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## A Review of the Political Status of the Trust Territory of the Pacific

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*Micronesia's strategic location has made it a valuable prize in the quest for overseas bases. Today it is governed by the United States as a "strategic trusteeship" under the auspices of the United Nations, and the inhabitants of the islands have requested an association with the United States, the details of which remain to be negotiated. As long as the United States desires to maintain her status as a major power in the western Pacific, she must maintain a military presence in Micronesia.*

## **A REVIEW OF THE POLITICAL STATUS OF THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC**

An article prepared

by

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The western Pacific is commonly referred to by geographers and oceanologists as Oceania, but the term actually is applicable only to the western Pacific islands, excluding Japan and Indonesia. Contained within this area is a group of islands termed Micronesia, which includes all of the island clusters of Oceania north of the Equator and generally west of 180 degrees longitude. Specifically, Micronesia encompasses the island groups of the Bonins, Marianas, Marshalls, Carolines, and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands.

Statistically, Micronesia contains some 2,141 islands and islets with a total landmass of approximately 1,000 square miles in a water area in excess of 3 million square miles.<sup>1</sup> Of these 2,000 plus islands, approximately 100 possess fairly permanent populations.<sup>2</sup>

Micronesia consists principally of low coral atolls, which are volcanic islands

of relatively high elevation. The Marianas total a land area of 399.11 square miles, of which Guam contributes 215.5 square miles.<sup>3</sup> Being relatively new volcanic islands, the Marianas do not have any significant lagoon area. To the south of the Marianas lie the Caroline Islands (here taken to include Palau) which total 461.4 square miles of atoll.<sup>4</sup> East of the Carolines lie the twin island chains of the Marshalls group—the Ralik, or sunset chain to the west, and the Ratak or sunrise chain to the east. The land area of the Marshalls is only 69.8 square miles, but the lagoon area is 4,506.9 square miles.<sup>5</sup>

It is with these three island groups that this paper is concerned, for the Marianas, Carolines, and Marshalls comprise the strategic Trust Territory of the Pacific. The reason for our interest in these islands is the lagoon area. These lagoons include some of the best fleet

anchorages in the Pacific and were of extreme importance to the U.S. Navy during the Second World War.

Ferdinand Magellan discovered the Marianas Islands in 1521 and claimed them for Spain, and from these islands Spain ultimately expanded its claim to the whole of Micronesia. Spain never did pacify the Caroline Islands and had little interest in the Marshalls. Spanish rule in Micronesia was characterized by a concern for religious interests and an economic vacuum that Germany later attempted to fill.<sup>6</sup>

In 1878 Germany penetrated the Marshalls and established a protectorate over Jaluit. The German interest in trade and commerce soon led to further encroachments on Micronesia and a local conflict that was settled in 1885 by Pope Leo XIII.<sup>7</sup> As a result of this arbitration, all parties recognized Spanish sovereignty in the disputed area. Both Spain and Germany, however, were to have equal rights in trade, fisheries, navigation, and plantations. Germany was also granted a naval base at Yap.<sup>8</sup>

Spain lost interest in Micronesia as a result of the Spanish-American War. She sold Guam to the United States in 1898, and for \$4.5 million she sold the remainder of Micronesia to Germany in 1899.<sup>9</sup> Germany increased the strategic importance of Micronesia by the construction of a cable station on Yap in 1904. This cable was the alternate route for communications to the Philippines and China in the event of the failure of the U.S. cable. The German cable connected Guam, Shanghai, and the Celebes.<sup>10</sup>

Germany completed her control of Micronesia in 1911 when she pacified Ponape in the Carolines—something Spain had never been able to do.<sup>11</sup> Pacification completed, Germany's last significant project in Micronesia was the establishment of a radio station on Yap. This increased the strategic value of the island and was to have far-reaching

consequences on the post-World War I relations between Japan and the United States.

