

INTERVIEW OF JOSEPH J. SISCO

by Howard P. Willens

July 18, 1994

- Willens: I am here in the office of Dr. Joseph J. Sisco on July 18, 1994. Joe, thank you for taking the time. You were a career Foreign Service officer in the State Department during the 1950s.
- Sisco: Yes.
- Willens: In the course of your responsibilities, did you find yourself working in the area of international organizations?
- Sisco: I did.
- Willens: Trying to direct your attention, Joe, to the 1950s, do you have any recollection to the extent to which there was U.N. supervision of the administration of the Trust Territory by the United States
- Sisco: Less than many others, simply because of the fact that my interests developed in terms of policy, whereas the question of administration and how that aspect of it was going, were very much under the responsibility of the Interior Department. Although, as I got into the policy dimension, obviously I became more interested in and learned more of how things were going on the ground actually and how things were being administered, and so on, because part of the difference in emphasis, if I can put it this way, between how I felt at least and some of my Interior colleagues, I think one thing that I can recall is that they obviously emphasized how well the Territories were being administered and how the people were basically getting along reasonably well, which they were. I have no doubt in that regard. On the other hand, the battle for resources was absolutely constant, as you well know.
- Willens: There is some suggestion that the U.N. Trusteeship Council did take issue with some of the guiding principles that the Eisenhower Administration followed with respect to the Trust Territory. For example, at the annual Trusteeship Council sessions, there were questions addressed to the United States about the level of funding, the location of the capital, the division of responsibility being the Interior Department and the Navy Department. Do you recall these as issues that you were aware of during the Eisenhower Administration?
- Sisco: Just aware of them, and you can't really say that they were hot issues in the sense that they were confrontational. I think that the kind of querying that you've described here within the framework of the Trusteeship Council was an expected sort of inquiry. There was not a lot of political steam behind it. Obviously we took very seriously our responsibilities under the Charter and within the U.N. framework, and we did not think, or I did not think, that these questions were really basically out of line. But to me they reflected a legitimate international concern and the commitment that we had made under the Charter. It was a factor that concerned me in this regard. I felt that as we moved along that the concern at the international level would increase, and my basic approach, the one thing that really stands out after all these years, was not that I felt that we had to be deferential to the U.N. or that somehow or another that was really guiding our policy. I felt that if we moved ahead strategically that the best guarantee that we could meet international expectations, but above all protect our strategic interests in the Territories, was for the United States itself to move with reasonable dispatch the way we wanted to move, essentially getting

ahead of the political curve. But the objective never was any different than those who were saying, let's make Micronesia really integrated closer to the United States and maybe a Puerto Rico sort of model. It wasn't that there was any real difference in objective. It was largely a difference in assessment how and when to move in order to assure that the United States influence would continue indefinitely.

Willens: As you can see from the documents that you had the opportunity to review, there was an obvious re-examination of U.S. policy at the outset of the Kennedy Administration. What factors led to that reevaluation? For example, was there any Department of Defense initiative taken to emphasize the national security and strategic objectives that you've just referred to?

Sisco: I don't recall that they took the initiative.

Willens: Where do you think the initiative came from?

Sisco: I think basically the initiative came from the State Department. As we reviewed the situation, we concluded that the best way to protect the overall strategic interests and, interestingly enough, the Pentagon was with us in this regard, was for the United States to move ahead on this matter. We did not feel, since this was a Trust Territory and therefore a mandatory relationship, not non-self-governing in the other categories, but here's the United States with the example of the Philippines, the United States projecting the policy and image of basically being a non-colonial power, that rather than to be put in a position five years or ten years down the pike of appearing to have to respond to international pressure, i.e., you think in terms of the whole Puerto Rican situation and how that generated a great deal of agitation within the United Nations at a given point, we felt here was a case where we could reassess, we could assure the objectives that all three agencies wanted—Interior, the Defense Department as well as the State Department—and that we could do so by moving along the lines we indicated or you've indicated. More a timing question in ways than substance.

