

# Micronesia in Modern Geopolitics

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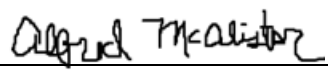
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## Abstract

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After the Second World War, the United States established full strategic control over the South Pacific region of Micronesia. Under a United Nations agreement, America held Micronesia as a “Strategic Trust Territory” during the Cold War, eventually acceding to the islanders’ demands for political self-determination. Throughout this period, the US failed to maintain coherent policy priorities and treated the islanders as second-class negotiating partners. Today, Micronesia is comprised of three states in “free association” with the United States: the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau, as well as the American territories of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands.

Micronesia lies geographically in the heart of the Asia-Pacific and continues to be of great strategic importance to the United States. In the coming decades, the rise of China will significantly alter the geopolitical *status quo* in Micronesia. The potential loss of Micronesia to China would be a substantial blow to America’s strategic position in the Asia-Pacific, and would be deeply damaging to American interests. US policymakers should consider the nature of this threat and create policy that meets the Chinese challenge in the Micronesia region.

This thesis will provide a political history of Micronesia to the present day, describe the unique relationship between America and the freely associated states, and discuss the geopolitical issues currently facing the region. Overall, I intend for this thesis to provide a basic primer on Micronesia, and a broader look at the region’s role in global geopolitics.

Supervising Professor: Michael R Anderson, PhD

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During my visit to the islands of Pohnpei and Chuuk in the Federated States of Micronesia, the people of Micronesia were nothing but kind, welcoming, and candid. Travelling to their remote paradise and speaking with them face-to-face left with a deeper understanding of their societies and the issues they face. Furthermore, my trip to Micronesia was made possible by a generous travel grant from Plan II, for which I am greatly appreciative.

Finally, I am thankful for my loving partner of four years, Ka'ohinani Kawahigashi, who accompanied me to some of the world's most remote islands and offered her own Pacific Islander perspective.

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## I. Introduction to Micronesia

"Our ancestors, who made their homes on these islands, displaced no other people.

We, who remain, wish no other home than this. Having known war, we hope for peace.

Having been divided, we wish unity. Having been ruled, we seek freedom."

*Preamble to the Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia*<sup>1</sup>

"The United States is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay."

*Barack Obama*<sup>2</sup>

*Micronesia* is a misnomer. The Greek word for "small islands" was imposed by westerners as a way of contrasting the region's tiny and scattered islands with the far larger archipelagos of Polynesia and Melanesia. Although the majority of the Micronesian islands are indeed small, they are quite numerous and deeply diverse; ranging from the large, plateau-like island of Guam to tiny sand spits in the Marshalls covered at high tide. Micronesia, as commonly understood, includes the Caroline, Marshall, and Mariana Island chains. These three groupings are themselves western inventions, and paper over the deep linguistic and cultural diversity found throughout and within the islands. On Guam, one is greeted with the Chamorro greeting of *Hafa Adai*, in Pohnpei by *Kaselehlie*, and in Chuuk Lagoon with *Ran Annim*. The myriad peoples of Micronesia, from the cosmopolitan casino-owning, English-speaking Chamorros of Saipan to the atoll-dwelling navigators of Satawal Island, all have their own interpretations of their islander identities that are far richer than the simple label "Micronesian." Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the geographic and political region of Micronesia mindful of the diversity of cultures and deep history among the region's more than 2,000 islands.

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<sup>1</sup> "Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia." Preamble

<sup>2</sup> McHenry, *Micronesia, Trust Betrayed*, 87.

The Caroline, Marshall, and Mariana Islands lie geographically in the heart of the Asia-Pacific. They sit between Japan and Indonesia on a north-south axis and between the Philippines and Hawai'i on an east-west axis. In recent history, this interior position has saddled the islands with outsized geopolitical relevancy, especially during wartime. The airfields and anchorages of Micronesia were the springboard for the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and consequently became a bloody battleground between the Japanese and Americans during the Pacific War. When the war ended and American rule came to Micronesia, the Marshallese atolls of Eniwetok and Bikini became the proving grounds for America's arsenal of increasingly destructive nuclear weaponry. Today the Micronesian islands continue to make the daily news. At the time of writing, North Korean dictator Kim Jong-Un is threatening to fire a nuclear missile at Guam, Micronesia's largest island and America's key military stronghold and logistical hub in the central Pacific.

The native people of the islands have experienced shockingly rapid social, religious, and cultural change over the past two centuries. Europeans arrived in earnest throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, introducing their religions, technologies, vices, and diseases to the native people. The islands saw a quick succession of several colonial masters, the devastation of history's largest naval war, and then the destructive power of nuclear weapons. The changes to the islanders' societies and psyches brought about by this tumultuous history are not to be underestimated. Above all, Micronesians have a keen understanding of the importance of their islands to the outside world, and have developed an ethos of shrewd political pragmatism to adapt and survive in the world they have found themselves in.

Today, the Micronesian islands are firmly under the strategic control of the United States. Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands are American territories, while the three semi-

independent nations of Micronesia exist in “Compacts of Free Association” with America. Micronesians hold a wide range of opinions on this political arrangement, but few see it as perfect. Among many, there is a sort of consensus that their resource-poor islands and atolls require a foreign benefactor to maintain a minimum standard of living. However, the inadequacy of American policy in fully meeting the region’s challenges has long been apparent. Most frustrating, America has failed to develop and maintain coherent policy priorities and for decades has treated the islanders as second-class political partners.

With the rise of China looming over the Asia-Pacific, the United States cannot continue to consider Micronesia as indefinitely in the American camp. Indeed, America can expect China’s geopolitical interests to expand into Micronesia as its political, economic, and military influence continue to grow. Already there are indications that China is seeking to make inroads across Oceania. Should America continue to neglect its relationships with the Compact states, it is possible if not probable that China will displace the United States as the predominant power in Micronesia. This thesis is first and foremost intended to inform the reader about an understudied and underappreciated topic – Micronesia. Chapters II and III are a political history of Micronesia, respectively focusing on the periods before and after American governance of the region. Chapter IV is an overview of the modern US-Micronesian relationship, using this as context to frame the current policy questions about the role of Micronesia in global geopolitics. For the remainder of this chapter, I offer a brief tour of the island groups of Micronesia in order to better acquaint the reader with the geography and diversity of these remote and mysterious islands.



