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Biography

James Earl (Jimmy) Carter, Jr. was the 39th president of the United States. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1946 and served in the Navy's nuclear submarine program until 1953. He returned to Plains, Georgia upon his father's death to take over the family's peanut farming and processing business. He served in the Georgia Senate and in 1970 was elected governor on the Democratic ticket. He won the Democratic Party nomination for president in 1976 and, with Walter F. Mondale as his running mate, defeated the Republican slate of Gerald Ford and Robert Dole. His major domestic accomplishments as president were in civil service reform, national energy policy, and the passing of significant environmental legislation. On the foreign stage, he gained prestige as mediator in the Israeli-Egypt peace negotiations but was criticized for his restrained stance in dealing with Iran over its taking of American hostages. The unsatisfactory state of the economy, the apparent lack of direction in Washington, and Carter's personal aloofness all contributed to his overwhelming defeat by Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Nature of Document Search

We visited the Carter Library on April 14-16, 2004. We found several folders of interest in the White House Central Files and the National Security Adviser files, although only a small portion of the files of National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski was open for research. The declassified National Security Adviser files did include records of the presidential directives issued by President Carter and included many documents pertaining to the Micronesian status negotiations. The most detailed records relating to the Northern Mariana Islands, Micronesia, and federal policy towards the insular areas were found in the files of the National Security staff (Michael Armacost, Nick Platt, and David Aaron) and the Domestic Policy staff (Al Stern and Jeffrey Farrow) who worked on these matters. Farrow worked extensively on territorial issues and his Subject File and Special Projects Files contained many relevant documents that came to the White House or had been circulated among the White House staff.

Highlights of Carter Library Documents

The most significant documents found in the Carter Library relating to Micronesia fall into three categories: (1) implementation of the covenant between the United States and the Northern Mariana Islands; (2) the ongoing status negotiations between the United States and the remaining five districts of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands; and (3) the development of a revised U.S. policy for the territories.

Implementation of the Covenant

The first government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands was installed on January 9, 1978. President Carter's staff prepared congratulatory remarks for the president to deliver on tape for this occasion. Included among the Library documents were some of the planning materials prepared under the auspices of the NMI Office of Transition Studies and Planning, including the plan prepared by the Institute of Public Administration regarding government organization and administration of the new commonwealth.

Letter, December 15, 1977, Mantel to Camacho Memorandum, December 27, 1977, Jagoda to President

Two issues relating to the Northern Marianas that required action by the Carter Administration concerned the enlistment of Northern Marianas citizens in the U.S. armed forces and the composition of the Commission on Federal Laws provided for in the covenant. The Northern Marianas petitioned the Department of Defense early in 1978 to clarify its regulations to permit the enlistment of NMI citizens. Although Defense was willing to do so, the Department of State raised an objection because the Northern Marianas were still part of the Trust Territory. In 1980 this matter ultimately was resolved by legislation that authorized the enlistment of NMI citizens. With respect to the Commission on Federal Laws, numerous letters endorsing different candidates for the Northern Marianas members of the Commission reached the White House. Not surprisingly, with a Democratic governor and a Republican-controlled legislature in the new commonwealth, political considerations loomed large and the president's staff had to evaluate proposed members from both sides before finalizing the Commission's composition.

Letter, March 23, 1978, Pangelinan to Brown Letter, December 5, 1978, Pangelinan to Claytor Memorandum, July 30, 1979, Andrus to President Letter, August 22, 1979, Pangelinan to Farrow Telex, October 3, 1979, CNMI Legislature to Garland Memorandum, November 30, 1979, Eizenstat to Miller Memorandum, September 13, 1980, Eizenstat to President

One of the most controversial issues affecting the Northern Marianas during the Carter Administration related to the application of various federal laws regulating shipping and fishing in U.S. territorial waters. The commonwealth government in 1979 requested an exemption from such laws so that they could profit from the use of

Japanese-owned vessels. Its petition was supported by the Department of the Interior. The question arose whether the issue should be addressed by legislation or by presidential proclamation exempting the Northern Marianas from the vessel documentation laws until termination of the trusteeship agreement. In 1980 President Carter issued such a proclamation and the commonwealth reciprocated by dismissing the court action that it had initiated challenging the federal government's action under these statutes.