Willens: What I've been unable to develop from the documents that were produced to us is one, where the initiative came from, and what kind of inter-agency discussion ultimately led to National Security Action Memorandum 145 in April of 1962. I have made available to you a letter, for example, from Secretary Udall to Harlan Cleveland, sort of summarizing certain assumptions and proposing topics for discussion at a luncheon meeting on March 1, 1962. It looks to me as though there must have been substantial staff work among the agencies that preceded such a high-level meeting. Do you have any recollection of participating yourself in that staff work?

Sisco: I'm sure I did, but I have no recollection. I'm sure I did, because I was quite active at the time on this issue, but I don't recall. I wish I could clarify that for you. I know how heavily involved we were, and I know how we felt. For example, we tried out our ideas later on. Arthur Goldberg, for example, I see that there's a letter in the file that I did not recall. Since we were the IO Bureau and since I was an Assistant Secretary, it was a question of how does one assess the international interest and involvement at this particular juncture of the reassessment. How does one judge that in terms of how much of a pressure there was, how serious, and how one took that into account in order to assure the long-range objective that everybody in the U.S. government was agreed.

Willens: Focusing on the United Nations for a moment. There is some suggestion that the report of the visiting mission in 1961 was different in substance or tone with respect to its criticism of U.S. policy. Do you recall the 1961 report being a contributing factor that emphasized the need for U.S. initiative in looking at the future?

Sisco: Yes. We felt that it was a reasonably objective evaluation. What it essentially said, as I recall, is, look, we really need to get on with this thing in terms of obligations that you have. It gave us certainly a picture of what they saw was the situation within the Territory. I don't recall that the report made predictions of some cataclysmic change in the situation. But frankly, the report was basically a description of the situation there and essentially strengthened the case for moving at a reasonable pace and to begin to discharge our responsibilities as the best way of protecting America's future. I want to emphasize something. Because one of the things that, within the bureaucracy, and that is that there was always the view in certain quarters that here is the U.N. Bureau, they're taking into account too much of the international opinion in the U.N., and they're merely responding to that, and that somehow or another by responding to that this would undermine the American role. The one thing we tried to get across in all of the papers that we prepared and it was our view, it isn't a question of responding to pressure at the international organization as the primary factor. It is the assessment that the pressure is going to increase, and how do we best protect the strategic interest now. Every paper that you will see that we sent forward, that was the critical point as far as we were concerned. We're saying to them, look, we want to achieve what you want to achieve, but we've got a difference of view here as to how best to do it. And the notion, for example, that you could reduce the status from a Trust Territory, under the one binding agreement with the Security Council, to a non-self-government status, the step below if you will, and that that would be internationally acceptable, we just didn't agree with that particular judgment. In fact, if you were going to open this Pandora's box and you were going to move ahead, then you had to move ahead to try to achieve a reasonable objective. And when we got into the argument as to the right of self-determination, we insisted that the right of self-determination provide three different options and that one of the options include independence. We didn't think for a moment that that would be the choice or should be the choice. But in terms of what the options ought to be, we felt our influence was such in the Territories that you wouldn't have gotten any kind of a vote at that particular time within the Territories that the expression of self-determination should mean independence. We were confident of that.

Willens: Did the changing composition of the United Nations and specifically the addition of many former colonies play a role in your thinking?

Sisco: Sure, because you had a lot of dependent countries coming in. When you added, what was it, 18 or 20 at one fell swoop, the whole character of the General Assembly basically changed, but here was the Security Council where the composition was still in our favor. We didn't feel we'd ever be confronted with a situation where we'd have to feed them. We felt that the composition of the Security Council was a good composition from our point of view and certainly not, as you went ahead and looked at the slow change in the composition of the General Assembly, where it obviously hit its peak from 82 and going on to 100. That whole period subsequently where the whole image of the U.N. went down simply because it was more a reflection of the dependent countries, and you had that whole period of where all sorts of very nonsensical resolutions were adopted. It debased the coinage of the organization. But we were ahead of that curve.

Willens: I have had the good fortune of interviewing Harlan Cleveland, who had many words of recollection about this period of time. Did he take a substantial interest in this particular problem?

Sisco: Oh, yes, he did. Harlan was quite active.

