Department never really thought independence was a very viable issue. At least as soon as we got into the exercise enough, and this was fairly early, and realized what in fact Micronesia was, who the people were, it didn't seem to make sense. What some of our people thought was that independence might be a future option, but that ought to be left open, and not to press this issue right now.

Willens: Did the Legal Advisor's Office at State play an active role on this issue?

DePalma: Yes. The Legal Advisor's Office was involved all the way through.

Willens: Their views on this subject have been characterized as quite ideological or almost religious regarding what was required by the Trusteeship Agreement.

DePalma: They were sort of pure legal views, yes. And perhaps that's a good thing, because none of the rest of us were going to take that particular approach. And if they didn't do it, it could quickly get away from the legal realities. It was not an obstructionist approach at all, but it was clear-cut advice: don't forget this and don't forget that.

Willens: The traditional role of lawyers who don't have to make the practical judgments. Another issue was the extent to which the United States had to offer meaningful self-government to the Micronesians, and this ultimately turned into a debate about whether there had to be an elected governor. Did you have any assessment at the time in 1969 as to whether the Micronesians were in fact ready for self-government?

DePalma: I'll tell you very frankly that we in the State Department were very badly informed at the beginning of this exercise. We were relying on too many people outside the Department trying to tell us what the situation was in Micronesia. It wasn't until halfway through this exercise that we had a decent appreciation of the facts. When we did, we may have had a somewhat distorted one because I think we had to rely too much on not our own sources. And I think we became a little concerned that the level of education and so on in the territories was not quite what we had assumed at the beginning and that one had to take that into account in this whole exercise. That we were dealing with a people who were not exactly ready to take over their own government in the next few months. I don't think that became a main issue with us, but we completely agreed with the Legal Bureau that we had to go through with the exercise. We couldn't just arbitrarily say, "No independence, period."

Willens: Did you ever personally visit the Trust Territory?

DePalma: No.

Willens: Did you ever meet with any of the Micronesian leaders who came to the States?

DePalma: Yes. I remember several meetings. I remember lunch. I remember it mostly because there was some jolly fellow from there who could tell us some stories that were rather peculiar.

Willens: But is it your recollection now that the State Department may have been more optimistic about the capabilities of the Micronesians to assume full responsibilities of self-government than you later came to believe?

- DePalma: I'm not so sure. No, I think there was the usual kind of approach. We had the legalistic approach—we must not arbitrarily freeze this. And then we had the cautious, more realist other people who said, "You know, but these people are far from ready." I don't think we ever came to a hard decision on that. We weren't in a position to. We didn't frankly in the State Department know enough about Micronesia or the people there. We just didn't. We had to rely on others.
- Willens: Your interest in having more reliable information resulted ultimately in the appointment of a Foreign Service officer, John Dorrance, to be a liaison and to provide reporting services.
- DePalma: Right.
- Willens: Did you know Mr. Dorrance?
- DePalma: Not then.
- Willens: Did you come to rely on his reports?
- DePalma: Yes. Well, we really had very little else to go on in terms of our own sources of information. And as I recall, he seemed to do the job quite well. I have no specific recollection, but I recall that we came to rely on him.
- Willens: As a result of the preparation of the staff paper and the meeting of the Under Secretaries Committee, certain decisions were made. One of the decisions was to authorize Secretary Hickel to visit the Trust Territory and announce for the first time that the United States was interested in exploring a permanent relationship with the Micronesians. Did you have any views one way or the other as to the desirability of sending Secretary Hickel out with that kind of a message?
- DePalma: I have very little specific recollection of how we felt. I don't recall that we had any reason to be opposed to this. We had reached a stage clearly when we had to move the issue, and it seemed that something like this had to be done. We had to get the issue before the Micronesians in a way that made them realize that there were certain limits, great opportunities but also certain limits. I think we regarded it as inevitable.
- Willens: The Under Secretaries Committee also rejected the options of independence or free association and authorized the drafting of an organic act that would provide the Micronesians with a status similar to American Samoa or Guam. That decision represented a substantial change from the positions previously urged by the State Department. Was it your sense then that it was politically necessary to go forward with some specific proposal even if it wasn't one that State traditionally had favored?
- DePalma: Yes. And also that it had become clear then that if the matter were not handled along this kind of a channel, that we'd have a situation with the Defense Department, which would really assert itself behind Interior and say, "This is what we have to do." And everybody, not everybody, but people I was able to talk with, assumed, perhaps wrongfully, that if Defense was pushed into that kind of an attitude, we would be caught in a position which would not sell in the U.N. but which our U.S. government would be committed to. So everybody wanted to avoid that extreme. And also by that time I think there was a general realization in State, and growing in Interior, that we had to find this kind of an accommodation. The infighting was on specifics, no longer on general principles, once we crossed this bridge.
- Willens: At the time that Secretary Hickel visited the Trust Territory, there had been many public statements by Micronesian political leaders that they were going to recommend a status

