

## JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY LIBRARY

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### Biography

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the 35<sup>th</sup> president of the United States and served from January 20, 1961, until his assassination on November 22, 1963. He was a graduate of Harvard University, served with distinction in the Navy during World War II, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1946, and served there until he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1952. His domestic program, labeled the New Frontier, called for increased federal involvement in civil rights, education, medicine, and urban renewal and attracted many public spirited liberals, especially among academics and the young. His administration is remembered more, however, for the foreign affairs events and issues that preoccupied him. The ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba took place shortly after his inauguration. His meeting in Vienna in June 1961 with the Soviet Union's Nikita Khrushchev heightened, rather than eased, tensions. He increased U.S. involvement in Vietnam, established the Peace Corps, and created a new Latin American policy known as the Alliance for Progress. President Kennedy's most spectacular success in foreign affairs occurred in October 1962 when, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, he forced the Soviet Union to remove its missiles from Cuba – albeit on terms that were not disclosed to the public for several decades. President Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 by Lee Harvey Oswald was a defining moment in the lives of many Americans, who grieved with his widow and young children over this tragic end to the life of one of America's youngest and most charismatic presidents.

### Nature of Document Search

We visited the Kennedy Library on January 26-28, 2004. We had worked at the Library several years earlier in writing our book entitled *National Security and Self-Determination: United States Policy in Micronesia (1961-1972)*. The Library has two major collections: the President's Office Files and the National Security Files. In addition, it has a Peace Corps Collection and several collections donated by persons who served in the Kennedy Administration.<sup>1</sup> We found documents relevant to the Northern Marianas and Micronesia in many parts of the President's Office Files, including files relating to the Department of the Interior, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, the president's speech files, and the Peace Corps. The National Security Files contain the

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<sup>1</sup> The following collections were not examined: White House Oversize Attachments, JFK Presidential Oral History Collection, Pre-Presidential Collection, and Presidential Recordings.

most significant documents relating to the important decisions that the president made regarding the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Included are numerous documents relating to the issuance and implementation of National Security Action Memorandum No. 145 dated April 18, 1962, setting forth a new U.S. policy for the Trust Territory; National Security Action Memorandum No. 243 dated May 9, 1963, creating the survey mission headed by Anthony M. Solomon to investigate and report regarding the major political, economic, and social problems facing the people of the Trust Territory; and National Security Action Memorandum No. 268, dated October 25, 1963, directing the Secretaries of State and Interior to implement the recommendations of the Solomon Mission Report “that are feasible and acceptable for implementation.”

### **Highlights of Kennedy Library Documents**

President Kennedy and his new appointees at the Departments of Defense, State, and Interior recognized that U.S. policies in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands had to be improved substantially to address the needs of the Micronesians, fulfill the aspirations of the New Frontier, and anticipate the likelihood of increased criticism of American “colonialism” by the recently enlarged membership of the United Nations. In 1960 the UN General Assembly enacted Resolution No. 1514 (Declaration on Colonial Independence) proclaiming “the necessity of bringing to a speedy and unconditional end colonialism in all its forms and manifestations” and declaring that “All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.” In early 1961 a UN Visiting Mission reported on its investigation of the Trust Territory and found much to criticize about American policies and practices under the Trusteeship Agreement of 1947: the division of administrative responsibility in the Northern Marianas between the Navy and Interior as a result of President Truman’s earlier decision; the location of territorial headquarters outside the Trust Territory; financial favoritism of Saipan as compared with other areas; the absence of a territory-wide legislative body; and serious deficiencies in education, public health, and economic development of the territory’s residents.<sup>2</sup>

Well aware of these criticisms, President Kennedy and his appointees knew that the “colonialism” issue would have to be addressed by the president in his first appearance before the UN General Assembly in September 1961. The Department of State advised the president that the upcoming General Assembly session “will find the world closer to war than any Assembly session in recent years” and that the Trust Territory “has suddenly come to critical notice as, near the end of the colonial era, the United States is revealed to everybody’s surprise as among the last of the colonial powers.” Notwithstanding the importance of the issue, State’s efforts to formulate a new policy for the Trust Territory that could be presented to the General Assembly foundered “as a result of resistance from the other departments concerned.” In the absence of a new Micronesian policy to announce, President Kennedy’s speech before the General Assembly in this collection set forth his strong anti-colonialism views, and explicitly

