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At the very outset of Gen. Douglas MacArthur's campaign to retake the Philippines from the hands of the then occupying Japanese military, his determination to keep out of the Islands any official American government representation, other than himself, of course, is now very evident. In a previously Top Secret "for Secretary [of War, Henry L.] Stimson's EYES ONLY" lengthy URGENT message dated 7 February 1945, MacArthur wrote,

I believe the appointment of a High Commissioner and his dispatch to the Philippines at this time would be premature and highly detrimental to the conduct of military operations in the theater.¹

For the next three and a half single-spaced pages, the General set forth his reasons for his very strong opposition to such an appointment. He began by arguing that, since the United States had repeatedly stated that it would grant independence to the Philippines at the earliest possible moment "and the definite belief among Filipinos that this will be done before July 4, 1946," the reestablishment of the Office of High Commissioner would send entirely the wrong signal to the Filipino people. Moreover, he said, President Sergio Osmeña had told him that President Roosevelt had assured him (Osmeña) that he (Roosevelt) was prepared to proclaim Philippine independence whenever Osmeña "so recommends."

According to MacArthur, Osmeña was about to propose 13 August, Occupation Day, as the new date for independence. Therefore, in MacArthur's opinion, since the Office of High Commissioner was, rightly or wrongly, regarded by Filipinos as a symbol of American

colonialism, "it will come as a shock" to have that office reinstituted. Further, he contended, it would "undoubtedly be seized upon by the Japanese as a most propitious weapon of propaganda." Also, it seemed to MacArthur that with much of the country still in enemy hands and with more "bloody fighting" ahead, any such office could surely not function properly. Most unfortunate of all, MacArthur felt, would be to create any entity which would "divide authority with the Commander in Chief." "Coordination in order to attain a maximum effort against the enemy is difficult enough when it involves only the two agencies of the War Department and the Philippine Government."

MacArthur went on to articulate one of his long time pet peeves. To have the Interior Department, he wrote, injected into the current situation in the Philippines would "bring about deterioration of existing conditions," and would run utterly counter to his efforts to secure the cooperation of the Philippine government and people. Of course, the then Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, was a particular bugbear of MacArthur.

However, MacArthur had a solution to what he viewed as the calamity of divided authority were a civilian High Commissioner to be appointed. He proposed that "under the law which permits a military officer to be appointed acting High Commissioner that the Commander in Chief of this theater be so appointed." Since the office of High Commissioner would, according to MacArthur, "function only nebulously" for about six months until the establishment of the Republic in Manila by Osmeña, MacArthur's own appointment as High Commissioner would be purely for a brief interim period until the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the United States and the independent Republic.

Finally, MacArthur told Secretary Stimson that President Osmeña and his advisors are "unanimously and irrevocably opposed to the appointment of a High Commissioner and his dispatch here." MacArthur also reiterated his contention that sending a High Commissioner would undo all the good which had so far been achieved by US Forces in the Pacific and would "revive instantly the charge of imperialism so skillfully employed by the enemy throughout the Far East."

In response to MacArthur's communication, on 9 February Secretary Stimson replied to Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall asking Gen. Marshall to hand his reply to the President at the earliest possible moment.¹ Stimson began his response by seeming to agree

with MacArthur that the early appointment of a High Commissioner might indeed be "premature and detrimental to both American and Philippine interests as well as to the conduct of military operations." However, Stimson did not agree that between the expiration of active operations and the establishment of an independent Philippine republic, there was no need for American civil authority. Wrote Stimson, "Ickes, [Secretary of the Navy, James] Forrestal, and I wholly disagree." Stimson told Marshall that the three secretaries wholeheartedly agreed that there were important advisory functions for a civil American High Commissioner to exercise between the end of hostilities and Philippine independence. These functions would, he said, be mutually advantageous to both the Philippine Commonwealth and to the United States. Accordingly, Stimson urged that the whole matter be discussed in detail with the President when he returned from the Yalta Conference, and that any decision on the matter be delayed until that time.

As is well known, no decision on this matter was made prior to President Roosevelt's death in April 1945. Indeed, it was President Harry S. Truman who appointed former High Commissioner Paul V. McNutt to serve again in that capacity in the few months remaining before the formal granting of independence to the Philippines on 4 July 1946. Of course, by the time of McNutt's second appointment Gen. MacArthur was consumed by concluding the war with Japan and was about to become Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in the Occupation of Japan.

In retrospect the concerns which aroused such anxiety in MacArthur never materialized. No impediment to his own all-encompassing authority in the Philippines from February 1945 to Japan's surrender on 15 August 1945 ever emerged. Whether the message to Secretary Stimson of 7 February really was predicated on MacArthur's expressed concern about the theoretical negative propaganda potential of an appointment of an American High Commissioner or whether the possibility of such an appointment simply evoked from MacArthur a paranoid reaction to a potentially intrusive Ickes may never be known. Nevertheless, here again is a marvelous example of MacArthur's consistent desire to have unimpeded control of his area of command responsibility and to brook no interference of any kind, real or imagined.

Notes

1. United States National Archives, War Department, Message Center, Classified Message, top Secret General Headquarters Southwest Pacific Area, Advanced Echelon San Miguel, Philippines. Nr. CA50321, 7 February 1945, To AGWAR from MacArthur cite CA50321 for Secretary Stimson's EYES ONLY. Replying WARX 33108 TOPSEC. Declassified 4/22/99. All subsequent quotations are from this document.

2. United States National Archives, War Department, Classified Message Center, Outgoing Message, Top Secret, Secretary General Staff, Col. Pasco 9 February 1945, ARGONAUT (2), Number: WAR 34690, HEARTH 201, For the eyes of Colonel McCarthy only from Pasco Number 28. Declassified 4/22/99. All subsequent quotations are from this document.