of free association or alternatively independence. Was there any sense within the State Department that going forward with a draft organic act was going to be viewed as a very provocative and unacceptable alternative?

DePalma: I can't say there was. I don't think we were at all opposed to going ahead with it at that point. If we had opposed it, we had worked our way into it far enough so we were not fighting the idea.

Willens: One of the interesting reactions to the publicity about Hickel's visit was that the newspapers reported that the United States was about to annex the Trust Territory, and that prompted some concern among our allies with interests in the Western Pacific. Do you recall any discussion being prompted with representatives of Great Britain or New Zealand on this subject?

DePalma: Yes. You have also, and I know this is reflected in this, you have also background music to all of this. There are people in New York who were watching this, and there were countries who had representatives on the Trusteeship Council who obviously (and I can't cite facts, but we sensed this) somehow had been approached about this point in the exercise by people (I don't know whether by Micronesians directly or people who liked the Micronesians or whatever). So there was an attempt to stir up some activity anticipating what the U.S. would do, and our people in New York, our mission in New York, got wind of this and began to report it. I don't think it ever got very serious, but we were made aware and we were able to make the other members on the Under Secretaries Committee aware that the thing now was bubbling around a bit in New York, and we had to be even more careful. But it never really got out of hand in New York.

Willens: When you attended Under Secretaries Committee meetings, did you feel free to be an active participant, or were you principally there as staff to the senior Department of State representative?

DePalma: These meetings were really quite brief. They went almost by rote. The papers did the job. It was a subject on which they could act that way. Everybody knew what the other guy was going to say, and so on and so forth. I can vaguely recall an Under Secretary turning around and asking me something. That was my kind of participation. At the Under Secretaries meeting, it was not customary for hangers-on to participate. There was always a hierarchal approach. I clearly had to brief them and debrief them afterwards and so on.

Willens: One of the names in the documents identifying staff at the NSC refers to Arthur Hartman, who subsequently was Ambassador to France and elsewhere.

DePalma: Yes.

Willens: Do you recall his being actively involved?

DePalma: No. Frankly I don't.

Willens: Do you recall any staff people at the NSC who took a particular interest in this topic?

DePalma: Not off hand, no.

Willens: After Hickel went to Micronesia, the Inter-Agency Group sort of regrouped, because among other things an organic act was being prepared by the Interior Department. Do you recall any discussion as reflected in the documents that Congressman Aspinall wanted to introduce an organic act promptly without any advance consultation with the Micronesians?

- DePalma: Well, if I hadn't had the chance to skim through these, I would have said no. So now I can't remember whether it's these that prompted my memory or not. I was aware of the Aspinall problem, as we looked on it at the time. I don't know how soon I became aware of it, but it became a kind of an issue right along. I didn't think so at the time, but I wondered looking back whether somebody wasn't using that threat to influence our approach. I don't know how real that threat really was. At the time, though, I think that they had to take it seriously.
- Willens: Did you ever meet Congressman Aspinall?
- DePalma: I did, but he's just a vague something in my mind.
- Willens: Did you ever testify before him?
- DePalma: No.
- Willens: Or attend a hearing at which a State Department representative testified?
- DePalma: Yes. I'm trying to remember what it was.
- Willens: There were subsequently some oversight hearings that we'll come to after I guess the second round of negotiations.
- DePalma: I remember attending a hearing of Aspinall's.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection as to Aspinall and the degree of authority that he seemed to exert over Interior?
- DePalma: Well, certainly in this issue, I've been conditioned before, so I assumed he was really in charge of this issue, and I didn't think anybody else really gave a damn. There are issues like that in the Congress. That seemed to be his baby. We weren't aware of anybody else who was gnawing on this.
- Willens: The organic act that was being prepared by the Interior Department raised again this issue of an elected governor or some alternative to that. There is a memorandum here (I guess under tab eight) addressed from you to the Acting Secretary with respect to whether or not the legislation or organic act should include an elected governor. You proposed here some alternatives, including an elected governor but supplemented by an advisor, and you requested authority to present that alternative to Interior. Do you recall any internal Department of State discussion as to how to deal with this issue when this organic act was being evaluated?
- DePalma: I don't really, and my only recollection is that at this point we and the Legal Bureau were working really quite closely together. We didn't have issues between us. We just had to sort of be sure that we covered all the ground that each of us felt was necessary. So my recollection is that this seemed to be the right thing for us to do. And actually L [legal] had a very strong input at this time.
- Willens: You respected their legal analysis, but you suggested their tactics were perhaps not the most politically adept given the Interior position. Is that fair?
- DePalma: Right. Yes.
- Willens: While this was going on, in terms of preparing for what turned out to be the first round of Micronesian negotiations, the Future Status Commission established by the Congress of Micronesia did submit its report in the summer of 1969. As predicted, it proposed a status known as free association. Did you have any understanding at the time as to exactly what a free association relationship might be?