- Willens: Do you remember any expression of interest by President Kennedy? There's some suggestion, for example, that the polio epidemic in the Marshall Islands, which I think took place in 1962, may have precipitated some presidential interest?
- Sisco: I have no recollection.
- Willens: Is it your best recollection then, Joe, that there really were no differences among the agencies as to the ultimate objective reflected in National Security Action Memorandum 145 but that the differences developed with respect to the means and the timetable?
- Sisco: That's correct.
- Willens: After that National Security Action Memorandum was issued, a Task Force was created to try to develop a program to implement it, and the documentary records with respect to that Task Force are very fragmentary.
- Sisco: Both were very good. They're very fragmentary?
- Willens: In terms of what was made available to me.
- Sisco: I see.
- Willens: Did you participate or have one of your subordinate officers participate?
- Sisco: Yes. I was always involved in one way or another. I hope that if you haven't talked to him yet, I hope you will talk to Don McHenry, because Don McHenry and Elizabeth Brown were the two people who did all the drafting for me. After all, you know, when you're an assistant secretary, you use your staff. And Don McHenry, in particular, and Elizabeth Brown is still in town. You can reach her on this. I don't know what her recollection would be. These are two people. And then there was Don Morris, who was a third. These are all three staff people who were actively involved. They're the three people that I used. We participated in all of these inter-agency meetings.
- Willens: This was one of many Task Forces that the documents refer to, as you undoubtedly recall. I've shared with you a document in March of 1963 which is a letter from Assistant Secretary Cleveland to Carver setting forth the State Department's contributions to a status report that the President asked for. Approximately a year after NSAM 145, he asked for a status report. It looks as though the Task Force dealt with funding and other needs of the Trust Territory. Is that your recollection?
- Sisco: It is, and the reason was that, here I may not have my timing quite straight, but remember we were becoming increasingly aware that something more needed to be done for the Territories themselves, and that if you were going to move ahead in a change of policy, that even underscored more importantly that you would not want to find yourself in a situation where it was felt that we were not doing enough in the Territory, that the people would be agitated, so that the notion of resources and budget and doing something more for them was totally consistent with the idea that it would help assure, among other things, that when there was a change that the change would really come out the way in which we wanted it to come out.
- Willens: There's some suggestion in the documents that the High Commissioner was supplying data and recommendations through the Interior Department to contribute to the work of the Task Force. Do you have any sense of the role that the High Commissioner played?
- Sisco: I remember meeting him once. They were providing information in a very balanced sort of way and really had this objective. The one objective they had obviously is to get more resources for the Territories. But secondly, and these were not hot-headed radicals, these

were people very strongly pro-American. These are people who wanted this to move along in a very reasonable sort of way, and they were not calling for example as I indicated earlier for independence; they were calling for ways to strengthen the fabric of the relationship between the Territories and the United States in circumstances where probably the change of status had to take place. I don't recall this specifically, but I'd be very surprised if at that time they did not agree with us that there had to be in order to satisfy the situation some form of expression of self-determination.

Willens: Very early on, President Kennedy emphasized the element of the policy that called for improved educational opportunities for the Micronesians. Do you recall any debate with respect to the status of educational programs and facilities in Micronesia?

Sisco: In fact, there was really no argument about the various elements that I can recall. There was a consensus that more needed to be done. I don't recall any strong views. It was a question of allocation of resources, let me put it that way. I don't myself recall getting into any lengthy discussion as to how the resources should be allocated. What we were interested in was some additional resources going in, and the High Commissioner's view in this regard would have been relevant because certainly he would have had, I'm sure, given indications to the Interior Department as to what ought to be done.

Willens: You'd be interested I think in knowing that some of the literature that subsequently developed discussing U.S. policy in Micronesia in the 1960s is very critical of the decisions to teach the Micronesians English from an early age forward rather than to educate them in the vernacular. Was there ever any doubt in your mind that the teaching of English to the Micronesians was an important element of the program?

Sisco: I don't recall that. In retrospect, it's not surprising, because the objective was a continuing close association with the United States. We do have this tendency of believing—it's a strength as well as a weakness—that if everything and everyone was American, things would be just great.

Willens: Well, you and I can agree on that.