Figure 1: A Map of the South-Central Pacific with American Micronesia outlined in red. Note the Caroline Islands in the center-bottom, the Mariana Islands in the center-top, and the Marshall Islands to the right.<sup>3</sup>

### The Federated States of Micronesia

Comprising the largest portion of Micronesia, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is a massive four-state federation with a population of just over 102,000.<sup>4</sup> Four high-rising islands are the political, economic, and cultural hearts of the Federation. At least seven major languages are spoken in FSM, and no ethnic group comprises the majority. FSM has developed into a surprisingly successful multiethnic democracy – transitions of power are frequent and peaceful, and ethnic strife exceedingly rare. On the other hand, FSM has long struggled to develop a functioning market economy and remains deeply poor. Like the other independent nations of Micronesia, FSM is in a “Compact of Free Association” with the United States. The four major states of FSM, and their respective island capitals, are as follows:

*Kosrae (previously known as Kusaie)* is a sleepy, remote island and the easternmost state of FSM. About 6,600 Micronesians live on Kosrae, which is unique among the FSM states in

<sup>3</sup> “Oceania Map.” Central Intelligence Agency

<sup>4</sup> Francis X. Hezel and Levin, “Survey of Federated States of Micronesia Migrants in the United States Including Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI).”



that it is a single island, with no outlying atolls under the state's jurisdiction.<sup>5</sup> Flights to Kosrae are infrequent, and a handful of tourists visit every year to stay at eco-lodges and dive around the island's pristine coral reefs. Kosrae was once a united, hereditary monarchy, but the traditional political system was abandoned during the period of American rule.<sup>6</sup>

*Pohnpei (previously known as Ponape)* is a mountainous island that serves as the capital of the Federated States. The island is round and roughly a fifth the size of Oahu, with a population of just over 36,000.<sup>7</sup> The Capital of Pohnpei State, Kolonia, is a small but busy town hosting the island's only airport. The island is brimming with government agencies: embassies, bureaus, commissions, departments, and divisions of all sorts make their home on Pohnpei, converting foreign aid into working class jobs for islanders.

The unending rains, dowering humidity, and thick mangrove jungles make Pohnpei a dower place. There are no beaches on the island – instead, the water is met only by thick and muddy mangrove swamps. New public buildings look years-worn as soon as they are completed (if they ever are – many make it only halfway up before running out of money or tangled in red tape). Freshly-repainted used cars, imported from Japan, quickly lose their sheen. Their fate is often to lay strewn along the roadside, windows shattered, tires flat, with coconut trees and mangroves sprouting from the driver's seat. Husks of abandoned ships, red with rust, litter the sides of Kolonia's harbor. It is not the fault of the Pohnpeians, but their environment. The environment of the island is lush, verdant, and all-consuming. Anything left outside on Pohnpei lives on borrowed time.

Pohnpei maintains a somewhat robust system of chiefly authority. The paramount chief, the *Nahmwarki*, holds influence over the island's lower chiefs, who manage systems of

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<sup>5</sup> FSM Government, "FSM 2010 Census."

<sup>6</sup> Hezel, Petteys, and Chang, "Sustainable Human Development in FSM."

<sup>7</sup> FSM Government, "FSM 2010 Census."

patronage in their respective tribal networks. Chiefs manage the distribution of tribal and familial property, hold feasts, and grant honorifics or gifts. Driving on Pohnpei's single ring road, you will find yourself in such bizarre entities as the "Kingdom of U", both a legal subdivision of Pohnpei and a traditional tribal area headed by a hereditary chief.

*Chuuk (previously known as Truk)* is a collection of small rocky islands enclosed in a coral lagoon. Chuuk is the most populous and least developed state of FSM, with over 48,000 inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> The Capital of Chuuk State is Weno, a small town hugging the sides of a small, mountainous island and hosting Chuuk's single-runway airport. Outside of Weno, most Chuukese are strewn throughout the other islands in the lagoon. Many live in villages lacking basic utilities like running water and electricity that are commonplace on Pohnpei. Chuukese with ambition typically leave their home island – either to Weno (home to Micronesia's best private school, the Jesuit-run Xavier High School), to Pohnpei to work in FSM government, or to Hawai'i, Guam, and the mainland United States on Compact migration privileges, where they tend to work in low-skill, labor-intensive industries.

Chuuk is infamous for its somewhat high crime rate, and likewise Chuukese have a rather poor reputation across most of Oceania. On Pohnpei, FSM officials disdain the numerous Chuukese for their outsized influence in the multi-ethnic Federation government. In Guam and Hawai'i, they are often stereotyped for their homelessness and criminality. Interestingly, Chuuk lacks a tradition of hereditary tribal chiefs, instead having a system similar to the "Melanesian Big-Man Societies" to the South. Before the period of German rule, Chuuk was not governed in any meaningful sense. Individuals lived in small family fiefdoms that rarely grew or consolidated and only entered into "impermanent and shaky arrangements aimed at gaining support at time of

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<sup>8</sup> FSM Government.

war.”<sup>9</sup> It is thus not unreasonable to speculate that Chuuk’s violent reputation in part stems from its anarchic history.

*Yap* is the westernmost state of FSM, a small, hilly island known for its preservation of traditional Micronesian culture. Home to just over 11,000 individuals, the island is still organized around traditional village tribes.<sup>10</sup> Yap is also home of the famous *rai*, the giant stone money by the precolonial Yapese as markers of wealth and status. The stone coins are sometimes as large as buildings – and rarely can be moved from place. Traditional dress is still in use, and many Yapese women go topless and wear traditional grass skirts. The traditional culture in Yap has been sustained partly due to the island’s reluctance to embrace the outside world. The tribal chiefs of Yap have long been more skeptical of outsiders than those of Palau or Pohnpei, and maintained a tight grip on their people throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s procession of colonial masters. More than any other groups of Micronesians, the Yapese have rejected tourism, internationalism, and capitalism in favor of maintaining their traditional social systems. Change on Yap thus arrives far more slowly than elsewhere in the major Micronesian islands.

#### *Commonalities of the Federated States of Micronesia*

Despite the unique cultural heritage of the four states, they share several important characteristics. For most Micronesians, church is a highly significant social institution. From the mid-1850s to today, foreign missionaries from various Christian denominations have come to Micronesia in order to spread their gospels to the previously pagan islanders. This includes mainstream denominations: Catholicism, Episcopalianism, and Anglicanism are all entrenched in Micronesia, and the role of Catholicism is especially important as the church maintains a network of relatively high-quality private schools. However, this missionary tradition has also

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<sup>9</sup> Hezel, Petteys, and Chang, “Sustainable Human Development in FSM.”