Letter, July 13, 1979, Camacho to President
Memorandum, September 28, 1979, Farrow to Eizenstat
Letter, November 30, 1979, Atwood to Murphy
Letter, January 8, 1980, Andrus to Camacho
President's Proclamation re Application of Certain U.S. Laws to the Northern Mariana Islands, February 21, 1980

Action by the Immigration and Naturalization Service in early 1980 affecting NMI citizens prompted a heated reaction in the Northern Marianas, but the dispute was quickly resolved through the intervention of White House staff. The INS in March 1980 revoked its earlier policy allowing NMI citizens who had certificates of identity under NMI law to travel freely to the United States to live or work there. Governor Camacho immediately sought review of this INS decision, and the Department of Justice promised prompt action. Shortly thereafter, the Director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service reversed the earlier decision and instructed district directors and regional commissioners to treat NMI citizens "administratively as US citizens" for "immigration inspectional purposes only."

New York Times, March 9, 1980
Letter, March 20, 1980, Shenefield to Camacho
Letter, March 21, 1980, Crosland to District Directors and Regional Commissioners
Memorandum, March 24, 1980, Farrow to Eizenstat

Micronesian Status Negotiations

The Carter Administration had an immediate need in early 1977 to reevaluate U.S. policy regarding the Micronesian status negotiations, which had reached an impasse in the last months of the Ford Administration. The Acting U.S. Representative for Micronesian Status Negotiations, Philip W. Manhard, wrote the new national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, about the need for such a review, emphasizing the increased separatist desires among the Micronesian negotiators. Brzezinski directed the agencies to complete a review within 30 days, identifying U.S. interests, analyzing Micronesian objectives, examining alternatives, and recommending a negotiating strategy. The resultant study observed: "The unresolved issue of unity/separation is presently a major stalling element in the political status negotiations." The study put several issues before the president for decision, including what institutional arrangements should be made to handle the negotiations because the Under Secretaries Committee mechanism used by the two preceding administrations had been abolished. The result was

Presidential Directive/NSC-11 dated May 5, 1977, sent by Brzezinski to the vice-president and all the concerned agencies.

Memorandum, February 10, 1977, Manhard to Brzezinski
Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC -19, February 15, 1977, Brzezinski to Concerned Agencies
Presidential Review Memorandum – 19, April 7, 1977, Interagency Group to Brzezinski
Presidential Directive/NSC-11, May 5, 1977, Brzezinski to Agencies

Under the president's directive, the United States would be represented in the status negotiations by a Special Representative of the President, with departmental recommendations to be coordinated by the NSC Policy Review Committee, chaired by the national security adviser, and supported by the NSC Inter-Agency Group on Micronesia to be chaired by the counselor of the Department of State. A few months later, Peter R. Rosenblatt was selected to be the special representative. Over the next several months Rosenblatt worked with the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations and the Policy Review Committee to draft a set of principles that would guide him during future negotiations with the Micronesians and be acceptable to Members of Congress. Key among these issues were the extent to which the Micronesians under a free association relationship with the United States would have control over foreign relations and the U.S. commitment to provide financial assistance. Upon the recommendation of the Policy Review Committee, President Carter in April 1978 approved these principles – with a modification of the foreign affairs provision to protect U.S. interests and the declaration that the United States would not be obligated to continue financial payments if the Micronesians elected to terminate unilaterally.

Memorandum, June 13, 1977, Armacost to Brzezinski
Memorandum, October 14, 1977, Armacost to Brzezinski
Letter, October 19, 1977, Brzezinski to Rosenblatt
Memorandum, April 3, 1978, Armacost to Brzezinski
Memorandum, April 4, 1978, Brzezinski to President
Memorandum, April 7, 1978, Brzezinski to Vice-President and Agencies