Sisco: Yes. Reminds me of the story of when I was a junior officer. I was very fond of the Norwegian Foreign Minister. I can recall going to a dinner at the Norwegian Embassy. And I said, you know, Mr. Minister (we'd been all day meeting) if only the world was full merely of Americans and Norwegians, what a wonderful world it would be. We'd get along so well. He smiled and he said, "Young man, let me tell you something. If it was we, Norway, that had the atomic bomb and not you, we'd scare the hell out of everybody in the world."

Willens: The Executive Branch did take several actions in 1962 to implement the policy, such as moving the headquarters and removing some of the security requirements. Do you remember any resistance from the Navy Department with respect to the steps that were taken to open up the Territory?

Sisco: I would not have been involved in that.

Willens: At one point did you personally become aware that there had been a CIA training facility on Saipan?

Sisco: Well, I can't pinpoint it. But you see I myself had been on the island of Saipan, for example, during World War II. I don't know whether I ever became aware of a CIA station there, but if I had, it wouldn't have surprised me.

- Willens: The early documents also suggest a consensus among the agencies that a plebiscite might be conducted in Micronesia as early as 1967 or 1968. Did you believe personally that achieving the holding of a plebiscite and securing a favorable outcome within a period of five or so years was a feasible objective?
- Sisco: Yes, I did, and we did. We were up against, of course, the fact that Interior basically took the view that it should take a longer period than that. See, our concern was that if you began to extend the period beyond that, one, that those who frankly didn't want to change were really using the time period for a way of not moving things along, that's internally within the U.S. government. But we also felt a ten-year period in terms of the U.N. would find the situation of where from a political point of view it would be more difficult. We felt that within the five-year time plan, it was manageable.
- Willens: In 1963, the President assigned Tony Solomon and colleagues a mission to look at the Trust Territory. Do you have any recollection as to the origin of the idea to have such a private study mission sent to Micronesia?
- Sisco: I don't recall Tony's involvement, but again, I don't know who took the initiative. It could very well have been us, for all I know.
- Willens: Do you recall any briefing session that you participated in, either before he went out or after he came back?
- Sisco: I remember seeing him, but I don't recall when.
- Willens: Do you have any personal knowledge as to what the reaction of the various agencies was to his report in late 1963?
- Sisco: I don't. Ours was positive.
- Willens: I had the opportunity to interview Tony Solomon just last week in New York.
- Sisco: Beard and all?
- Willens: Beard and all. And I queried him about the substance of the political status recommendation he made. Just to refresh your recollection, he did propose a plebiscite on about the same timetable that you and your colleagues had in mind, but he suggested that the form that would be acceptable to the Micronesians would include some measure of self-government, but it would not include either citizenship or nationality, would not include an organic act, and would defer for some five or more years the decision as to what their true attributes of self-government would be. And I asked him whether he thought that would have been acceptable to the State Department, which was on the whole at that time insisting on something much closer to a free association relationship. And he said that he was confident that the State Department thought that that type of program could win both Congressional approval and U.N. approval. Is that your sense?
- Sisco: Yes. I think that's quite accurate. We felt what was important was this step itself and moving ahead, we felt we could really be ahead of the curve.
- Willens: But did you think the U.N. would approve a change in status that did not begin to meet what were the international criteria at the time for self-government?
- Sisco: Let me put it this way. We were willing to take a crack at it, in other words, see what could be done.
- Willens: There were some who said that with your skill and experience, you would find a way to bring it to the Security Council, if it came to that, at a time when the Russian delegate was having a late breakfast.