**The League of Nations Mandate.** At the commencement of the First World War, the Japanese and British moved to liberate Micronesia from German rule. The Japanese preempted the British in this effort, and the British recognized Japanese influence over the islands of Micronesia in exchange for reciprocal recognition of British influence over the islands to the south of the Equator. This agreement was signed in February of 1916, and, as the price for the Japanese entry into the war on the Allied side, the agreement was further recognized by France and Italy.<sup>12</sup> In March of 1917 Russia joined with the others in acknowledging the Japanese occupation.<sup>13</sup>

This secret agreement would have been the last word on the subject except for the intervention of President Wilson. Wilson intended to excise what he considered to be the principal evils of contemporary international relations—secret agreements and imposed settlements—and to enforce the principle of self-determination. He was therefore against the Japanese annexation of Micronesia since it exemplified both of these evils at their worst. President Wilson's idealism was reinforced by his belief that Japanese possession of Micronesia was not in the interests of the United States, since such possession would threaten access to the Philippines and Guam.<sup>14</sup>

When the war ended, Germany renounced her rights to her colonies in favor of the principal Allies and the Associated Powers. Japan now advanced her claim and insisted on the annexation of the Marianas, Marshalls, and Carolines at the Versailles Peace Conference. President Wilson opposed this annexation and suggested instead the more limited concept of a mandate.<sup>15</sup> Japan was not satisfied with the mandate

concept and felt that it was a betrayal of trust. In the end she finally agreed on the substance, if not the form, of annexation and accepted a class C mandate which provided for the administration of the mandated territory as an integral part of the mandatory state.<sup>16</sup>

The mandate concept was again placed in jeopardy during the formation of the League of Nations, but it was included after the Japanese made such inclusion conditional upon their entering the League.<sup>17</sup> As finally granted, the mandate over Micronesia placed few limitations upon Japanese sovereignty. The islands were to be open to visitation and unfortified. Freedom of worship was to be allowed, and forced labor was prohibited. The Japanese were also required to promote actively the welfare of the inhabitants and to submit an annual report to the League concerning their stewardship in the mandated territory.<sup>18</sup>

The United States had serious security reservations concerning the mandating of Micronesia to Japan—especially over the island of Yap. President Wilson attempted to have Yap internationalized, but he was unsuccessful.<sup>19</sup>

**The Japanese Phase.** The initial Japanese administration of Micronesia was military in nature, reflecting the fact of the World War. The islands were garrisoned and administered by a newly created South Seas Defense Corps from December 1914 until 1918, when a Civil Administration Corps was added.

Upon the adoption of the mandate terms by the League of Nations in 1920, a transitional period was entered wherein the Japanese Ministry of Overseas Affairs formed a South Seas Bureau to take over the administration of Micronesia, phasing out the military administration. This new civilian bureau was headquartered at Koror on Palau and consisted of five sections: General, Financial, Police, Economic Development, and Communications. For ad-

ministrative purposes Micronesia was divided into six districts. The transition from military to civil administration was essentially complete by April 1922.<sup>20</sup>

Japanese-American discord over the island of Yap was resolved by the American-Japanese Treaty of November 1921. In accordance with this treaty, the United States recognized Japanese mandatory control over Yap and in return received equal rights in all matters that might directly or indirectly affect the cable system. Japan also gave the United States the right to build a radio station on Yap if the then existing Japanese station proved inadequate.<sup>21</sup> The treaty provided that

The United States and its nationals shall have free access to the Island of Yap on a footing of entire equality with Japanese or other nations and their nationals in all that relates to the landing and operations of the existing Yap-Guam cable. . . . Nationals of the United States shall have the unrestricted right to reside on the island. . . . Nationals of the United States shall have complete freedom of entry and exit for their persons and property.<sup>22</sup>

Enforced with good faith, this treaty should have resolved any dispute between the United States and Japan concerning Yap.

Further agreement on the status of Micronesia was reached among the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan as a result of the Washington Conference of 1921-22. At that conference the three powers agreed not to strengthen or extend the fortifications in their Pacific insular possessions. The term fortifications included naval bases, repair and maintenance facilities, and coastal defenses.<sup>23</sup> This agreement removed the subject from open contention until 1931.

The Japanese invasion of Manchuria

in 1931 caused the U.S. Government to voice its lingering suspicions. Japan, accused of clandestinely fortifying Micronesia, denied the charge in a report to the League of Nations Permanent Mandate Commission.<sup>24</sup> When the Japanese took Shanghai in a military operation widely publicized for its brutality, Secretary Stimson wrote an open letter to Senator Borah to the effect that if Japan continued to violate the Niuc-Power Treaty by its aggression in China, the United States would be justified in fortifying its own Pacific island possessions.<sup>25</sup> This letter led to a war scare in Japan and undoubtedly aided the emerging militarists in establishing their control.

