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US-Yap agreement smooths the path for military construction on island state

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By Mar-Vic Cagurangan

The United States and the Federated States of Micronesia have signed an agreement that will facilitate defense construction and other related projects in Yap, aiming to surmount any potential obstacles that may impede military undertakings in the strategically important island state.

Rear Adm. Brent DeVore, outgoing commander of the Joint Region Marianas, said the operational control letter grants the Yap government some authority “to work together with the Department of Defense to allow some construction projects to happen.” [Support Us](#)

The government of Yap announced the signing of the operational control letter on May 2, following a meeting with U.S. officials to discuss the components of the agreement, which sealed the partnership between Washington and the state government.

“So that was negotiated between the U.S. government and Yap state, and was signed off by the FSM administration to approve that. We're at the early stages,” DeVore said at a press briefing on Tuesday.

“We're just at that first step of the agreement that was made and just as with any agreement between governments, you'd expect it to be lengthy and legal.”

The U.S. Department of Defense announced in March its plan to invest \$2 billion in the FSM to build additional projects that would enhance the strategic, operational, and exercise capabilities of U.S. forces.

“Behind that is future investment that will include some port development capability just to provide probably dual-use capabilities for both the community of Yap and for the military to use it as a logistics hub,” DeVore said.

In 2023, the U.S. Air Force proposed a \$400 million international airport extension project in Yap to accommodate U.S. military operations in the strategically important Pacific region in response to China's military buildup.

On May 19, U.S. defense representatives met with FSM and Yap officials to present an overview and design projects planned for Yap.

“These projects include improving the port, improving roads, and other infrastructure projects. They want to ensure that the projects are safe, environmentally friendly, and beneficial to Yap State,” states a press release from the Yap government.

According to the latest available statistics, Yap had a GDP of \$52 million in 2018. The island state has a relatively small tourism industry.

In an earlier interview with the Pacific Island Times, Yap Lt. Gov. Francis Itimai said the state government welcomes defense investments, but acknowledges that the looming military presence in Yap has triggered community anxiety, especially among the elders, “who don't really understand the process.”

The Compact of Free Association provides the U.S. military exclusive defense rights in the FSM's land, water and air.

Although Yap is an autonomous state, the FSM national government has the sole authority to deal with foreign governments. However, Itimai said Yap has the final say on issues affecting the state.



Brent DeVore