- Sisco: We could handle it, we felt.
- Willens: So you do not recall any feeling of disappointment with respect to the Solomon Mission's recommendations?
- Sisco: No. We felt it was a step forward. And also remember that we were very conscious of the fact that we were in a situation where there wasn't a consensus within the U.S. government, where the State Department and the Defense Department positions were much more parallel and akin than the State Department position with Interior. Interior was seeking—Carver and the rest were all seeking to slow things down.
- Willens: Well, you've seen some of the letters that were subsequently written, and I will ask your reaction to those later on. With the assassination of President Kennedy, did you feel that there were any changes at the agencies or in the White House with respect to policy for the Trust Territory?
- Sisco: I'm not aware of it. But you've got to understand too, particularly from my vantage point here is, I became Assistant Secretary of IO replacing Harlan Cleveland. We had a plethora of problems to worry about, and Micronesia was not the number one priority.
- Willens: The 1964 U.N. visiting mission commented on a variety of aspects of this matter, one of which related to the separatist movement in the Mariana Islands. At what point did you become aware that there was sentiment in the Marianas arguing for some closer relationship with the U.S.?
- Sisco: I'm sure I was aware of it, but I can't say that I recall it concretely. That's one of the bad features of this in terms of years. It is very difficult to recall.
- Willens: Throughout the 1960s and indeed into the 1970s, the State Department took a very firm position that the Trust Territory should be treated as a single entity, and they generally took steps until 1972 at least that were calculated to deter any separatist movement in the Marianas or the Marshalls. Do you have any recollection as to what was the rationale for that kind of position?
- Sisco: I'm trying to recall. I think the only thing I really recall is that we really didn't feel that you could divide the thing in this way. And secondly, that if you were going to address the issue, that you really needed to address it on an integrated basis and an overall basis. But other than that, nothing else really strikes me at the moment.
- Willens: Actually, there's some suggestion in the materials that once the Trust Territory as an entity became affiliated with the United States there then would be the opportunity to deal with any separatist desires. Does that strike a bell?
- Sisco: Yes. I can recall that. Yes, I think that's one of the considerations.
- Willens: There seems to be relatively little action with respect to this subject, at least based on the documents made available to me, during 1964, although it was during 1964 that the Congress of Micronesia was created by Secretarial Order. Do you recall any participation by you or your staff in debate with Interior or other agencies as to the powers and authority of the Congress of Micronesia?
- Sisco: I don't recall. I'm sure that some of my people probably do. Someone like Don McHenry may very well have been involved.
- Willens: Yes. I'm trying to get hold of Don McHenry, who I have met over the years. I'm having some difficulty in locating him, actually.
- Sisco: He has a Georgetown University number. I'll give you the number I call.

- Willens: Excellent. In early 1965, though, as the documents suggest, the State Department seems to have taken the initiative again to bring this to the attention of the Secretary and the Under Secretary as what I'll term a festering or at least an unresolved problem. Do you recall what precipitated that?
- Sisco: Well, you can take it as a given throughout that whole period it was the State Department and IO in particular that took the initiative and continued to focus on this particular problem. Because our overall responsibility, after all, was the United States policy in the U.N., and it's natural that we would take the initiative. And so the memoranda, for example, at one point I can recall, we said to Under Secretary Katzenbach look, we've carried this about as far as we can. You've got to really meet with Interior here and talk this over. And the interesting thing is that the memoranda we prepared and the line that we had developed and the policy that we had developed—that certainly got the full support of the seventh floor in the State Department.
- Willens: The exchange of correspondence with the Interior Department identifies a handful of issues on which there appears to be disagreement. One issue was whether in fact there was a need for change, with the State Department emphasizing the affirmative of that proposition. How did you assess Interior's view that there was really no pressing need for change of status for the Trust Territory?
- Sisco: We didn't agree with it. We felt that the Interior view was no change in the status quo. The Interior view, and they used always, constantly, the argument, you can't get this by the Congress. We felt that one of the critical influences on the Interior Department was the relationship between Interior and their respective Congressional committees. We felt quite frankly that that argument was being used against us and was really being overemphasized.
- Willens: Did you have any basis for disagreeing with that assessment of Congressional sentiment?
- Sisco: Well, we felt that this was an overall policy issue and that while we would not necessarily disagree with the assessment that the Committees that Interior was dealing with wouldn't like the change and that there was after all a strong view on the Hill in terms of you've got to stay American and so on, that we understood what Interior was saying. We felt that they were overemphasizing that particular argument and using it as an argument for maintaining the status quo and that the argument that we made was largely one that was trying to defer with that thing called the U.N., and when we made an appearance, I personally made an appearance, I've forgotten which committee it was, and I think your documents if you showed me and I could recall that, I really dispelled [that] and influenced people on the Hill. The tendency was to look on someone who was Assistant Secretary of IO [responsible for the U.S. position with] the United Nations as some flake and some world government guy. Well they suddenly heard me talk about the national interest and the very fact that my Ph.D. was done under Hans Morgenthau, who didn't believe in world government and international law and all the rest of these things. And I hit very hard in that testimony, how do we protect the strategic interest of the United States? And I made some headway with these people. Moreover, you've got to remember that there's an overall foreign policy issue. You've got the Foreign Relations Committees involved in this, even though the Trust Territories were under the responsibility of Interior.
- Willens: Is it your sense now, with the benefit of hindsight, that if the Executive Branch had been able to agree on a program that led toward a reasonably early plebiscite and a political status of the kind for example recommended by the Solomon Mission that Congress would have ultimately approved that disposition?

