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US military admits it fell short on awarding local contracts in Micronesia

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JTF Micronesia commander Rear Admiral Joshua Lasky said the US military is looking into how contracts are awarded. Photo: Supplied

The head of Joint Task Force (JTF) Micronesia has acknowledged that the US military could have done a better job of awarding contracts to local companies involved in its growing network of projects across the region.

JTF Micronesia commander Rear Admiral Joshua Lasky made the admission during the Association of Pacific Island Legislatures (AOIL) general assembly on Saipan this week, in response to a question from Yap Senator John Mafel.

He said the shortfall was not unique to Yap State - the westernmost state of the Federated States of Micronesia - but also occurred in the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), particularly during recent military exercises.

"We are looking into how contracts were awarded," he said.

"For instance, during exercise REFORPAC here in the CNMI, I think some economic benefit was experienced, but in certain circumstances, we didn't do the best job of making sure that the business was going to local vendors. That's something we need to continue to work on."

Mafel earlier raised concerns that Yap had yet to feel the economic benefits promised by the US military buildup, recalling assurances made by former Indo-Pacific Command head Admiral John Aquilino.

"The very first contract awarded in Yap - for removing debris and junk cars for a planned dock site - was given to Amentum," he said.

"But Amentum subcontracted to another off-island firm. It's not a Yapese company. So with all this talk of \$2.3 billion in projects, we're not really seeing any real benefits."

Amentum is a US-based contractor that provides engineering, technical, and logistical services for defense and intelligence operations worldwide.



Lasky said JTF Micronesia is committed to promoting local participation in infrastructure projects to generate long-term employment and skills development. Photo: Naina Rao / KPRG News

The US military previously faced similar criticism in the CNMI when a Texas-based company was awarded a US\$238,000 catering contract to feed 600 Air Force personnel during training exercises last July and August.

Mafel said Yap had expected a share of the military buildup's benefits, including opportunities for local fuel suppliers, labor, and vendors.

"When the movement does come, I hope they make sure to use our fuel, our local fuel company, so prices go down-and also use local labor and vendors as much as possible," he said.

In his presentation to Pacific lawmakers, Lasky outlined JTF Micronesia's mission and priorities since its establishment in June 2024, emphasizing that US homeland defence extends beyond the mainland to include all territories, commonwealths, and freely associated states.

He said the Indo-Pacific remains the most consequential region of the century, with JTF Micronesia focused on cooperation, deterrence, and resilience to maintain peace and stability.

Lasky highlighted initiatives in humanitarian assistance, disaster response, maritime security, and infrastructure resilience, citing collaboration during Typhoon Mawar and exercises such as Pacific Partnership, COPE North, and Koa Moana.

He said JTF Micronesia is committed to promoting local participation in infrastructure projects to generate long-term employment and skills development, while ensuring respect for local culture and the environment.

Lasky closed by reaffirming that deterrence, transparency, and partnership are vital to preserving peace in the Pacific.



Joint Task Force Micronesia commander Rear Admiral Joshua Lasky. Photo: Supplied / Mark Rabago

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