<sup>10</sup> FSM Government, “FSM 2010 Census.”

attracted more fringe Christian groups: including Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Seventh-Day Adventists. These more esoteric Christian denominations are gaining followers in the islands, where they are free from the some of the social stigma they face elsewhere.

Outside of the main islands there are many inhabited coral atolls scattered across FSM in the states of Yap, Chuuk, and Pohnpei. Most atolls are highly remote – often hundreds of miles from the nearest other piece of land. Most lack airstrips and telecommunications, and are connected to the outside world only by infrequent boat visits that bring basic provisions. Two atolls in FSM, Kapingamarangi and Nakuro, are ethnically Polynesian, while the remainder are ethnically Micronesian. For many who grow up on atolls – tiny scraps of land, supported only by taro or coconut patches – their small islands are the entirety of their world. It is an exceedingly remote existence in an already isolated region of the world.

### **The Republic of Marshall Islands**

The Marshall Islands are a collection of 29 low-lying coral atolls divided into two chains, the *ratak* and *ralik*. The vast majority of the 53,000 Marshallese are atoll-dwellers, divided between the highly urbanized atolls of Majuro and Kwajalein and the 27 other, more remote islands.<sup>11</sup> Together, they are governed by the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) in free association with the United States. The Republic's capital, Majuro, is a crowded city anxiously resting upon a large, low-lying coral atoll, no more than 100 meters in width at any one point.

A few hundred miles northwest of Majuro is the 97-island Kwajalein Atoll, of which 11 are leased to the United States as the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site. The southernmost island, affectionately known as “Kwaj” by its over 1,000 American military personnel, hosts most of the base infrastructure, including an American-style suburb complete

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<sup>11</sup> Economic Policy, Planning, and Statistics Office and Office of the RMI President, “RMI-2011-Census-Summary-Report-on-Population-and-Housing.pdf.”

with recreational facilities, a supermarket, and movie theater. Slightly to the North, over 10,000 Marshallese occupy the tiny island of Ebeye, attracted by the prospect of jobs on Kwaj. Ebeye is one of the most densely populated islands on Earth – and conditions, while not third-world, are far below American standards.

Poverty is not the only issue facing the RMI. The Marshalls' low-lying geography make the islands uniquely vulnerable to climate change. Rarely does the land pinched in the middle of a coral atoll exceed six meters in altitude, so even a modest change in sea level could erase or make uninhabitable many of the atolls. Should sea level rise meet even more conservative projections, many of the Marshalls will need to be permanently relocated.

As in Yap, traditional hereditary chiefs in the Marshalls have far more power than they do elsewhere in Micronesia. The *irooj* (chiefs) have a dedicated House of Congress, and maintain strong land rights and traditional authority within their communities.<sup>12</sup> This is not to overstate Marshallese conservatism, as the victory of Hilda Heine in the 2016 Marshallese Presidential Elections made the Marshall Islands the first Micronesian nation to have a female head of state.

Of course, the Marshall Islands are most well-known as the site of American nuclear testing from 1946 to 1962. Starting with the testing of 2 fission bombs on Bikini atoll in 1946, 66 nuclear weapons were detonated on Marshallese atolls, the testing ground for the world's first hydrogen bombs.<sup>13</sup> The effects of radiation and the relocation of the natives from the so-called "Pacific Proving Grounds" remain a perennial public health and political issue in the Marshalls.

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<sup>12</sup> Walsh, "Imagining the Marshalls: Chiefs, Tradition, and the State on the Fringes of US Empire."

<sup>13</sup> Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land : A Century of Colonial Rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands*. 273

## The Republic of Palau

Palau is a chain of 340 islands and the westernmost region of the Caroline Islands, only 1000km to the east of the Philippines. The just over 21,000 residents of Palau are far wealthier than those of Micronesia and the Marshalls, as the islands host a thriving tourism industry that mostly caters to visitors from East Asian.<sup>14</sup> The Palauan island chain, extending some 1,000 miles southwest of the Marianas, is far closer to Asia than the rest of Micronesia. Palau is also home to a large Asian expatriate population. Palauans see their country as distinct from the remainder of Micronesia – in general they are far more outgoing than other Micronesians, and are known as the ambitious go-getters of the region.

Despite the islands' relative wealth, of the three Compact states Palau has been the most politically dysfunctional. Palau rejected the Micronesian Constitution in 1979, and could not reach an agreement for *de jure* independence until 1994. The first President of Palau, Haruo Remeliik, was murdered on the job, while the second, Lazarus Salii, committed suicide amid a political firestorm.<sup>15</sup> In more recent years, Palauan politics have stabilized, but some governments have continued acting unscrupulously. In the late 2000s, the islands became a haven for money laundering and tax avoidance with the tacit permission of the government – an arrangement eventually ended under intense international pressure. Given Palau's geographic proximity to Asia and its somewhat self-sustaining economy, it is the Compact state with by far the most fragile political relationship with the United States.

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<sup>14</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook — (Palau)."

<sup>15</sup> Arnold Leibowitz, *Embattled Island: Palau's Struggle for Independence*.

## **The Territory of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands**

Guam is the largest and most populous island in Micronesia, and a territory of the United States since 1898. Over 167,000 individuals of several ethnic groups reside on Guam.<sup>16</sup> To its tourism promoters, Guam is “Where America’s Day Begins!”, but to America’s strategic planners, the island is America’s “Gibraltar of the Pacific”, an impregnable fortress home to a major American air and naval base.<sup>17</sup> Geographically, the 543 km<sup>2</sup> island of Guam is part of the Mariana Islands, with whom they share a common Chamorro ethnic heritage. It is the largest island in Micronesia, and the second-most visited island in the Pacific by foreign tourists – banking nearly 1.5 million every year, mostly from East Asia.<sup>18</sup> Guam’s economy, fueled by tourism and the presence of the US military, is therefore quite prosperous. The island is also multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan, and deeply interconnected with major economies of East Asia.

To the north, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is another American territory that together with Guam comprise the Mariana island chain. Around 52,000 individuals live in the Northern Mariana Islands.<sup>19</sup> There are 15 islands in the CNMI, though the vast majority of the Commonwealth’s population lives in the southern islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. CNMI, like Guam, shares a Chamorro heritage and has embraced tourism and real estate as major economic engines. As a result, the Mariana Islands, Guam included, are far more prosperous and cosmopolitan than the Compact nations to the South.