- Sisco: Absolutely. I have every confidence that's the case. First of all, that was the Johnson Administration, among other things, and Lyndon Johnson knew how to deal with the Congress, to say the least. And secondly, you don't have the same kinds of problems as you do today and the increasing problem with Congress interfering with foreign policy—an increased problem and a weaker Executive role under our Constitutional system—and we were very conscious of this. Our government works best under a strong President and a bipartisan support in the Congress, and we felt that was achievable. We felt we had a strong President, a strong Administration. Granted, as things went along, Vietnam and the rest of these things began to take over. But yes, if there was a consensus within the U.S. government—because, for one thing, we were encouraged in our position by the very fact that the Defense Department did not disagree that the best way to protect their strategic interest, our strategic interest, which were common, was to move now rather than later.
- Willens: Another issue on which disagreement appears in the documents is whether the Micronesians themselves wanted a change. Here State emphasized Micronesian sentiment in favor of a change. Carver on behalf of the Interior Department said there's no evident need or expression of desire for change.
- Sisco: They liked it the way it is. The argument that we had was that, oh, no, there's no real agitation here, and people are happy. And of course the leadership within the Trust Territory was very careful in the way in which they dealt with Interior and understandably so. It should have. And moreover, they didn't want to do anything which would have really undermined the allocation of resources. There was a lot of focus on the part of the leadership in the Territories in terms of we've got to improve the situation and so on, so that it was a delicate political balance for everybody. No one had an entirely free hand, so to speak.
- Willens: Ambassador Anderson conducted an inquiry there, I think accompanied by some Congressional representatives, and subsequently testified about it before Aspinall and O'Brien. She seemed to have taken a fairly strong view that there was a Micronesian desire for change and for some measure of certainty as to what their future status would be.
- Sisco: Evolutionary. It was there, but on an evolutionary basis, and the interesting thing is I don't recall anything other than the view among the Micronesian leadership—these were not people who were saying there needs to be change and that the change should move in the direction away from the United States. Not at all. It was a question of closer association.
- Willens: Another issue has been given the label of leap-frogging, that is, the sense that Congress and Interior would not go along with any status for the Trust Territory that was more advanced in terms of self-government than that available to Guam, the Virgin Islands and American Samoa. The State Department seems to have taken the position throughout most of the 1960s that all the Territories should be treated together, and I don't quite understand why it was that State took that view since its principal interest was in the Trust Territory.
- Sisco: Well, the only thing I would recall in that regard was that I think we felt at the time that if you were going to move with the Trust Territory then you really had to take into account Guam and the rest of the areas. But other than that—it's funny, I really want to try to recall that, because nothing really rings a bell.
- Willens: Well, it looks to me from the documents as though this was the starting position of the State Department but that it changed by the end of the Johnson Administration and that you and staff in particular were recognizing that maybe politically it was better to focus on the Trust Territory and differentiate it from the other Territories.