The charge was then made, and is still accepted by many, that the Japanese were fortifying their mandated island in earnest. Reference was frequently made to the work that Japan was doing to the harbor facilities of Saipan, but the Japanese maintained this work was of a commercial nature.<sup>26</sup> Since Japan shortly thereafter excluded all foreigners from Micronesia, the only prewar information available today are the reports which Japan prepared for the Permanent Mandates Commission. These, of course, denied any treaty violation. The Japanese may, however, have been sincere. The much-vaunted Truk was evaluated by a post-war inspection to be "a fraud among fortresses" in that its defenses were superficial.<sup>27</sup>

The Japanese continued to present their annual reports concerning Micronesia to the League until 1935. In 1935 Japan withdrew from the League and declared the Micronesian Mandate to be under complete Japanese sovereignty. Subsequently, Micronesia was closed to all but a few foreign visitors, and those who were admitted were escorted over a very strict route. The League made no demand that Japan, as a withdrawing member, surrender her mandated territories, and the Japanese claimed that

the islands of Micronesia had been awarded to them by the Allies and Associated Powers, rather than the League.<sup>28</sup>

The strategic importance of Micronesia was well demonstrated by the Second World War. Possession of Micronesia changed Japanese naval strategy from defensive to offensive by placing Japan within reach of all that was worthwhile in the western Pacific—Australia, the Philippines, the East Indies, and Southeast Asia. It also forced the United States to transport war materials to China over the 13,000-mile circuitous route through Australia, India, and Burma. The Japanese Navy referred to Micronesia as its "floating fortresses" and its "stretching fleet of natural aircraft carriers."<sup>29</sup> Several important Micronesian bases were of consequence during the Second World War, including Truk, Palau, Saipan, Tinian, Yap, and Eniwetok. After obtaining a foothold in Micronesia, the U.S. Navy established floating mobile base groups that transformed many Micronesian islands into advanced bases for the wide-ranging 5th and 3d Fleets. These fleets and their supporting Marine elements completed the conquest of most of Micronesia by October of 1944. The Japanese phase was thus brought to an end.

**The United Nations Trusteeship.** The conclusion of World War II saw a disagreement among various segments of the U.S. Government over the future of Micronesia. The Department of State wished to internationalize the area as late as 1943, while the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that national security demanded outright annexation. Secretary of War H.H. Stimson thought Micronesia should become a series of "defense posts" for the United States, while President Roosevelt favored the concept of "multiple sovereignty," which involved vesting sovereignty over Micronesia with the U.N. but

designating the United States as the trustee.<sup>30</sup> All were agreed, however, that Japan was to lose the islands completely, and this was confirmed by both the Cairo and Potsdam Declarations.<sup>31</sup>

Due to this internal disagreement on the part of the U.S. Government, no effort was made to establish the status of Micronesia until the San Francisco Conference. At that conference the United States requested and obtained a trusteeship of the islands. This trusteeship was unique, in comparison with other trusteeships granted over Axis territories, in the privileges it afforded the United States. The trustee was granted permission to fortify Micronesia and to close off any part of the trusteeship for security reasons.<sup>32</sup> U.S. capital was an exception to the "most-favored nation" commercial clause,<sup>33</sup> and the United States was responsible only to the Security Council for its stewardship of the territory. All other trusteeships were supervised by the General Assembly.<sup>34</sup>

These favorable provisions were the result of the Security Council's decision to grant the United States a "strategic" trusteeship—the only trusteeship so designated.<sup>35</sup> This unique management was for the United States a compromise between the nonannexation principles of the Atlantic Charter and security requirements. In spite of attempts by the new Afro-Asian dominated General Assembly to modify this trusteeship agreement, the basic provisions still pertain and will do so for the foreseeable future, unless the United States voluntarily declines to use its veto in the Security Council.