## **The Micronesian Diaspora**

The Compacts of Free Association have allowed Micronesians unrestricted immigration and work privileges in the United States. With these privileges, tens of thousands Micronesians

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<sup>16</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook — (Guam).”

<sup>17</sup> Rogers, “Guam’s Strategic Value.”

<sup>18</sup> Hezel, Interview with Father Fran. Hezel by Cameron Jack Andrews.

<sup>19</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook — (CNMI).”

have moved to America. Most numerous are the Micronesians in Guam, Hawai'i, and Saipan, where many find work as standard low-wage immigrant workers: housekeepers, cooks, clerks, and janitors. In Honolulu, Micronesians are numerous enough to have their own neighborhoods, grocery stores, and aid clinics that cater especially to their needs. In Guam, many work in construction and other labor-intensive industries.

Interestingly, the Micronesian diaspora is becoming entrenched throughout the continental United States. The number of Compact immigrants is not effectively counted by the US Census, so it is highly difficult to ascertain their true number. However, according to a 2012 study by Fran Hezel and Dr. Michael J Levin, the FSM population in the United States totals 49,840 – including 16,790 born on American soil.<sup>20</sup> According to FSM's official 2010 Census, there are just over 102,000 individuals in FSM itself, a number that has been slowly decreasing.<sup>21</sup> Thus, about one in three FSM Micronesians live in the United States, one of the highest rates of per capita migration to the United States of any country worldwide. Although a similar count has not been conducted for the Marshallese, it is widely believed among Micronesia experts that immigration from the Marshall Islands is of comparable scale. These Micronesians have settled in places as diverse as Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Minnesota. Enid, Oklahoma developed a Marshallese community around 250, who affectionately call the town "Enid Atoll." Three hours to the east, over 2,000 Marshallese live in Springdale, Arkansas, mostly working in a Tyson Chicken plant. Springdale's Marshallese population is so substantial that the Marshall Islands maintains a consulate in the town. Surveys of Micronesian immigrants have also suggested that those who migrate to the mainland fare better economically than those who migrate to other

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<sup>20</sup> Francis X. Hezel and Levin, "Survey of Federated States of Micronesia Migrants in the United States Including Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)."

<sup>21</sup> FSM Government, "FSM 2010 Census."



island territories.<sup>22</sup> Though the exact trends in Micronesian migration are difficult to study, it seems that increasing numbers of Micronesians are using their Compact immigration privileges to move to the United States and are establishing permanent islander communities on the American mainland. This understudied wave of Micronesian migration, among other aspects that will be discussed in this thesis, is reflective of the unique relationship that the United States has with the region.

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<sup>22</sup> Hezel, "Micronesians on the Move: Eastward and Upward Bound." 33

## II. Five Empires in Micronesia

“[The Carolines] are not worth it. The islands would not repay one week of preparation for war.”

*-Otto von Bismarck, 1885<sup>23</sup>*

“The next time you have a war, please don’t have it here.”

*-Micronesian Woman to UN Trusteeship Council, 1947<sup>24</sup>*

The Micronesian islands are so distant, scattered, and small that they can seem the very archetype of isolation. Even today, their combined population is only barely equivalent to that of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The oceans separating the Carolines, Marshalls, and Marianas from Asia look deceptively small on a world map – in reality, outside of the cosmopolitan Marianas, Micronesia is a slow and disconnected place. On the more distant atolls, isolation is at the heart of island life. Despite this isolation, Micronesia’s regional position in the heart of the Asia-Pacific has made the region incredibly important for foreign powers seeking to project power and facilitate trade in the Asia-Pacific.

This chapter is intended to offer a political history of Micronesia from Ferdinand Magellan’s chance encounter with Guam in 1521 to the beginning of American administration. This history is by no means comprehensive, but will provide context for the present-day political questions that are the focus of this thesis. During this period, foreign powers, first Europeans and then Japanese and Americans, viewed control of the Micronesian islands as important to their national aspirations. Taken as a single narrative, Micronesian history is the rather surprising story of how some of the world’s most remote islands transformed into a central battleground of world geopolitics.

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<sup>23</sup> Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization: A History of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in Pre-Colonial Days, 1521-1885*. 311

<sup>24</sup> Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia*.

### **The Micronesian Islands and European Contact (Prehistory-1780)**

The atolls and islands of Micronesia were originally settled by peoples of the Austronesian ethno-linguistic group, who migrated from Southeast Asia on ocean-going canoes.<sup>25</sup> The settlement of Oceania was gradual but comprehensive. By the time Europeans began exploring the deep Pacific, the vast majority of islands were home to indigenous civilizations of varying degrees of sophistication. The larger rocky islands or island groups – Guam, Pohnpei, Palau, and Yap – were generally ruled by loose tribal confederations led by hereditary chiefs. The chiefs presided over complex social systems that could have as many as five distinct social castes. Tribal confederations would compete for group status and control of large island groups, sporadically fighting to retain the loyalties of outlying villages and atolls. Smaller rocky islands typically had simpler systems of political organization. On Kosrae, a single hereditary chief held all authority. On the islands of Chuuk Lagoon, smaller kin-groups were the main unit of social organization. Throughout the Marshalls, where the atolls are arranged closely in the *Ralik* and *Ratak* chains, confederations among atolls were frequent. More remote atolls had even more basic social systems, which each typically having a chief who led a relatively egalitarian tribe, sometimes paying tribute to a far-off island.

Larger Micronesian islands briefly developed centralized states. On Pohnpei, the Saudeleur Dynasty upended the island's tribal system and established a monarchy centered in the extensive stone city of Nan Madol, ruling for at least 500 years over a peak population of perhaps 25,000 islanders.<sup>26</sup> However, the Sandelaur state collapsed before substantial European contact began. Similar ruins on Kosrae and Saipan attest to other pre-contact civilizations that have been lost to time. Without written languages, archeological records and oral histories are all

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<sup>25</sup> Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam*. 23

<sup>26</sup> Hanlon, *Upon a Stone Altar: A History of the Island of Pohnpei to 1890*.

that is available to speculate on the nature of these societies, though there is little doubt that they were highly sophisticated. However, the decline of such civilizations does indicate that in the long-run, sophisticated states had difficulty sustaining themselves on the small and resource-poor Micronesian islands.

