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## **A Meeting with MacArthur, 20 March 1945**

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## A Meeting with MacArthur 20 March 1945

*Grant K. Goodman*



As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the return to the Philippines of American armed forces under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, it is appropriate to note the existence of what may well have been the first written report from the Philippines to the then brand new American President Harry S. Truman.\*

As can be seen below, this document was originally despatched to the State Department from the American Consul General in Manila on 21 March 1945 and was transmitted to Mr. Truman on 30 April 1945, less than three weeks after he took office. Evidently Acting Secretary of State Joseph C. Grew realized the very sensitive nature of the report's contents since he classified it "TOP SECRET" and admonished the President that it was "for your eyes only."

Of special interest to the reader of this material is the apparent idiosyncratic nature of General MacArthur himself. He tells Consul General Paul Steintorf that the State Department is the only "civil agency" with which the Army (read MacArthur) can work. More interesting, however is the observation by the General, especially in light of his heroic image in the Philippines, that the Commonwealth Government is "incompetent." Moreover, we are privy to MacArthur's poor opinion of President Sergio Osmeña, whom he describes as "weak and impressionable," "very timid," and "unable to make decisions."

Nevertheless, we also get a picture of the General as a fervent supporter of early Philippine independence, if only to forestall the reestablishment of civilian U.S. authority with personnel such as E.B. Hester and J. Weldon Jones whose presence he had seemingly de-

\*Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President's Secretary's Files, "Memorandum for the President," 30 April 1945. Top Secret.

tested during the prewar Commonwealth era. Moreover, we hear of MacArthur's somewhat naive faith in a future prosperous and egalitarian Philippines as a result of anticipated "tremendous military expenditures" by the United States.

Most importantly perhaps for the subsequent MacArthur-Truman relationship, we perceive clear indications of the General's seemingly pervasive paranoia: his description of the Navy as "utterly selfish" and, in particular, his plea that the Consul General "not spring any plots behind his back." This latter concern seems to have plagued MacArthur throughout his career and, in part at least, was inherent in his dismissal by Mr. Truman in 1951. One can only speculate, too, that it may have been this very early report of the General's unusual preoccupations that, at the outset of his presidency, made Mr. Truman suspicious of MacArthur's motives and ultimately led the President to decide that the General was guilty of insubordination.

For Filipinos it is especially significant, in light of MacArthur's evident support of Manuel Roxas in the 1946 presidential election, that the General was so disparaging of Sergio Osmeña. It may also be important to suggest that a MacArthurian rationale for supporting almost immediate independence for the Philippines was his desire to prevent the reintroduction into the Islands of civil officials from the Department of Interior and, accordingly, to maintain his almost exclusive personal military hegemony in the Philippines.

Also inherent in a report of the nature of this one is the evident lacuna in what Vice President Truman may have known about the Philippines or, indeed, what, prior to the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Truman may have been told about the Philippines. To date, in the American system, and I believe that a similar situation exists in the Philippines, the Vice President is only as informed, both generally and specifically, as the President encourages or, in fact, permits him to be.

A document such as the one provided here takes on greater importance than might otherwise have been the case. One could presume, for example, that Acting Secretary of State Grew was, in effect, "tutoring" Mr. Truman on Philippine matters by selecting this particular report for his personal perusal. Moreover, given the document's contents, one might also imagine that Secretary Grew might be seeking to gain precedence for the State Department as opposed to the Interior Department in future Truman administration policy determinations for the Philippines.

A MEETING WITH MACARTHUR

DECLASSIFIED  
E.O. 11652, Sec. 302 and 303, or GR  
Dept. of State Instr. Aug. 18, 1973  
By AT-ALC NARS Date 7-24-75

*Return to  
Philippine Island  
TOP SECRET Foreign*

Department of State  
Washington

April 30, 1945



MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

The enclosed copy of the first despatch received from our Consul General in Manila reporting his initial interview with General MacArthur is especially interesting as it discusses some of the outstanding problems that we shall face in the Philippines. I think you would find it worthwhile to read it in its entirety. As personalities come into the picture the despatch is of a top secret nature and I think it should be for your eyes alone.

Joseph C. Grew  
Acting Secretary



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Concerning civil government, General MacArthur stated that it was his desire to withdraw from civil affairs as quickly as possible, and to confine his activities to "purely military affairs". He said that he was opposed to military control of civil affairs, and did not want to see a military government established in the Philippines. He implied, however, that it would continue to be necessary for the Army to exercise considerable supervision over civil government, since this country was destined to become the principal staging area for the Pacific war, with possibly a million American troops stationed here. Military security would demand extensive Army supervision over civil government. General MacArthur made it very clear that up to the present time practically all important decisions with respect to the local government had been made by the Army; although great care had been taken to ensure that the nominal authority for enforcement was given to the Commonwealth Government. He stated that he had avoided any appearance of dictating to the Commonwealth Government, and that matters had been handled very tactfully, protecting the political interest and self respect of the Filipino officials.