- DePalma: Oh, I think, in my mind at least, it's quite vague, because I wasn't spending that much time on it. I knew from the discussion in general what it would be, but if you had asked me at the time to really define it, I would have had trouble. I was relying too much on other people at that time.
- Willens: Who principally were you relying on at this point in time?
- DePalma: At this point, had Peale come in? I can't remember who came in and took over there at this point.
- Willens: Peale's name is on several of these documents.
- DePalma: Later on I think it was still Peale, and the Legal Bureau.
- Willens: I see some other names, Mr. Frisbee, Mr. Day, on some of these memos. But as you recall now, Mr. Peale was someone that you looked to for the most detailed knowledge with respect to the subject.
- DePalma: Yes. Later on, I have to tell you that I felt I was better relying on Mr. Day. And I kind of remember a friend who took over from him. And Armitage and people like that. My recollection at the time and from looking at this is that Peale did an outstanding job. He was too low in the totem pole to be able to handle some of the things, and I soon found myself having to deal with Day and Armitage.
- Willens: Did Armitage have a more senior position?
- DePalma: Yes.
- Willens: Was he in your bureau?
- DePalma: No. Not then.
- Willens: Do you know where he's located now?
- DePalma: I don't.
- Willens: Looking back on the summer of 1969, do you think that the report of the Micronesian Status Commission had any effect whatsoever on U.S. policy?
- DePalma: Well, I don't know. I think it was felt that things were pretty much going in stride and this report was something we could keep working with and work on. I don't recall that it made any great impression or gave any jolt to the proceedings.
- Willens: There's some indication in the documents that some people in the United States government felt that there was no constitutional basis for a free association relationship. Had you ever heard that thought expressed?
- DePalma: Well, I had, but I never pursued it myself. I know that I vaguely recall some conversations where we thought the Legal Bureau would have to take the responsibility of looking into that. And I do recall some discussions, and there was concern expressed, and there were doubts expressed at this. But by the same token, my vague memory is that most people felt that there was a way to do this. One had to be careful, but it was not impossible.
- Willens: At the Trusteeship Council meeting in 1969, representatives of the Marianas appeared once again to tell the members of the Council that they wanted to have a separate status from the rest of Micronesia and reintegrate with Guam. When do you recall first becoming aware that the Marianas seemed to have separate aspirations from the rest of Micronesia?
- DePalma: We were made aware of this fairly early on. I don't remember just exactly how or why. It was in very informal discussions with Interior and Defense people and all that. It was

made clear fairly soon that when you said Micronesia, you weren't talking about an entity. And every time somebody would say, "Well, we think that they were this," somebody would point out that, "Well, you're only talking about one group." So by the time we got that far along the exercise, it was obvious we were dealing with this real problem that you didn't have a basic consensus. And I don't recall now who were the most influential people one had to really pay attention to.

Willens: In addition to a legal objection to dealing with the Marianas separately, there also were some practical concerns. Did you formulate any view while you were Assistant Secretary as to what State should do with respect to this Marianas desire for separate status?