Cyclical population booms and busts came every few generations, as small islands are highly vulnerable to overpopulation. Over time the population of an island like Pohnpei would gradually increase until suddenly declining from disease, natural disaster, or the collapse of political institutions. Some islands and local cultures adapted to this reality. Shocked European visitors documented infanticide among the Marshallese, some of whom would smother their third baby in the sands of the beach to prevent overpopulation.<sup>27</sup> Later on, the gradual arrival of European diseases would decimate Micronesian populations, first in the Mariana Islands and then centuries later in the Carolines and Marshalls.

Written Micronesian history begins with Spanish explorer Ferdinand Magellan's chance encounter with the island of Guam in 1521. The native Chamorro people of the Marianas islands, unaccustomed to European ideas of private property, boarded Magellan's ship and promptly began hauling off nearly everything that was not tied down. Magellan removed the islanders from his ship by force and then promptly continued onwards to the Philippines. Following Magellan's assessment of the natives, the Spanish called Guam the "Isle of Thieves" throughout the two centuries to follow.<sup>28</sup> Deeper into the Spanish colonial period, well-intentioned Jesuits renamed Magellan's "Ladrones Islands" to the more dignified "Guam."

The Spanish returned to the Mariana Islands a few decades later after successfully conquering the Philippines, claiming the islands as part of the "Spanish East Indies" and using

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<sup>27</sup> Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization: A History of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in Pre-Colonial Days, 1521-1885*. 93

<sup>28</sup> Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam*.

them as a trading and navigation waypoint for their disparate colonial empire. On Guam and the other Mariana Islands, there passed the standard sort of Spanish Colonialism: Iberian settlers moved onto the islands, missions and churches were built, and natives were compelled to adopt Spanish language, culture, and religion. Meanwhile, disease substantially reduced the Chamorro population, perhaps by upwards of 90%. Here in the Spanish conquest, the historical trajectory of the Mariana Islands diverges significantly from that of the Carolines and Marshalls, which were not extensively colonized until the arrival of the Japanese in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To this day, the Marianas are the most Hispanicized of the Micronesian islands, retaining substantial elements of Spanish religion and culture.

To the South, the Carolines and Marshalls initially escaped direct European control. At the peak of Spanish Imperial Era, Spanish explorers made sporadic expeditions to the southern islands. However, overstretched and in relative decline, the Spanish ultimately did not extend their colonial dominion south of Guam, and the islands would remain mostly untouched (and uncharted) until the late 1700s, though the Spanish crown still officially considered all of Micronesia as rightful Spanish territory. After the period of Spanish interest in Southern Micronesia following Magellan to the complete cessation of Spanish exploration in 1733, the Carolines and Marshalls were re-isolated from the outside world for another half-century. The islands were simply too remote and scarce in natural resources to induce any sustained effort at colonization further than that already undertaken in the Marianas.

### **The “Age of Adventure” (1783-1886)**

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Caroline and Marshall Islands were gradually “rediscovered” by the British, who headed a vast merchant fleet that was highly active in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>29</sup> In

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<sup>29</sup> Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization: A History of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in Pre-Colonial Days, 1521-1885*. 60

1783, the damaged British merchant ship *Antelope* ran into Palau in route to Canton.

Unbeknownst to both the British and Palauans, the arrival of the *Antelope* on Palau was the beginning of a new historical era in the Caroline and Marshall islands. The *Antelope* incident and the subsequent era of European contact dramatically changed Micronesia. After 1783, the islands would gradually become more exposed to the outside world, as well as objects of the political ambitions of foreign powers.

Ashore in Palau, the *Antelope*'s crew gleefully intervened in island politics. The *ibedul* (high chief) of Palau was quick to recognize the disruptive potential of European firearms, and requested the service of five English musketeers in his ongoing dispute with other tribal confederations in exchange for feeding the marooned crew and allowing them to repair their vessel. The five armed men were more than enough to deliver an easy victory. According Fran Hezel, the *Antelope* left "a deep appreciation for the value of gunpowder in the struggle for political ascendancy among the local villages, and a strong desire to continue to use foreigners as powerful allies in this struggle."<sup>30</sup> This knowledge, and these sorts of interactions, would soon spread across the Carolines.

After the ship was repaired, one of the English musketeers elected to stay behind. The otherwise unremarkable Englishman Madan Blanchard was the first of the Micronesian "beachcombers," a term for the Europeans who left or deserted their ships to live a more exotic life in Oceania. Within months, Blanchard "had discarded his clothes, had himself tattooed, and gone entirely naked."<sup>31</sup> He would not be the last; hundreds of washed up European and American sailors would escape to Micronesia in much the same way. They were convicts escaping Europe, African former slaves escaping their past in the New World, or eclectic adventure-seekers with

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<sup>30</sup> Hezel. 73

<sup>31</sup> Hezel. 77

nothing to lose. All settled into a new social role. Beachcombers served as retainers to local chiefs, mediating the trade in gunpowder and acting as liaisons with new European visitors. Most took local wives and adopted some manner of local culture, although not all followed Blanchard in fully ditching their clothes for tattoos. In the post-*Antelope* political era we begin to identify the first examples of how the islanders handled the new visitors. The Micronesians were neither fierce resisters of colonialism nor weak-willed natives wowed by the supposed sophistication of their European visitors. Instead, they were typically savvy political operators, making the best of the rapidly changing state of affairs.

Further British expeditions established similar arrangements on Yap and Pohnpei, and in subsequent years most of the Western Carolines were charted by British ships.<sup>32</sup> However, Micronesia soon developed a purpose in itself for the Chinese trade – as the British learned that the Chinese upper classes would trade their valuable teas, silks, and spices for *bêche-de-mar* (sea cucumber), sandalwood, turtle shells, and edible bird nests, all of which were abundant in the Micronesian islands. Copra (dried coconut) was also in demand worldwide. As British (and to a lesser degree, French and American) navigators discovered more islands in Carolines in the 1820s and 1830s, more beachcombers settled variously where local chiefs permitted and began informal trading houses, selling barrels of *bêche-de-mar* and crates of copra for gunpowder and iron, which they would exchange with their chiefly patrons for social status and wives. In addition to flooding Micronesia with firearms, the beachcombers introduced the islands to tobacco and liquor, which would become immensely socially disruptive.