During his first year as Special Representative, Rosenblatt made considerable progress with the Micronesians once the United States yielded to the insistence of the Marshalls and Palau representatives that their constituents wanted a future status separate from the other districts. In April 1979 Rosenblatt encountered vigorous opposition from Representative Phillip Burton to any action on the proposed status agreement before the 1980 presidential election. His specific criticisms related to the alleged inadequacy of the financial provisions of the proposed compact and the handling of federal domestic programs under free association. But the discussions between Burton and Rosenblatt apparently became very personal. Rosenblatt reported after one meeting that "I was told that I was the devil and personally denounced in vicious and demeaning terms." Burton expressed his "contempt for the Administration and its works, including its administration of the TTPI." He complained that the United States should be working

with the Micronesians, not “treating them like hostile people.” White House staff, especially Farrow and Eizenstat, intervened in an attempt to placate Burton and permit initialing of compacts with the Marshalls and the Federated States in January 1980. In light of Burton’s acknowledged dominance in the House of Representatives on territorial issues, his opposition to the administration’s negotiating strategy led to numerous meetings and internal memoranda regarding the most appropriate response. Eventually President Carter’s staff felt compelled to make major concessions to Burton: they agreed that the negotiations would not be completed before the 1980 elections and made significant adjustments in the financial and federal program provisions of the proposed compact.

Memorandum, April 26, 1979, Rosenblatt to Nimetz

Memorandum, May 23, 1979, Nimetz to Brzezinski

Memorandum, May 29, 1979, Brzezinski to President

Memorandum of Conversation, June 15, 1979, prepared by Rosenblatt

Letter, November 1, 1979, Burton to Eizenstat

Memorandum, November 5, 1979, Rosenblatt to U.S. officials

Memorandum, December 7, 1979, Farrow to Eizenstat

Memorandum, December 13, 1979, Rosenblatt to Farrow

Letter, January 8, 1980, Rosenblatt to Burton

Memorandum, January 28, 1980, Rosenblatt to Members of IAG

After a proposed compact of free association was initialed by the parties in January 1980, Rosenblatt encountered new criticism of his work from Congress – this time by senators concerned that the proposed compact did not adequately protect U.S. defense interests. Following a hearing in early June 1980 before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, chaired by the very influential Senator Jackson, Rosenblatt reported that several senators said they opposed the compact as drafted. They questioned why the trusteeship could not be continued indefinitely or, as an alternative, why the proposed compact could not provide that American defense and national security interests be protected permanently in the freely associated states. To respond to this concern, Rosenblatt raised with the White House staff and agency representatives a possible compromise that would entail the Micronesians to agree permanently to deny use of their areas to other nations for military purposes. In return, the United States would provide that its financial commitments in the compact would be backed by the full faith and credit of the United States, which would mean that the Micronesians would have access to the U.S. courts if the United States failed to make the required payments, and would eliminate the provision in the draft compact that the Micronesians would forfeit 50% of the promised U.S. economic assistance if they terminated the relationship unilaterally. Rosenblatt labored within the White House and the inter-agency committees to obtain timely approval of this, or some other, acceptable compromise proposal that might be presented to the Micronesian representatives

Memorandum, June 4, 1980, Rosenblatt to Ridgway

Memorandum, June 9, 1980, Rosenblatt to Ridgway

Memorandum, June 23, 1980, Farrow to Eizenstat

Memorandum, June 30, 1980, McCall to Ridgway
Memorandum for the Record, July 14, 1980, prepared by Rosenblatt
Memorandum, July 18, 1980, Rosenblatt to Ridgway

While Rosenblatt was waiting for an administration decision on the permanent denial issue and certain financial issues, representatives of the Marshalls and Federated States were pressing him for answers before the next round of negotiations set for October 1980. The interagency group learned at a meeting in September 1980 that the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were prepared to accept the permanent denial compromise, but that the concerned senators were not satisfied with it, and that U.S. allies were advising that such a revision would damage the American position in the United Nations when it sought to terminate the trusteeship agreement. The interagency group recommended that Rosenblatt be authorized to seek the permanent denial compromise and this recommendation was approved by the president. However, the agencies were advised that the president noted "that he may not approve additional costs incurred as a result of securing strategic denial for a longer period of time." As these deliberations moved forward, the White House staff was increasingly sensitive to the upcoming election and dubious that the Micronesian status negotiations could be completed in time to meet the long-publicized objective, endorsed by President Carter early in his administration, to terminate the trusteeship agreement in 1981.