DePalma: I don't recall that I personally had any input of that kind at that point. I know that we were more and more getting in a position where we could see that the issue was going to be framed by Interior and Defense and that our real purpose had to be to keep it clean and keep it doable. In a sense it's a peculiar kind of statement to make since we were actually centrally involved, but by this time we had no illusions that we were going to be able to lay down the law for Defense or for Interior, so we really became the middleman at this stage. And so the issue gets a little muddled in my mind because we weren't driving anything.

Willens: Did that result in part from the fact that the inter-agency work was now being done under the chairmanship of Assistant Secretary Loesch?

DePalma: In part. And in part because positions were now very well known. So we knew what we were dealing with. It was clear that we had to play a kind of minor mediating role, although we couldn't really mediate, but we had to go through those motions. And just as I said, keep the exercise clean in terms of our approach to the U.N. More and more, we had been forced into that position.

Willens: But as you were trying to maintain that position, the U.S. position with respect to future status alternatives was consistently unsupportable (to use a strong word) with respect to Trusteeship Agreement obligations. Isn't that right?

DePalma: That's right.

Willens: So to some extent, State's effort to keep it clean and maintain compliance with the Trusteeship Agreement was being outweighed by Defense and Interior positions.

DePalma: Very true, and forcing us more and more into the position that I said. We lost our ability to try to actually deal with the issues, because we had to take up all our time and keep the exercise within a certain kind of respectable channel so we could carry it through in the U.N.

Willens: So you found yourself arguing, for example, about whether there should be an elected governor or an appointed governor with an advisor, or whatever. You found yourself debating issues like those which you might regard as peripheral.

DePalma: Yes, and in the awkward position at times of having to be careful that we didn't express a judgment as a real preference that we ourselves could complicate the issue with. In other words, we wanted to get a kind of agreement we could sell. We were not at this point trying to sell a particular kind of settlement. It may have been, I don't know, inter-agency politics which were above my head. Or there may have been a decision already made topside of which I was not even aware. But increasingly we came to that position.

Willens: Some of your predecessors have described an institutional concern at State with the creation of a multiplicity of mini-states and suggested that some of the opposition to

dealing separately with the Marianas was concern for fragmentation and adding more mini-states to the international roster.

- DePalma: I think that played a very minor role. Yes, there was always such a concern. And our bureau thought more strongly about it than almost anywhere else in the Department. But I don't recall that that was a sharp issue in terms of the Marianas. It did occur to us, definitely, and we were already in our bureau expressing concern (which incidentally got us nowhere in the U.S. government) about the future of the U.N. We could see what was going to happen. I remember talking about 135 states. It's turned out to be a lot more. And people were sort of blasé about it and didn't seem to care. So we did raise the issue, but I don't remember it strongly in this case.
- Willens: At this time, of course, the so-called Committee of 24 was still active, although it seems from the documents that near the end of the 1960 decade, Department of State officials in your bureau were somewhat less concerned about the political impact of criticism within the United Nations than had been the case during the Kennedy Administration.
- DePalma: I think so. There was a feeling that we've got to do it right and we've got to do what we've got to do. We can't just go by appearances. There was a much firmer approach to the U.N.
- Willens: Did this reflect some change in ideology, or was it sort of a growing sense of realism about the limitations of the U.N.?
- DePalma: Both. Definitely ideology in terms of the Executive, but also very definitely a growing realization that you just couldn't swim along with the tide there wanting to push you back.
- Willens: After all this inter-agency discussion, there was an Under Secretaries meeting in late August 1969. The job was to prepare for the first round of Micronesian negotiations which were scheduled for early October 1969. At that time, there were legislative proposals put before the Under Secretaries Committee that had come out of the inter-agency discussions. One of these approaches provided for a constitutional convention, which had been supported in particular by Congressman Meeds. Do you have any recollection as to why it was that a proposal to go forward with a constitutional convention didn't win favor within the Under Secretaries Committee?
- DePalma: I don't really remember the issue, how it was treated and how it came out. I know that there was skepticism which we shared in State about the ability and the desirability of trying to run such a convention after we had been apprised of the split in the islands and that it didn't seem like a great idea. But I don't remember specifically how we chose to address the issue.
- Willens: Do you remember attending an Under Secretaries Committee meeting shortly before the first round of negotiations in late 1969?
- DePalma: I have no independent recollection of that, no.
- Willens: How about the negotiations themselves, which are discussed in your memorandum of October 16, 1969 to the Under Secretary? This also appears to have been drafted by Mr. Peale. As I understand the materials, you personally were present at some of the negotiations with the Micronesians. Is that correct?
- DePalma: Yes, but that doesn't mean that I was a very strong factor in this situation.
- Willens: Do you recall personal impressions of individual Micronesians like Lazarus Salii or others?