As more and more foreigners interacted with the Caroline and Marshall Islands, the predominance of the beachcomber gave way to the trader and missionary. With European roots became more entrenched, formal trading houses moved into the Micronesian islands, working

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<sup>32</sup> Hezel. 84

directly with local chiefs and ditching the ignoble beachcomber middlemen. Missionaries from Catholic and Protestant sects also began setting up churches in the Carolines, working with varying degrees of success to save the souls of the natives. Within decades, majorities on every Carolinian and Marshallese island group had embraced one sort or another of Christianity. These mass conversions were often disruptive to the traditional chiefly authority systems of Micronesia, and mark one of the first examples of Micronesians embracing western culture.

Additionally, the arrival of the British marks the first time that any sort of international order was extended to Micronesia. Cases of murder by European seamen and beachcombers were tried in courts in Hong Kong. The British overall began to establish a sort of legal order, keeping the peace between chiefs, prosecuting the most heinous of crimes, and regulating trade in and out of Micronesia. They also began enforcing a series of “Kidnapping Acts,” meant to deter the abduction of natives by European privateers.<sup>33</sup> For the first time, Micronesia was entering into the international economic and legal system and getting a taste of the political significance it would come to have in the two centuries to come.

Increased European contact came with devastating waves of disease. Epidemics came and went as new vessels brought new ailments, particularly smallpox, measles, influenza, and syphilis. In Palau, the population plummeted from an estimated 10,000 in 1860 to 4,000 by 1800.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, the population of Pohnpei dropped from 10,000 to less than 5,000, the Marshalls’ from 15,000 to 10,000, and Kosrae from 3000 to only 300. Only isolated Chuuk and Yap were initially spared this scale of devastation from foreign disease.<sup>35</sup> Even in Guam, with

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<sup>33</sup> Hezel. 300

<sup>34</sup> Hezel. 271

<sup>35</sup> Hezel. 318



centuries of outside contact, was not immune. In 1856, an outbreak of smallpox killed 60 percent of the island's population.<sup>36</sup>

During this period, the Spanish were becoming decreasingly interested in their Mariana colonies. According to Fran Hezel, "Guam in the early 1800s was a sleep little colony of two or three thousand souls, a lonely outpost . . . there was no business or industry to speak of."<sup>37</sup>

Robert Rogers describes Guam during the "Twilight of the Pax Hispanica" as "distant", "with little oversight", needing only a "shove to break away from Madrid's tired arms."<sup>38</sup> Spain, the titular colonial ruler of Micronesia, was extending little authority throughout the islands. By the latter half of the 1800s, Britain had declined to move to annex territory in Micronesia and the rapidly rising German Empire was moving in intent on conquest of the Caroline and Marshall islands for their new colonial empire. This foreign challenge at last roused the Spanish to make a more formal claim to the Carolines. Soon, Spanish and German ships were racing one another to the Caroline Islands, placing plaques and raising flags in order to legitimize their claims.

The race for the Carolines nearly caused a European War in 1885. Simultaneous with the Berlin Conference to divide Africa the same year (of which Spain received a mere pittance), there was deep insecurity in Spain about the nation's status as a global power. When the Germans made their move in the islands, Spanish officials responded by igniting anti-German riots in Madrid, Valencia, and Barcelona.<sup>39</sup> Frustrated, Otto von Bismarck remarked that, "[The Carolines] are not worth it. The islands would not repay one week of preparation for war."<sup>40</sup> The dispute was mediated by the Vatican in 1885, with the resolution that Spain would receive the

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<sup>36</sup> Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam*. 95

<sup>37</sup> Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization: A History of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in Pre-Colonial Days, 1521-1885*. 104-105

<sup>38</sup> Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam*. 84-85, 100

<sup>39</sup> Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization: A History of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in Pre-Colonial Days, 1521-1885*. 311

<sup>40</sup> Hezel. 311

Carolines and Germany the Marshalls. Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the tiny islands of Micronesia had caused a major international crisis – a taste of the high-stakes global geopolitics that was creeping into the region.<sup>41</sup>

### **Micronesia in the Age of Imperialism (1886-1917)**

Now with a legitimate claim the Carolines but without any colonial infrastructure outside of the Marianas, Spain set out to finally conquer Southern Micronesia. Warships were dispatched to large islands such as Palau and Pohnpei to place plaques, raise flags, and reach pacts with local chiefs. Additionally, Spain did make a serious effort to settle the islands of Pohnpei and Yap in 1886 (where they built small colonial towns, both named “Kolonía”). However, Spanish government of the islands was quite weak, and traditional political systems mostly continued unmolested. Meanwhile, Germany was asserting more and more control of the Marshalls to the east, formally annexing the islands in 1885 and investing in the trade of copra.<sup>42</sup> Any illusions that the Spanish would become a lasting force in the Carolines were crushed in 1898, with Madrid’s catastrophic defeat in the Spanish-American War. As a result, the ascendant United States had seized much of Spain’s Pacific Empire including Guam and the Philippines. However, the Americans declined to annex the remainder of Spanish Micronesia, including the Mariana Islands of which Guam had been linked culturally and economically for all of known history.

Crippled, Spain sold the remainder of the Carolines and Marianas to Germany in 1899. The ambitious Germans gained in reality the already-colonized Marianas – the rest had to be earned, and the Germans were much more proactive colonial masters. German administrators worked assiduously to reach pacts with local chiefs, establish settlements, and write laws. The lucrative smuggling of guns and liquor in the Carolines was banned, and German trading

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<sup>41</sup> Hezel. 311-313

<sup>42</sup> Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A Century of Colonial Rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands*. 45

companies began heavily regulating the copra trade.<sup>43</sup> Their efforts were surprisingly effective, and by 1910 the Germans had made inroads into previously-hostile island groups such as Chuuk.

Meanwhile, America had acquired its first Micronesian territory with the island of Guam and had little idea of what exactly to do with it. Legally, Guam's territorial status was as an "unincorporated, unorganized" territory governed by the US Navy. The US Constitution was not extended to Guam, and instead the islands were governed under the *Insular Cases*, a set of Supreme Court cases from 1901 which affirmed the denial of constitutional rights to the inhabitants of US territories on the grounds that "alien races" may be not be able to accord themselves with "Anglo-Saxon principles."<sup>44</sup> The US Navy was thus free to run an inattentive colonial government and utilize Guam as a coaling and telegraph station. Guam historian Robert Rogers summarized post-annexation American governance on Guam as being conducted "as if it were a warship, the *USS Guam*, with the governor as captain, American military personnel as crew, and Chamorros as mess attendants."<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, the ambitious Japanese Empire searched for the opportunity in Spain's eviction from Micronesia. Tokyo had just recently conquered Taiwan and had eyes on expansion into the region it knew as *Nan'yō* – the "South Seas." According to historian Mark R. Peattie, *Nan'yō* was a topic of "fevered excitement" among the Japanese political class of the late 1800s, even becoming the subject of a widely popular genre of Japanese pulp novels in which heroic Japanese men went on expeditions to exotic and pristine Pacific Islands.<sup>46</sup> To the North, Japan annexed the Bonin and Volcano islands (including Iwo Jima) – two chains north of the Marianas that were unclaimed and had no native populations. Slowly throughout the decade of the 1900s,

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<sup>43</sup> Hezel.