General MacArthur stated bluntly that the existing Commonwealth Government was "incompetent" and unable to handle the many pressing problems. He urged me to establish friendly relations with the local Government as quickly as possible, and to advise and assist them in every way. He said that they very badly needed direction, but that such direction must be handled with extreme tact, and without any appearance of dictation. I said that I was fully aware of that danger, and would certainly avoid any such mistake. I added that I would be glad to be of help, but that I did not conceive it my duty to attempt to actually participate in the local Government.

General MacArthur said that he was enthusiastically in favor of the plan to grant independence to the Philippine Islands on August 13, 1945. He implied that he had originated the plan, and would support it fully. He said that when President Osmena left, he was entirely in favor of the plan, but that he was weak and impressionable, and might falter when subjected to the influence of Mr. Hester, Secretary Ickes, and others in Washington. General MacArthur said he had considerable difficulty working with President Osmena, since he was very timid, and seemed unable to make decisions. He

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said that he had told President Osmena to remain in Washington until he obtained a definite promise of independence, and the necessary economic concessions from the American Government. He had told President Osmena that it would probably be necessary for him to make various concessions to the American sugar industry and other American economic interests, in order to obtain his objective. General MacArthur failed to mention the project for continuance of free trade between the two countries for 20 years after independence, but appeared to favor it in that he did say that economic assistance would be necessary for a considerable period.

General MacArthur said that he was unalterably opposed to the reestablishment of the offices of the High Commissioner in the Philippines. He felt that the activities of the High Commissioner would be essentially obstructive, and totally unnecessary in view of the pending early independence of the country. He appeared to be particularly opposed to Mr. Hester, whom he considered a confirmed and well known exponent of continued dependence for the Philippines, and a person who had made himself unacceptable to the Filipinos because of his dictatorial and contemptuous treatment of them. General MacArthur is also opposed to the reestablishment of other American civil government agencies, except the State Department, mentioning the Treasury Department particularly. General MacArthur appeared to be under the impression that the Treasury Department desired to send Welfon Jones here. He said that he was opposed to this, since Jones, Hester and others wanted to come here solely for their own personal aggrandisement.

General MacArthur said that the American Embassy should be established here immediately after independence. In his opinion, the Ambassador should be a career diplomat and not a politician, since the former would be better qualified to handle delicate, involved political negotiations. He said that he would be very glad to have me occupy the position, and that he would support my candidacy to the best of his ability. I hastily disclaimed any such ambitions, stating that I felt I was not qualified, but that I did hope to become a part of the diplomatic establishment, and to utilize what knowledge I possessed to promote friendly relations between the United States and the Philippines.

General MacArthur expressed the opinion that as a result of the war, the Philippines would have a totally

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new economy. He felt that the country would become more prosperous than at any time in the past, owing solely to the tremendous American military expenditures. He felt that the wealth would be much more widely distributed, since these military expenditures would go directly to the common people in return for labor and similar services. He felt that the old economy whereby a small wealthy group dominated the country and exploited the common people would not be reestablished. He felt that many of the former Philippine industries were doomed, although he did not mention any specifically. He thought that it would be a Filipino, rather than an international economy, which would appear to imply that American economic interests would be considerably less extensive than in the past.

General MacArthur said that he thought that the damage in Manila would probably amount to about P750,000,000. He was confident that Manila would be rebuilt, but somewhat dubious as to whether the Filipinos could be entrusted with the expenditure of such a large sum. He apparently had reached no decision as to how the expenditure of these funds should be administered.

On behalf of the Department, I congratulated General MacArthur on his splendid achievement in liberating the Philippine Islands, and in response he said that the Philippine campaign had gone very well, and that in a short time it would be confined to a mopping-up operation. He said that it might have been speeded up except he had preferred to go slowly in order to save American lives. General MacArthur apparently still retains some of his resentment against the paucity of material which had been furnished his Forces during the early stages of the Pacific campaign; although he admitted that his Forces are now adequately supplied. General MacArthur touched lightly on the controversy over the command of the Pacific operations, and admitted that he had some differences with the Navy, which he characterized as "utterly selfish". He appeared confident that he would be given command of all American Army Forces in the Far East.

Concerning our relations with the Army, General MacArthur stated that he anticipated no friction, and that I was to deal directly with General Marshall, his Chief of Staff, bringing to him any matters which could not be settled between us. I assured him that I saw no reason for any serious friction, since we appeared





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to be entirely agreed on general policy. General MacArthur made one rather cryptic statement to the effect that I would "please not spring any plots behind his back". I assumed that he meant that I was not to make any recommendations with respect to basic policy without first consulting him. I assured him that I would certainly consult him on any important matters, particularly those that might affect the Army, directly or indirectly.

Very truly yours,

Paul P. Steintorf,  
American Consul General



PPE/mfc