- DePalma: Not at this point. At the time, I know I came back with some impressions of one or two of them. I can't even remember who they were now. I did have a feeling that they were, well first of all, they were people of intelligence. I dispel any notion that we were dealing with ignoramuses. But also that they hadn't gotten any realistic grasp on the problems, that they would say things that were inconsistent. They wanted to do things in a way that obviously was not terribly realistic. But the discussion never, in the part of the meetings that I was there, never got to the point where these people really made any headstrong statements.
- Willens: I've heard some differing views about the extent to which the U.S. representatives were prepared for these negotiations. Did you have any sense at the time that the U.S. team was not adequately prepared?
- DePalma: No, I don't recall. It was always a kind of a problem—this specific time it was a sharp issue. The status preparation was always a problem because the situation was always malleable until toward the very end. We didn't have a fixed, concerted approach among the three departments, so at any one time, people might have felt free, and did feel free, to poke around and try to suggest something else. And the discussion would have been ruled out, but was being tossed on the table even at a later stage. It was a little messy; it was not a very tidy procedure.
- Willens: Well, as it happened, Assistant Secretary Loesch did try to advance a compromise on the land issue that subsequently was opposed by both State and Defense. Do you have some recollection that he and Interior were in particular pressing hard for agreement at this first round of negotiations?
- DePalma: I recall that they were playing every role in the discussion, but I haven't really any specific recollection. I knew that they were trying to play the heavies at that stage, but it clear that we were going to have to deal with them very carefully because they were really using their muscle.
- Willens: Who was?
- DePalma: Interior as such at this point. But we were never clear whether Loesch spoke for everybody at Interior, I should add that.
- Willens: Whether he in fact was speaking for Secretary Hickel.
- DePalma: That's right. There were people who always assumed he was doing it because he had a special interest in it. I don't know what that would have been, but they were not necessarily the Interior Department.
- Willens: Did it come as a surprise to you during that first round of negotiations that the Micronesians were particularly concerned about land arrangements and certainty with respect to what U.S. requirements in Micronesia would be?
- DePalma: Well, the issue was befuddled by lots of talk about the Micronesians—about how important land was to the Micronesians. I decided after a while that, not that we should ignore that, but that that was not the point. The point is that obviously the Micronesians knew that Defense wanted somehow to retain kind of a base there, and they wanted to get the best deal that they could get. They were going to fight it until they could get the kind of deal they wanted. It seemed to me just that simple, and that while the Micronesians weren't skillful enough, I think looking back on it, and obviously didn't have enough help to really ride that issue as hard as they could have. That was their main concern at that point.

- Willens: Is it your recollection that the land issue was really of greater concern to them at the time than the degree of self-government that they might be permitted under a future status?
- DePalma: I think they just kept assuming they were going to have a kind of self-government, something that they could even themselves call self-government. But what they wanted to be sure of was that they weren't selling away their land issue which they thought was the only handle they had, frankly, for money. They knew they had to get some financial support. And, as you know, there was a split, but having a little Defense contingent around them was not all a terribly bad idea to a lot of Micronesians, you know, they didn't exactly want to be left completely on their own. So I think that issue was very much muddled in their minds. And land became a handle on it. If you're going to have a base, you're going to pay for it.
- Willens: Did the Defense Department representatives play an active role in this first round?
- DePalma: It emerged rather slowly. We had assumed they always had a very active role in the background. For some reason, Defense and Interior found it easier to work together on this at the early stages than we did with Defense. I guess they'd been used to working with Interior on that, so the channel was already there.
- Willens: The memorandum reporting on this first round of negotiations indicates on page two that both Interior and Defense were interested in promptly exploring new alternatives after the negotiations were concluded. It is reported here that Interior was considering working on the Meeds proposal which would provide for a Constitutional Convention, and Defense wanted to explore the sentiment of the Marianas to split off from the rest of the Trust Territory. What prompted you to suggest that it was premature to explore these alternatives at this point?
- DePalma: It's awfully vague now, but my vague recollection is that we weren't convinced yet that we had a concerted, unified, agreed approach in the U.S. government. And to start exploring these things before we had developed any kind of a good solid position I think we felt we'd just sort of keep the thing spinning in mid air without any chance to go to conclusion.
- Willens: Well, you conclude in the memorandum that one ought to look at the first round as sort of an opportunity to exchange views and not regard it as a decisive event. Is that your recollection?
- DePalma: Yes.
- Willens: It sounds to me as though you felt that the staff studies and the deliberations of the Under Secretaries Committee in advance of this first round really had not been successful in firming up an Executive Branch position that could be advanced in this session.
- DePalma: That's right.
- Willens: After the session and your report, there are documents as reflected under Tab nine that I've provided you indicating that there would be a cabinet level meeting with Dr. Kissinger to review the negotiating strategy. There's a memorandum here over your signature that again (I see the names Mr. Day and Mr. Peale as the authors) on or about November 22, 1969 which is designed to brief the Secretary as to this cabinet level meeting. You recommend that he reiterate the Department's position that the land proposal of the Interior was unacceptable, and you make certain recommendations about the self-government issue and a compromise position on that subject. Did you personally participate in briefing Secretary Rogers in advance of that meeting?