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<sup>2</sup> Willens & Siemer, *National Security and Self-Determination: United States Policy in Micronesia (1961-1972)* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000)[hereafter *National Security*], 15-19.

denounced the Soviet Union's exploitation and subjugation of its own and other peoples. He challenged the General Assembly: "Let us debate colonialism in full – and apply the principle of free choice and the practice of free plebiscites in every corner of the globe."

**Memorandum, September 4, 1961, Cleveland to Stevenson**  
**Memorandum, September 19, 1961, Johnson to Schlesinger**  
**President's Address to the United Nations, September 25, 1961**

Unhappy with the inability of the federal agencies involved to come up with a revised policy for the Trust Territory in advance of his UN speech, President Kennedy demanded action from his White House staff. The coordinating responsibility was given to the Deputy National Security Adviser, Carl Kaysen, a former member of the Harvard faculty as was his boss, McGeorge Bundy. The Library papers reflect the exchange of views among State, Defense and Interior officials over the next several months to craft such a policy. The different priorities of these agencies are clearly revealed: Defense wanted to preserve its virtually unlimited authority in the area under the 1947 Trusteeship Agreement; State wanted to minimize any difficulties in the United Nations arising from the trusteeship; and Interior wanted to replace the Navy in the Northern Marianas and become the responsible federal agency for the entire Trust Territory. The result of these interagency deliberations was National Security Action Memorandum No. 145, issued by the president on April 18, 1962, which remained classified for about 25 years until we obtained it through our litigation under the Freedom of Information Act in the late 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

**Letter, February 26, 1962, Udall to Cleveland**  
**Memorandum, February 28, 1962, Raskin to Kaysen**  
**Memorandum for the Record, March 1, 1962, prepared by Kaysen**  
**Letter, March 12, 1962, Carver to Cleveland**  
**Memorandum, March 29, 1962, Rusk to President**  
**Memorandum, April 17, 1962, Kaysen to President**

Entitled "New Policy for the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands," the two-page statement observed that the United States in the past had "carried out its obligations to the inhabitants of the Territory in such a manner as to change as little as possible their customary way of life," but fundamental changes in the outlook of the peoples of the remaining dependent areas and the rest of the world toward these areas had brought "a recognition of the need for a greatly accelerated program of political, economic and social development." Therefore, the United States had to reexamine its obligations under the Trusteeship Agreement "in light of these facts of international life." Recognizing the U.S. obligation to prepare the Trust Territory for self-government or independence, the new policy concluded that it was "unlikely that the Trust Territory could ever become a viable, independent state." Therefore, "it [was] in the interest of the United States that the Trust Territory be given a real option at the appropriate time to move into a new and lasting relationship to the United States within our political framework." With this as its goal, "the people of the Trust Territory must become an educated people, prepared to

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<sup>3</sup> *National Security*, 8-19.

exercise an informed choice, which means a choice by people capable of weighing the realistic alternatives.” This in turn pointed to “an urgent need for the initiation of programs leading to the improvement of education” as a first step; other improvements in public services and economic development were important but less urgent. President Kennedy instructed his secretaries in charge of the Defense, State, Interior, and Health Departments to form an interagency task force, chaired by Interior, to develop and implement programs to advance these policies.