<sup>44</sup> Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam*. 118-119

<sup>45</sup> Rogers. 119

<sup>46</sup> Peattie, *Nan'yō*. 14

Japanese traders and fisherman began establishing operations in German Micronesia under the nose (and often against the wishes) of colonial administrators. In essence, just as the Germans were establishing themselves, a new great power had already set out to displace them in Micronesia.

The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 provided Japan with its opportunity to expand into the South Seas. Bound by alliance to Great Britain, Japan declared war on Germany and invaded German Micronesia, competing with sailors from British Australia to quickly occupy the Kaiser's most easterly colonies (the British would grab German New Guinea and the Gilbert Islands). Although Japan would sporadically participate in war efforts as an Allied Power until the end, the invasion of Micronesia was the single most significant Japanese military contribution to the Great War. In fact, the prospect of conquering Micronesia was a key motive for Japanese involvement in the war, and the lack of further Japanese military participation left other Allied powers deeply suspicious of Tokyo's motives.<sup>47</sup>

### **Japanese Rule in Micronesia (1914-1942)**

Japan's invasion of Micronesia was a significant item of contention at the Versailles Treaty negotiations of 1919. The United States under President Woodrow Wilson (now with interests as far as Guam and the Philippines) in particular objected to Japanese expansionism, and the Americans made a concerted effort to force League of Nations oversight of the new Japanese territory of *Nan'yō*. Instead of annexation, Japan was to consent to a "League Mandate" that placed Japan as the temporary guardian of the islands and required that certain minimum standards be met in the interests of the native population. Like most other initiatives of the League of Nations, the Mandate system essentially failed in Micronesia, as the League had no enforcement capability, leaving a reality indistinguishable from annexation. The deal on the

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<sup>47</sup> Peattie. 44

Japanese side was highly favorable, as they were given nearly complete control of Micronesia in return for a simple verbal commitment by the Japanese delegation to return Shandong to China (which they did not).<sup>48</sup> Congress, eager to pick at the Versailles treaty, pounced on Wilson for failing to secure a better deal in Micronesia, forcing the State Department to return and demand additional concessions from Tokyo – consisting of the rights to lay telegraph cable and trade in Yap, a privilege that the Japanese reluctantly granted but would never be invoked by the United States.<sup>49</sup> For the second time, the United States had blundered and allowed Micronesia to fall into the hands of an aggressive foreign power.

This exchange, made amidst the larger tradeoffs of the Versailles negotiations, left American naval planners deeply anxious about their newly exposed Pacific flank. In the event of war, Japan now had bases from which it could easily seize Guam and cut off American supply lines to the Philippines. The Navy and other branches began formulating “War Plan Orange”, the strategy for a potential Pacific War with Japan. Noting the gradual Japanese buildup in Micronesia, War Plan Orange no longer treated the Pacific islands as just fixed coaling and telegraph cable station but as logistical hubs from which the United States (or a hostile power) could deploy fleets and aircraft.<sup>50</sup> In 1935, the Joint Army and Navy Board officially made the invasion of Japanese Micronesia central to the war plan – in the event of conflict, America would *not* attack Japan directly from the East from Hawai’i and North the Philippines (as previously planned), but up the Marshalls and into the Carolines to support an eventual blockade of Japan.<sup>51</sup> American planners were accepting that Guam and the Philippines were likely to be lost, and that an invasion of Japan would require stepping stones in the Pacific. Nevertheless, the United States

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<sup>48</sup> Green, *By More than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia-Pacific since 1783*. 129

<sup>49</sup> Peattie, *Nan ’yō*. 47

<sup>50</sup> Green, *By More than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia-Pacific since 1783*. 135

<sup>51</sup> Green. 143

directly moved into the South Pacific with the secretive “American Equatorial Islands Colonization Project”, a federal program which recruited native Hawai’ians to establish permanent settlements on the eastern fringes of Japanese Micronesia.

With the United States watching nervously from the sidelines, Japan pushed the limits of the League Mandate as far as possible. Initially, the people of Micronesia had little reason to fear that changing a Kaiser for an Emperor would substantially alter their day-to-day lives. To the contrary, the Japanese initiated a dramatic national effort to settle, exploit, and militarize its new territories in *Nan’yō*. Overall, the Japanese Empire was profoundly more directly invested in Micronesia than either the Spanish or the Germans, and were far more willing and capable in upending the traditional political, economic, and cultural *status quo* of the islands. During the preceding two colonial periods, a small number of foreign administrators and traders “ruled” Micronesia mostly by making deals with local chiefs, facilitating exports, and maintaining small garrisons. Never was Micronesia truly colonized by thousands of foreign settlers until the Japanese Mandate.

The physical evidence of Japanese rule came to be everywhere on the islands. Telegraph cable was laid, airports were built, and the relative independence of the Micronesian chiefs was ended under a stifling effort to institute comprehensive Japanese rule. Sleepy coaling stations were transformed into colonial cities populated by foreign colonists, jungles were paved over with massive sugar plantations, and foreign commercial fisherman flooded into the islands *en masse*. Micronesian natives found themselves third-class citizens – lower in status than both their Japanese masters and the waves of Okinawan and Korean immigrants who arrived under the Japanese to Micronesia to work in the new colonial economy. By the end of the 1930s, more ethnic Japanese resided in *Nan’yō* than ethnic Micronesians, comprising 58 percent of the

population. On Saipan alone, there were only 3,000 native Chamorros compared with over 20,000 Japanese in 1941.<sup>52</sup> The scale and rapidity with which Japan was changing Micronesia cannot be understated. After just a couple of decades of Japanese administration, indigenous Micronesian culture was on the path to total extinction, and the islands were becoming political, economic, and cultural extensions of mainland Japan.