- DePalma: Yes, but I have no recollection of it. There were two or three of us there. And I'm not sure who really carried the briefing. I just don't recollect that I did most of the speaking. I obviously was there, yes.
- Willens: You seem also to have attended the cabinet level meeting, which is referred to with some redactions in this memorandum under tab 12. Mr. Peale wrote a memo for the file apparently debriefing you after the meeting that you attended.
- DePalma: Yes.
- Willens: To what extent did Dr. Kissinger personally participate in this meeting? It seems as though he took some fairly definitive positions and in effect this group of cabinet level officers rejected the recommendations of the working group.
- DePalma: Yes.
- Willens: Was Kissinger well informed, and did he have a particular view on these issues?
- DePalma: I don't know what stage that I came to the conclusion that he was playing his usual kind of ardent role. I'm not sure it was quite yet at this point. But what was clear still at this point was that we just hadn't worked out a deal with Interior and Defense.
- Willens: Clear that you had not?
- DePalma: Had really not.
- Willens: But the Inter-Agency Group did have a specific recommendation to make to the cabinet level officers.
- DePalma: Yes, that's right. They did, and yet it turned out to be a kind of a soft thing when discussion turned up. Several times we had agreements that didn't really stick. I mean they were agreed in principle, but then people would stir around, and you never could quite be sure that that's the way it would be treated in the next meeting. Now I don't know at this stage where this occurred.
- Willens: Well, there is some disappointment reflected in this memorandum, tactfully to be sure, that Secretary Rogers at this cabinet level meeting took a somewhat different position than he had during the in-house briefing. Is that your recollection?
- DePalma: Vaguely, yes. This would not have been the first time. To his credit, he was not the kind of person who would say that this is a State Department position. He was very keen on being able to make his contribution by fitting in to the top level consensus and not carry a State Department bureaucratic approach into these meetings. This would not have been the first time that he went into a meeting and modified the State Department position at the meeting.
- Willens: Well, according to this memorandum, you personally raised the idea of pursuing the constitutional convention approach, and Dr. Kissinger is reported as coming down quite hard against this idea.
- DePalma: He said that was stupid or something.
- Willens: What was the point he was trying to make?
- DePalma: The point what?
- Willens: That he was trying to make. I mean, what were the problems with the approach that you were recommending?