Micronesian sentiment over this state of affairs is perhaps best expressed by an ancient Saipanese, whose attitude is the soul of pragmatism: "In my youth I learned Spanish and then German. At middle age I learned Japanese and now, in my old age, I find myself taking English lessons. I wonder, will I some-

day have to learn Russian?"

**The American Phase.** The initial American occupation of Micronesia was complicated by the presence of Japanese nationals. Japan had colonized Micronesia as Spain and Germany never had, and by 1945 Japanese nationals outnumbered the indigenous population by 147,000 to 50,000.<sup>36</sup> The United States solved this problem by removing all Japanese nationals from the islands and repatriating all Micronesians who, for various reasons, had left Micronesia. This process was completed by January of 1947.<sup>37</sup>

The first American administrative authority for Micronesia was the U.S. Navy. With its large budget the Navy could and did contribute much to the material welfare of Micronesia. However, it was decided in 1951 that it was incompatible with American principles for a military service to exercise control over large groups of civilians, and the administration of Micronesia was transferred to the Department of the Interior. This department appointed a High Commissioner who combined in his office both legislative and executive responsibilities for the territory.<sup>38</sup>

It was quite a blow to the Micronesians when the relatively free-spending Navy left and the Interior took over with its budget of \$7 million a year, most of which was disbursed in salaries to the American administrators. In concurrence with the recent Japanese agitation for the return of Okinawa, however, Interior's budget for Micronesia has been increased to \$41 million a year, over a third of which is expended on education.<sup>39</sup>

At the United Nations, the Soviet Union and many nations of the Afro-Asian bloc have attacked the U.S. administration in Micronesia as an example of "American colonialism."<sup>40</sup> These attacks have occurred in meetings of the Trusteeship Council, the General Assembly, and the Special Committee

of 24, an ad hoc committee formed to implement the 1960 General Assembly Resolution 1515 (XV) which demanded an end to colonialism.

The Trusteeship Council received authority over the ex-League of Nations Mandates, ex-Axis colonies, and any voluntary additions. The Council includes the permanent members of the Security Council, those nations granted a trusteeship, and others such that they equal in number the first two categories. It sends an annual visiting delegation to Micronesia with the permission of the United States.<sup>41</sup> As a rule, the delegation has reported favorably concerning American stewardship, but complaints have been lodged at the slow turnover of responsibility to Micronesians and the relatively slow progress in education.<sup>42</sup> One United Nations touring mission reported that the economy of Micronesia was stagnating, and President Kennedy responded by reversing the Department of Interior's policy of discouraging private American capital investment.<sup>43</sup> In another instance, a touring mission complained at the transfer of northern Marianas to naval administration in 1952, and the area was, as a result, returned to the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior.<sup>44</sup>

Since 1965 the yearly meetings of the Trusteeship Council have become the stage for perennial Soviet attacks on U.S. administration of Micronesia. Such attacks have been carried into the General Assembly also, and the Soviets have obtained the support of much of the Afro-Asian bloc on this issue. As a result, the General Assembly passed a resolution on 20 December 1965 calling on "colonial powers to dismantle their military bases in their colonies and territories and to refrain from establishing new ones."<sup>45</sup> Similar resolutions were passed in the 1966 and 1967 sessions of the General Assembly.

The attack on U.S. Micronesian policies was not confined to the Trusteeship Council and the floor of the General

Assembly. In 1961 the General Assembly established a committee to implement its 1960 Resolution 1515 (XV), which called for an end to all international dependencies. In 1963 the Assembly saw fit to include the trust territories in the charter of the committee and expand its membership to 24. This committee was officially titled the Committee on the Situation with Regards to Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. The United States, however, has never accepted the General Assembly's right to involve itself in the Trust Territories and refused in 1967 to provide the Special Committee with data on military bases in the Trust.<sup>46</sup> A portent of things to come was provided in 1968 when the Special Committee concluded that the U.S. bases on Guam were having a negative effect on the liberation of Guamanians.<sup>47</sup> As Guam is not even in the Trust Territory of Micronesia, the United States protested this conclusion and threatened to resign its membership on the Special Committee.