### **National Security Action Memorandum No. 145, April 18, 1945**

While the task force was deliberating, the Library documents reflect the several actions taken by the administration to respond to some of the criticisms of the UN Visiting Mission. By executive order dated May 7, 1962, President Kennedy returned responsibility for the entire Northern Marianas to the Department of the Interior effective July 1, 1962. After the CIA facility on Saipan, the Navy Technical Training Unit, was closed down by presidential directive, the Trust Territory moved its headquarters from Guam to occupy the buildings vacated by the CIA. At the request of the Kennedy Administration, Congress moved to increase significantly the funds available for the administration of the Trust Territory, which had remained fixed at \$7.5 million since 1954. The effort to remove the stringent security restrictions on the Trust Territory installed by the Navy after World War II was opposed by military officials at the Department of Defense. Under existing restrictions, no one could enter the territory without a special permit from the Navy; civilian shipping had to pass Navy inspections; and tourists were not allowed. Northern Marianas residents wanted these restrictions removed. Civilian officials at Defense and National Security Adviser Bundy concluded that they were unnecessary, prevented the development of civilian industry and tourist trade, and were incompatible with the development of local self-government. The restrictions were removed by a presidential directive issued on August 23, 1962, in a way that accommodated the military’s interest in restricting access to the Trust Territory by foreign powers. President Kennedy said that his action was intended to “foster responsible political development, stimulate new economic activity, and enable the people of the islands to participate fully in the world of today.”

**Executive Order No. 11021, May 7, 1962**  
**Memorandum, July 5, 1962, Bundy to Bell**  
**Memorandum, July 13, 1962, Bundy to Gilpatric**  
**Memorandum, August 16, 1962, Johnson to Bundy**  
**White House Press Release, August 23, 1962**

Further action by President Kennedy was recommended in early 1963 by the White House staff in the absence of any report from the interagency task force created by NSAM No. 145. After visiting the Trust Territory, Michael Forrestal, a member of the National Security Council staff, advised Bundy that the situation there was “truly appalling” and that the time had arrived “for the White House to take more vigorous action” to avoid further setbacks in the U.S. Congress and the United Nations. After President Kennedy in March 1963 requested a report from the task force regarding its

findings and recommendations, he received two very conflicting reports – a bland and passive report from Interior and a detailed and passionate report from State spelling out the likely international consequences of continued failure by the United States to produce tangible benefits for the people of the Trust Territory. The White House staff clearly preferred State's approach, were convinced that Interior could not address the problem with the desired sense of urgency, and believed that outside expertise was required to achieve the objectives set by the president in April 1962.<sup>4</sup>

**Memorandum, February 20, 1963, Forrestal to Bundy**

As a result, President Kennedy issued National Security Action Memorandum No. 243 dated May 9, 1963, designating Anthony M. Solomon to head a mission to investigate and make recommendations regarding the Trust Territory. Solomon had recently completed a report on Bolivia for the White House and was highly regarded because of his background in finance and economics. In consultation with White House staff and others, Solomon picked the seven other members of the group. The two key appointees were Richard N. Cooper, from the Council of Economic Advisers staff, and Professor Gerard J. Mangone, from the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. The Solomon mission spent six weeks in the Trust Territory, visiting all six districts and many outlying islands. They had discussions with “seven assemblies of local people, eight legislative committees, seven municipal councils and three women's associations; about twenty-five interviews with American missionaries and over forty-five interviews with Micronesians,” and numerous briefings by Trust Territory personnel. The mission's final report, written by Solomon based on submissions from the other members, in particular Cooper and Mangone, addressed three broad issues: a proposed capital investment program for Micronesia, political development leading to a plebiscite no later than 1968, and better administration of the Trust Territory before the plebiscite.

**National Security Action Memorandum No. 243, May 9, 1963**

**Memorandum, September 20, 1963, Forrestal to Bundy**

**Letter, September 20, 1963, Solomon to President (enclosing a copy of the report's summary)**

The mission's recommendations were based on a harsh and realistic assessment of previous policies in the Trust Territory. They proposed a significant increase in capital investment funds and annual operating costs, which they believed was necessary to improve the living standards of the people and to encourage a favorable vote on the proposed plebiscite. Only a small percentage of the funds would be devoted to economic development projects, “because of the Trust Territory's very limited ability to use such funds effectively, given its meager production resources and tiny, dispersed markets.” Solomon anticipated that the territory's limited prospects for growth in the private sector meant that it would be a deficit area for the foreseeable future despite the proposed program. His report saw no reasonable expectation that the islands could become self-sufficient, with the possible exception of the Northern Marianas. The report was skeptical