- DePalma: I think what he was doing was his usual thing. Now I'm relying on no specific memory. I think it was typical Kissinger: "You people are very unrealistic. We have to decide what we have to get out of this, and we don't want a constitutional convention. We don't want these people getting themselves fixated on something that we don't want. Don't be silly. We've got to do it our way. Find a way to do it our way." Now I'm putting words in his mouth, but that would have been his approach. I had subsequent dealings with him where that exact thing was his approach.
- Willens: And so the sense was that we—"we" being the United States—do not yet have to abandon our organic act approach. That's our way. Let's try to make it work.
- DePalma: Right. And above all, don't put yourself in a position of asking these people what they want before you even decide what they have to have.
- Willens: Well, as you've stated it, there's some merit in that position. That meant that the working group had quite a task ahead of it, and according to the memo under tab 13, you met with the working group the day after the cabinet level meeting to try to implement the decision reached by the principals. And as it happened, the Secretary basically agreed with the recommendation here that the Micronesians be presented with a revised organic act and given the option of alternative proposals with respect to either an appointed or an elected governor. Did that seem to you to be the best possible way to implement what the principals had decided to do?
- DePalma: Yes. I don't recall any struggle over this at all. I think this was a decision we came to easily.
- Willens: You were not left with very much negotiating room as a result of the meeting of the principals.
- DePalma: No.
- Willens: It followed from this session then that Assistant Secretary Loesch went out to deliver the revised copy of the organic act and came back with at least initially some optimistic reports. Subsequently, however, Chairman Saliu wrote Assistant Secretary Loesch a letter that took strong exception to the act, was very critical of the United States position and emphasized the need for a constitutional convention. Do you recall any sense in early 1970 that the Micronesians had now firmed their position up in a way that was going to make it necessary for the United States to revise its position?
- DePalma: Well, I can recall that we realized that we were now going to have to deal with the situation. The people there had gotten themselves organized enough or gotten counsel from the outside to press their views in a more effective way and more strongly, so we were going to have to be more careful. But I don't recall the specific issue, I don't even recall how we reacted to it at the time.
- Willens: Well, during these months a decision made by the working group to revise the organic act and relabel it as a commonwealth. There are some documents suggesting this was more a matter of symbolism than substance.
- DePalma: Yes.
- Willens: Is that your recollection?
- DePalma: Yes.
- Willens: Now to be fair, there was some change in terms of... .

- DePalma: Also I was going to say, it had to be changed so you could really present it as a commonwealth act, because there again we had a very distinct view about selling it to the U.N. It had to be adapted so it could work in the U.N. Commonwealth we knew could work, but it had to be more or less the real thing or look like the real thing.
- Willens: One of the specific changes made, and I haven't listed them all, was to drop the concept of an elected governor with a U.S. advisor. Do you recall any decision within the working group to go forward now with the constitution convention bill as a necessary part of the strategy?
- DePalma: Not specifically.
- Willens: Did you personally participate in the second round of negotiations in May 1970? It was the round of negotiations at which the Micronesians announced for the first time the so-called four principles. Do you have any recollection of attending those meetings?
- DePalma: You know, I don't recall attending that meeting. When I skimmed through this thing, I just don't recall. I don't think I did. I don't know why.
- Willens: Who then would have attended from your office?
- DePalma: It could have been almost anybody. It could have been us, others from my U.N. political division, I think would have been there.
- Willens: How long did you remain in the Assistant Secretary slot?
- DePalma: Oh, I left in July of 1973.
- Willens: July of 1973. Do you recall hearing that the second round of negotiations had more or less reached an impasse with respect to accommodating the four principles announced by the Micronesians?
- DePalma: I recall that we were confronted with a real problem at that point, but I don't remember the specific details. Also something tells me (and this is probably a terrible admission to make) that at about this point I was less directly personally involved in it than I had been before and that I had officers in the bureau who were attending meetings in my place and briefing me. It's somewhere at this point I got sidetracked on a lot of other things and found myself dealing second-hand with everything.
- Willens: Well, your impression is confirmed by my review of the documents.
- DePalma: Good.
- Willens: Because I find very few documents that you either authored or received on this subject after about mid-1970. There is this memorandum from John Armitage under tab 14 reporting to you on an oversight hearing of the House Interior Insular Affairs Subcommittee.
- DePalma: I think Armitage was one of the people who really was standing in for me.
- Willens: Let's just step back from the details a minute then and let me just ask you some more general questions as to what you may recall about this issue during the remainder of your tenure at State in this position. Do you have any recollection of the Under Secretaries Committee conducting a new study and reevaluating the U.S. position as a result of the impasse that was reached in 1970?
- DePalma: Yes, but not in any kind of detail, quite honestly. As I say, I obviously got quite away from this exercise at that point. I know about the issue, and I actually obviously had to go to that meeting, but I wasn't really following this in any detail at that point.
- Willens: Well, by late 1970 and early 1971, the staff among the various agencies had basically

prepared an options paper to be submitted to the National Security Council and then to the President. They advanced options like the present commonwealth proposal, one, two, advancing it with concessions on termination or eminent domain, three, providing for a district-by-district plebiscite, and four, offering Micronesians sovereignty with treaty arrangements. When the options paper was first put together, it didn't involve any free association alternative, and it did not include an Interior Department proposal that more or less favored continuation of the Trusteeship. Do you have any recollection of that particular proposal, namely, continuation of the Trusteeship as a way of protecting Defense interests?