- Sisco: Yes. You know, that may have come quite frankly from not only the internal negotiating situation but it also may very well have come from increasing knowledge of what the situation was, these reports and so on.
- Willens: One last issue and an important one goes to the extent to which there was need for White House involvement through the appointment perhaps of a special assistant.
- Sisco: It was strictly bureaucratic tactics in two ways. One, we felt that since there were differences of view between State and Interior, that moving it up to the White House level would give it more clout and it would offer the greater opportunity to bring the three agencies together on a common policy. That was point one. And secondly, we felt that since the Congressional dimension was a very important element in it, White House involvement at that particular level would be a good thing. And then third, even the image we felt, image of White House involvement as it related to the U.N. and image as it related to the Micronesians—my God, to have someone appointed at the White House level worrying about the Micronesian problems would certainly have been something that would have been welcomed and given the Micronesians rightly the feeling well, this is really getting some high-level attention.
- Willens: The documents indicate that you did in fact get authority to discuss that concept with Mr. Bundy in the White House and that you got some sort of an affirmative response. The documents, however, do not reveal whatever happened to the apparent agreement in the White House that such a special assistant would make sense.
- Sisco: I think the word “agreement” is too strong, but the Bundy reaction was positive. I can’t throw any light on that. I should, I suppose, if I ever really began to review this in detail, but at the moment I can’t recall as to why it didn’t immediately materialize.
- Willens: As you can see from the documents that reflected Interior’s position, that department was consistently opposed to any White House involvement.
- Sisco: Oh, constantly. Absolutely constantly.
- Willens: There is one document where State suggests that having a White House assistant assigned to the matter would help avoid the outcome of the Task Force which was disbanded by President Johnson in early 1965. Do you have any recollection of why it was that President Johnson abolished the Task Force?
- Sisco: I don’t.
- Willens: The documents indicate that you did meet on more than one occasion with Assistant Secretary Carver and on some occasions with Secretary Udall. What is your judgment with respect to Assistant Secretary Carver and his articulation of Interior’s views on this subject?
- Sisco: Let me first say, and I think it’s important to record, I must say these discussions were quite civil, were quite amicable. These were policy differences, but in terms of personal relationships, the relationships were just fine, at least I never detected any feeling otherwise. No, what I’ve described as the Interior position in my judgment really reflected Carver’s views, because he was the prime mover on this thing. And he had the support of Udall on this.
- Willens: Do you recall any policy initiatives coming from Ruth Van Cleve when she assumed the directorship position over there?
- Sisco: Ruth was equally active, and she was also very heavily involved.

- Willens: She recalls, although she says that everyone's mellowed with the years, one incident on which you and she had a sharp exchange because of your perception that she may have leaked a document on this subject to the Hill.
- Sisco: Yes.
- Willens: Is that your recollection?
- Sisco: Oh, I recall that we had a sharp—well, we had the feeling that as I said Interior was overemphasizing the Congressional dimension and that whenever they got to the point where the feeling may have been there (this is supposition in retrospect) that they were prone to seek at least informal Congressional support. Because I'm sure, and I agree with Ruth in the years it all becomes much more mellow and much more vague, but I'm sure there were discussions between Interior and the various Congressional Committees, certain members of the Committee, and that basically the line was that we're being pushed by these State Department people.
- Willens: Do you recall that Secretary Udall brought to these discussions any particular view?
- Sisco: I thought he was supportive. I didn't think he was emotional about it.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection of a meeting in which Secretary Udall recommended that the Trust Territory might be absorbed in the State of Hawaii.
- Sisco: I do not.
- Willens: There seems to have been a . . .
- Sisco: You've got to remember, and I don't mean this in any critical sense, since there were differences in policy, there were any number of suggestions over that period of time, none of which I really recall, that would basically allowed for continuing study of the matter indefinitely, if not ad nauseam. But that was largely a delay tactic.
- Willens: During 1966, the Peace Corps embarked on a substantial effort in Micronesia. Do you recall having any personal involvement in the decision to use the Peace Corps there?
- Sisco: No.
- Willens: Do you have any basis for evaluating the Peace Corps mission in the Trust Territory?
- Sisco: I don't, but I think it would have been helpful.
- Willens: In 1967, the orientation of the agencies seems to have changed to some extent and turned to the proposal for having a presidential commission to examine the Micronesian status issue. The documents I've provided you indicate that there was an Interior Department proposal I think in early 1967. Do you have any recollection of the origin of this presidential commission approach and what your reaction at State was to it?
- Sisco: What was the date?
- Willens: Early 1967. In the earlier years, in 1965 and 1966, the emphasis at State and with your staff as providing the laboring oar, was to try to prepare a draft memorandum to the President that reflected agreement of all the agencies and to get some Presidential fixing of policy that then would allow lobbying of Congress and so forth. Those efforts seem never to have been successful.
- Sisco: They didn't succeed.
- Willens: And looking back, what would you say was the explanation for that particular effort not being successful?