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<sup>4</sup> *National Security*, 38-39.

about the ability of Micronesia to support a vast increase in funding – a view at odds with that prevailing in many federal agencies.<sup>5</sup>

The report's discussion of political development presented an equally difficult set of problems. The Solomon mission concluded that most of the Micronesians were not even aware that future political status was a question for them to consider. As reported by the Solomon group, even those few leaders aware of the issue recognized that independence, even if they wanted it, was so distant as not to justify any present consideration. In addition, the United States had never openly expressed any interest in affiliation with Micronesia; therefore the prospect of any such affiliation created "feelings of uncertainty and insecurity that they would rather not face." In recommending a plebiscite by 1967 or 1968, the Solomon mission acknowledged some serious problems. Cultural and linguistic differences among the districts produced little consciousness among the people of being "Micronesians." The group concluded that Micronesia was still a long way from being able to mount a viable local government and had no experience whatsoever with a territory-wide legislature. But in terms of a plebiscite's ultimate outcome, they reported no serious opposition to permanent affiliation with the United States, estimating that supporters of independence would amount to no more than two to five percent of the Micronesian voters. They recommended that the plebiscite give the Micronesians a choice only between independence or permanent affiliation with the United States; inclusion of the status quo as a third option, they worried, would appeal to many Micronesians.

The entire report was submitted to President Kennedy on October 9, 1963. A meeting with the president was scheduled for October 24, 1963, to be attended by Solomon and Secretary of the Interior Udall among others. Two days before that meeting, Solomon and several of his team met with key Interior officials, the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory, and his deputy. The High Commissioner was particularly aggrieved by the report's finding "that a major obstacle to the overall development of the Trust Territory is the creaky functioning of the quasi-colonial bureaucracy in the Trust Territory government." The Trust Territory and Interior officials were very skeptical of the report's recommendation for a plebiscite as early as proposed and its pessimistic assessment of the overall potential of the territory's economy. At the meeting with President Kennedy on October 24, Secretary Udall, when asked directly by the president for his opinion, told him that he believed that the report was excellent and should be implemented.<sup>6</sup>

**Summary, Trust Territory Task Force Meeting, October 22, 1963**  
**Statement of Assistant Secretary Carver, October 22, 1963**  
**Statement of High Commissioner Goding, October 22, 1963**

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<sup>5</sup> The Solomon mission's recommendations are discussed in *National Security*, 41-45. This collection of Library documents includes the summary of the report but not its full text, which can be found in our collection of agency documents. *The Northern Mariana Islands: Original Historical Documents on Development as a U.S. Commonwealth*, NMI Council for the Humanities (2005)

<sup>6</sup> *National Security*, 45-46.

On the following day, the president directed State and Interior, in cooperation with other government departments, “to carry out recommendations in the report that are feasible and acceptable for implementation” and asked that he be advised by the end of November of “the actions taken or contemplated with respect to the report.” In an accompanying memorandum, Forrestal advised the secretaries of State and Interior that the president wanted advance knowledge before any public announcement or other actions by the departments regarding the fixing of a plebiscite date. Interior officials left promptly for the Trust Territory to explore in more detail the means for implementing the report.

**National Security Action Memorandum No. 268, October 25, 1963  
Memorandum, October 25, 1963, Forrestal to Secretaries of State and  
Interior**

On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy died. The brief burst of White House attention regarding the Pacific islands subsided almost immediately. In December 1963, the National Security Council at the request of State advised all holders of the second volume of the Solomon mission report, dealing with the economic recommendations, that it had been classified at the “Confidential” level and was not going to be released to the public. The first volume, dealing with political findings and conclusions, was classified “Secret” and remained undisclosed for many years. After this classification decision, Solomon team members were asked to submit all their notes and other materials to the federal government. Solomon later said that he was “a little shocked” by the decision to classify the report without any consultation with him or other members of his mission.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *National Security*, 49.