DePalma: Well, I can recall that it came up, and I can recall that we at that point in the exercise thought that it was awfully late to come back to that position. Not just the time we'd spent on it, but the issue had become too public. There were too many people in New York who were aware of what was going on, and that didn't seem to us to be a realistic option.

Willens: These option papers were the first formal indication that a district by district approach might be an appropriate way of achieving U.S. objectives in Micronesia. Do you recall having any view at the time as to whether a district-by-district approach, which would permit the Marianas to go separately, was something that State either favored or disfavored?

DePalma: No. I think that particular issue was very muddled for us. We could see why it had certain attractions in terms of getting what we wanted. We could also see that it could create a lot of trouble for us. So it was obviously not something we felt was a great idea, but we couldn't say never. It might have to come back to that. But my recollection is we never took kindly to it.

Willens: The options paper that the Under Secretaries Committee approved in March 1971 went forward to Dr. Kissinger and sat in his office for three months before the President actually acted on it. Meanwhile, Ambassador Williams was appointed. The documents reveal that Dr. Kissinger submitted a memorandum in December 1970 to the President recommending the appointment of a special representative. Do you have any recollection as to whether you knew at the time that Kissinger was going to make such a recommendation?

DePalma: Well, vaguely, yes. We did know.

Willens: Do you recall having any input in support of that?

DePalma: Not from our level, but I think that the Under Secretary of State was involved in that. And I know the word got down to us. We knew about it.

Willens: You knew that a memo had gone forward to that effect. Because I have no documents reflecting either State or Interior awareness that Kissinger had made this recommendation. That's why I'm asking the question.

DePalma: I don't quite know how it got to us, but we were not surprised by the decision when it was announced. It may be that the Under Secretary only informally said something at a meeting. I don't know.

Willens: And did you know F. Haydn Williams before he was appointed?

DePalma: I had met him. We were not friends.

Willens: It was about this time that the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations was established to coordinate. Do you have any recollection as to what prompted this organizational change as a way of dealing with the negotiations?

- DePalma: No, but it became clear to me, for example, that this now was going to take some time, and it had to be followed closely. It was not a case of going to a meeting once a month. So I know I breathed a sigh of relief when they decided to do that. And I think there was some concern in the legal bureau, but I think everybody went along with that. We just felt that we had to pull this together in one place now. We couldn't go around the Department clearing everything this way. You had to tighten it up.
- Willens: Ambassador Hummel was assigned, somewhat to his dismay, to help get the office organized. Do you know him?
- DePalma: I knew him slightly. He was certainly not happy with it, I remember.
- Willens: Do you recall any discussions with him at the time about what the function of the office would be and how it might be staffed?
- DePalma: Well, I only recall that he came around and Armitage or one of our people was with me and they were trying to figure out where things were going and so on and took the occasion to tell us that he didn't think much of this assignment. But I don't remember any more of it.
- Willens: After Ambassador Williams was designated and the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations was organized, do you recall having any personal involvement subsequently in the Micronesian negotiations?
- DePalma: Almost none. No. It comes to me now that at this stage I was really disengaged. Except to be briefed. We would have staff meetings in our own bureau and somebody who was following it for me would say a few things about it. But I was not personally involved at this stage, I'm quite sure.
- Willens: And do you recall any participation in meetings where the Marianas desire for separate negotiations was ultimately resolved in favor of agreeing to those separate negotiations?
- DePalma: I just don't recall that I was involved in any discussion.
- Willens: And do you have any reflections on how it all ended up with the Marianas becoming a commonwealth under United States sovereignty and the other districts of Micronesia all falling into a freely associated status?
- DePalma: No. I think by that time people were getting ready to accept anything that they thought they could sell, quite frankly. I remember only that there was some irreverence, almost amusement, at that kind of resolution. But nobody really cared that much provided the thing was doable.
- Willens: And just a few more names. Is Lindsey Grant someone who worked in this area?
- DePalma: Yes, but I can't really place his role. I remember the name.
- Willens: Okay. And you mentioned Sam Peale and John Armitage. Is Mr. Hummel still living in the area, I believe?
- DePalma: I don't know.
- Willens: All right. Well, that's all I have to ask you about, sir. And thank you very much for your help.