- Sisco: I think I've made it very clear. I think the opposition was quite strong in Interior. Insofar as the status commission idea was concerned, I don't recall it specifically, but that I think you would have to look at that akin to how we pressed and pressed very hard for White House involvement, higher level involvement, that we have probably concluded by that time that we were not going to be able to do it with State vis a vis Interior and that you really had to get somebody either in the White House or some blue ribbon commission that really would make the recommendation and strengthen that position politically.
- Willens: Joe, there were disagreements between State and Interior as to the presidential commission proposal as well. Do you remember any of the principal differences and why it was that that particular proposal never obtained agreement?
- Sisco: I think it was the same reason as I've indicated, and that is that we in the State Department had a strong interest in moving it at a higher level, and Interior did not.
- Willens: Did the fact that the Micronesians had created their own commission have any influence with respect to your views on the ended to move forward?
- Sisco: I can't answer that.
- Willens: Do you recall testifying before Aspinall and Carey in 1968 on this subject, at which point you produced a memo that subsequently along the lines that you said earlier reflected your view that you had demonstrated to these Congressional Committee members that at least the State Department didn't have horns.
- Sisco: That's correct.
- Willens: Is that the testimony to which you were referring earlier?
- Sisco: Yes. Very definitely. I think in retrospect it made quite an impact on it.
- Willens: At the end of the Johnson Administration, the Senate then had approved a presidential commission proposal, but the House had basically informed the agencies that they were not going to act. What was your assessment of Micronesian policy at the conclusion of the Johnson Administration?
- Sisco: Well, I'd have to say in all candor that (and this is in retrospect) I felt there was probably a lot greater push at the earlier period, during the Kennedy period, I don't mean to draw any invidious comparisons between the Kennedy Administration and the Johnson Administration. Because for one thing, when you begin to look at the Johnson Administration and the increasing concern and dominance of the Vietnam issue that pervaded upon all foreign policy issues, then one can understand why this problem really didn't have very much teeth.
- Willens: Did your position at State change with the coming of the Nixon Administration?
- Sisco: With the Nixon Administration I left IO and I became Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, and I was busy trying to solve the problems of the Middle East. In other words, my involvement on the Micronesia matter ended right there.
- Willens: Did you have any subsequent involvement with the Micronesian issue during the remainder of your years at State?
- Sisco: No, and when I took over as Under Secretary of State from 1974 to 1976, where my responsibilities obviously were across the board geographically, I don't remember dealing with it between 1974 and 1976.

- Willens: Did you have any contact with F. Haydn Williams in his capacity as Special Representative to deal with the Micronesian negotiations during those years?
- Sisco: I remember meeting with him, but I don't recall any—yes, I knew him and met with him.
- Willens: And do you have any judgment today as to the success or failure of U.S. policy in Micronesia? As you now, the Trust Territory now has fragmented into four separate units with the Northern Marianas becoming part of the United States and the other three entities adopting some form of free association relationship that delegates to the United States responsibility for national security and defense. What is your assessment of how that outcome achieves some of the objectives of U.S. policy that were of concern to you in the 1960s?
- Sisco: Well, given where we are, one would have to say that there's justification for the evolutionary approach and that basically since independence was eschewed as a concrete objective, that has come about, in that sense that you didn't have to move ahead in a situation where you'd end up with independence and anti-American bias. On the whole, I think one has to say that the United States has dealt with this reasonably satisfactorily. The results are there. Our strategic interest is still protected. But there are a lot of other factors that were significant. Look at how the worldwide situation has evolved and the global situation seems to impacts on us. I'm not up to date in terms of what the situation is in the Trust Territories right now other than what you've described in terms of what the feeling is. But since you haven't had any really serious anti-American outburst that has undermined fundamentally the strategic interest of the United States, to the degree to which that is the case, why one has to say that there has not been a failure of policy.
- Willens: On that note, we'll end the interview. Thank you very much for your help.