The United States has, however, made some concessions to the trend of opinion within the General Assembly and the political feelings of Micronesians. In 1965 a Congress of Micronesia was established consisting of a 12-man Senate and a 21-man House of Representatives.<sup>48</sup> This elected body, drawn from throughout the Territory, made Micronesia for the first time a term of political as well as geographical validity. The Congress is still subject to the veto of the High Commissioner, but its powers are accreting yearly. The Trusteeship Council has officially acknowledged its existence and recommended that it direct its attentions to the political future of Micronesia.<sup>49</sup>

**The Future.** The value of Micronesia to the United States in terms of strategy is obvious from a glance at a map of the

Pacific. It lies athwart the major shipping lanes connecting the United States with Southeast Asia, and in unfriendly hands it could force an expensive rerouting of our supply lines to Vietnam. If a new defense line is formed in the Western Pacific after the conclusion of the Vietnamese war, Micronesia would be a major element in it. The islands of Micronesia present many possibilities for forward naval bases, and such bases would, under present conditions, be more politically reliable than our present Japanese and Philippine bases. During February of 1945 the floating base complex at Ulithi Atoll alone was supporting, by actual count, some 492 vessels.<sup>50</sup> Both the Marine Corps and the House Subcommittee on Naval Affairs have expressed interest in Micronesian bases, and the head of the Political Status Committee of the Congress of Micronesia has suggested that the economic needs of the islands might be met through payments by the United States for military rights on the islands.<sup>51</sup>

At the present time the United States has a very small military investment in the islands of Micronesia. Kwajalein is under Army control as a closely guarded missile base and is not responsible to the Trust Territory Government.<sup>52</sup> There are also radio stations on Panope and Palau and a satellite station on Truk. The Defense Department is unlikely to appropriate new funds for the development of Micronesia until that area's political status is definitely settled. With the recent independence of Nauru, the only remaining Trustships are New Guinea and Micronesia, and increasing pressure for their independence can be expected from the General Assembly of the United Nations.

In an effort to resolve Micronesia's political status, President Johnson planned a plebiscite in the Trust Territory in 1972. Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel, during his May 1969 visit to Micronesia, stated that the plebiscite

may be held before 1972.<sup>53</sup> Secretary Hickel has invited the Congress of Micronesia to aid in planning the disbursement of funds allotted the Trust Territory by the U.S. Government, and he hopes to develop with the Micronesian leaders an acceptable form of home rule before the coming plebiscite.<sup>54</sup>

The Congress of Micronesia has formed a Political Status Commission to prepare recommendations relating to the future political status of Micronesia. The commission's report is expected to favor self-government and "free association" with the United States. This report will doubtless have an important bearing on the outcome of the plebiscite and Micronesia's future political status.

Any political status for Micronesia that does not include some form of association with the United States would appear to be unrealistic. Micronesia is still really a term of validity only in macrogeography. Although all the languages of Micronesia belong to a common family, the Malay-Polynesian, there are within the area nine distinct languages and many local dialects.<sup>55</sup>

## BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Comdr. Harry W. Bergbauer, Jr., U.S. Navy, is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and holds a master's degree in political diplomacy from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, where his field of research

was the role of the naval officer in international relations. He has had extensive duty in destroyers and a wide experience in anti-air warfare, both with fleet units and as an instructor in fleet and shore training units. Commander Bergbauer is a graduate of the Naval War College, School of Naval Warfare (Class of 1969), and is currently assigned as the Officer in Charge of the U.S. Naval Advisory Detachment, Danang, RVN.



Strong localism is the rule in Micronesia, and the islands themselves are separated by great distances. The islands also contain such American trappings as Little Leagues, Thanksgiving, tourism, and coffee breaks.

There is considerable sentiment among Micronesians for a permanent connection with the United States. In a sample plebiscite held in Saipan in 1961, 2,517 of 2,847 votes cast were for the option of becoming U.S. citizens.<sup>5 6</sup> The head of the Political Status Commission of the Congress of Micronesia has stated that most islanders

strongly favor a permanent connection with the United States. He has suggested a plebiscite to confirm this, followed by a leisurely negotiation to define the details of the association, taking "perhaps five to eight years."<sup>5 7</sup>

It is to be fervently desired that the United States react expeditiously to such exhibitions of good will on the part of the Micronesian leaders—before the inevitable something happens to blunt the sentiment. A Micronesia not politically allied with the United States would be a disaster of the first magnitude.

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