Memorandum, August 6, 1980, Rosenblatt to Interagency Group
Memorandum, September 11, 1980, Rosenblatt to Schirmer
Memorandum, September 12, 1980, Ridgway to Interagency Group
Memorandum, September 17, 1980, Ridgway to Brzezinski
Memorandum, October 8, 1980, Dodson to Tarnoff
Memorandum, October 8, 1980, Farrow to Eizenstat

Notwithstanding all these difficulties, Rosenblatt reported substantial progress at the October round of negotiations. The Micronesian readiness to resolve virtually all issues, with a few important exceptions, may have been influenced by their apprehension that President Carter might be defeated by the Republican candidate, Ronald Reagan, whose critical views of the Panama Canal treaties ratified during the Carter Administration did not bode well for the proposed compact of free association. It was agreed to leave the denial issue for separate treatment at a later date, recognizing that it had to be acceptable to the Micronesian representatives and the U.S. senators most concerned with this question. The compact initiated by Rosenblatt and the Marshalls representative on October 31, 1980, left for future negotiation an agreement settling claims arising from the nuclear testing program. No documents available in the Library reflected further action with respect to the Micronesian status negotiations after President Carter was defeated in the November 1980 election.

Letter, October 30, 1980, deBrum to Rosenblatt
Letter, October 30, 1980, Amaraich to Rosenblatt
Memorandum, October 31, 1980, Christopher to McIntyre
Letter, November 3, 1980, Rosenblatt to Amaraich

Memorandum. January 16, 1981, Ridgway to Brzezinski

Revision of U.S Policy Regarding the Territories

The documents available in the Library do not provide any useful information regarding the origin, or intended goals, of this study of territorial policy. It appears that Under Secretary of Interior Joseph played a leading role in the effort, as did Jeffrey Farrow of the White House domestic council staff. By May 1979, the Interagency Policy Review Task Force on the U.S. Territories was soliciting the views of the territories on the six questions that the group had been considering. The questions related to such important matters as (1) the goals of the U.S. in each of the territories; (2) the means by which the U.S. can encourage economic development in the territories; (3) whether federal financial assistance should be regularized to eliminate the need for ad hoc subsidies; (4) how best to refine the application of federal grant programs to the territories; (5) should any change be made in organization that places the focus for federal assistance and liaison for the territories in Interior; and (6) with the elimination of appointed governors, is there any need for a federal presence in the territories other than the Federal Comptrollers? The detained comments of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to the Task Force report, although agreeing that the questions considered were important ones, were generally critical of the Task Force's recommendations. In one letter to Under Secretary Joseph, Governor Camacho observed that "Many of the recommendations of the Task Force represent a throwback to the mentality of another era."

Letter, May 25, 1979, Ada to Joseph

Letter, June 25, 1979, Guerrero to Joseph

Letter, November 15, 1979, Camacho to Joseph

The Library documents do not indicate the extent to which the Task Force report submitted to the President in December 1979 incorporated any of the comments or suggestions submitted by the territories. The president approved the report with one significant amendment: President Carter wrote "Prefer no presidential position" regarding a proposed constitutional amendment to permit U.S. citizens in the territories to vote for president. The president issued a statement summarizing the new U.S. policy for the territories on February 14, 1980, and sent a message to Congress regarding the new policy. He decided to defer decision regarding the assignment of authority for dealing with the future freely associated states to the Department of State, because Senator Johnston wanted the Senate Energy Committee to retain jurisdiction over Micronesian issues after the trusteeship was terminated. Five months later, Eizenstat sent a memorandum to the agencies about the president's earlier message on the "Nation's first comprehensive policy" towards the territories. He emphasized the role of the Department of the Interior, which has "clear responsibility for all matters related to these territories with increased support from other agencies and the White House." He also noted "the designation of territorial matters as a major responsibility of a senior assistant on my staff." Notwithstanding the effort that went into the Task Force's study and recommendations, there is no evidence over the following 25 years that President

Carter's action had any positive impact on federal policies and practices with respect to U.S. territories.

Memorandum, February 13, 1980, Talking Points for Under Secretary on Implementation of Territorial Policy Review

Memorandum, February 13, 1980, Eizenstat to President

Memorandum, July 14, 1980, Eizenstat to Heads of Departments and Agencies

Memorandum, September 29, 1980, Andrus to Eizenstat