On December 7, 1941 the Imperial Japanese Navy used *Nan'yō* as a base of operations for the attack on Pearl Harbor. The same day, Japan seized Guam, with dozens of Chamorro translators in tow from Saipan. On the fringes of Micronesia, Japanese forces quickly invaded the British-held Gilbert Islands and forced the evacuation of the fledgling colonies set up by the American Equatorial Islands Colonization Project. With the premise of League oversight now completely removed, Japan's colonial regime intensified even further. Thousands of Micronesians were enlisted into forced military labor, and many would be killed in the fighting that followed. Far from being a remote and neglected colony of the Spanish Empire, by 1941 Micronesia was the contested middle ground between the United States and Japan in the largest amphibious conflict of human history.

### **The Rising Sun Sets (1942-1945)**

Once it became clear that Japan lacked the offense capability to follow-up on the strategic surprise delivered at Pearl Harbor, American strategy in the Pacific War organized itself around the idea of "island-hopping" across the Pacific – capturing select islands and using them to project power closer and closer to the Japanese home islands. This was a more strategically flexible version of the principles of War Plan Orange, which had called for an offensive campaign running up the Micronesian islands towards the Japanese mainland. The first major

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<sup>52</sup> Peattie, *Nan'yō*, 161.

American offensive in the South Pacific was launched in the Gilbert Islands (seized from Great Britain after Pearl Harbor) in late 1943, where Japanese positions were recently constructed and therefore thought to be more vulnerable. The battle of Tarawa was a taste of things to come – American Marines suffered 1,000 dead and 2,000 wounded storming the beaches of the small atoll.<sup>53</sup> Although the Japanese had heavily fortified nearly every inch of land in the Marshall and Gilbert Islands and with mines, trenches, and bunkers, the American amphibious invasion was successful and soon not long after Tarawa several more Marshallese atolls had been taken from Japan.<sup>54</sup> From this southern position, Admiral Chester Nimitz moved his forces north into the Marshalls, fighting amphibious battles to seize the well-fortified atolls of Majuro, Kwajalein, and Eniwetok. Kwajalein, the world's largest atoll, was particularly important as the headquarters of the Japanese Fourth Fleet.<sup>55</sup> With the success of the invasion, the Marshalls were the first pre-War Japanese territory to be reclaimed by the Allied powers.

Using the Marshalls as his new forward operating base, Nimitz launched an ambitious campaign to bypass the Carolines and go straight for the Mariana Islands, which could potentially be utilized to launch a strategic bombing campaign on the Japanese home islands. After several high casualty battles, by mid-1944 American forces had invaded the Mariana Islands and held Saipan, Guam, and Tinian. The Mariana airfields indeed proved to be of significant utility to the United States, and from there air power was used to obliterate the Japanese anchorage and fleet in Chuuk lagoon, permanently crippling Japan's ability to project power into Micronesia.<sup>56</sup> The Mariana Islands had been a major supply and communications hub for the Japanese and their loss presaged the larger defeat for Japan. "When we lost Saipan, Hell

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<sup>53</sup> Green, *By More than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia-Pacific since 1783*. 203

<sup>54</sup> Richard, *United States Naval Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands*, . 117

<sup>55</sup> Richard. 119

<sup>56</sup> Richard. 130



is on us”, remarked Fleet Admiral Nagano, Supreme Naval Advisor the Emperor.<sup>57</sup> Soon after a second attack was planned for Palau, the administrative center of the Japanese Mandate and home to over 25,000 Japanese troops. In November 1944, the United States invaded the island of Peleliu with the intention of using its airfield to retake the Philippines. The ensuing battle is known today as the fiercest amphibious combat of the Second World War and the last major engagement fought in Micronesia. Over the entire American campaign in Micronesia, some 7,353 Americans were killed and 25,042 were wounded, higher than American casualties on D-Day.<sup>58</sup> The successful Micronesian campaigns allowed American forces to push further into Iwo Jima, the Philippines, and Okinawa. Furthermore, the airfields of the Mariana Islands were critical in the strategic bombing campaign that crippled Japan in 1945, and the planes that dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki took off from Tinian.

Having successfully invaded foreign territory, America had to determine how to administer the population of the islands. On September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1943 President Roosevelt stated to Congress that “the United Nations will never let [Japan] have authority over the islands which were mandated to her by the League of Nations.”<sup>59</sup> The President’s priority was thus clear: the islands were to be governed by the United States. Anticipating victory, the Joint Chiefs crafted a comprehensive post-invasion plan for Naval government of the islands, and trained special officers on the culture and geography of Micronesia.<sup>60</sup>

Meanwhile, the islander experience of the war was one of helplessness and senselessness. Native Micronesians themselves had little idea of why the Japanese and Americans would fight with such tenacity for their remote atolls and islands. Isolated under blockades, the Japanese

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<sup>57</sup> Richard. 141

<sup>58</sup> Richard. 160

<sup>59</sup> Richard. 22

<sup>60</sup> Richard. 51

occupiers began engaging in punitive beatings, rapes, and executions. Limited food and medicine were reserved for Japanese colonists rather than Micronesians, and desperate Japanese garrisons increasingly preyed on native populations as the war dragged on. Japanese occupation of many islands, bypassed or bombed over by the Americans, would only end with the Emperor's surrender after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945, after which all of Micronesia fell into the hands of the United States.

### **Micronesia's Journey from Backwater to Battleground**

By the 1940s, the remote islands of Micronesia found themselves thrust into the middle of history's largest conflict. The hardships of war were deeply unfair to the people of the islands, who had little to do with the affairs of the great powers. Undoubtedly, many wondered why such disaster had come to them. The answer is unfortunately quite simple: Micronesia happens to occupy a strategically important interior position of the Asia-Pacific. This mattered little in the age of Magellan, but as the nature and geopolitics and warfare changed dramatically in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, Micronesia became gradually more relevant to other nations with interests in the Asia-Pacific. In general, foreign powers had not become interested in Micronesia because of *what* it was – there was little in Micronesia in the way of material wealth – but because of *where* it was. For the Spanish, Guam was an important stepping stone between its colonies in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. For the British, Palau was a potential base for London's merchant empire in the Pacific. For the Germans, who had no existing colonial empire, it was one of the last places on Earth that still seemed open for colonization. For the Japanese and later the Americans, Micronesia was the “strategic interior position” that could support, or at least defend, an empire across the Pacific.

Likewise, as the exposure to the wider world increased, the isolated islands of the Micronesia archipelago began to experience rapid social, political, and demographic change. Between the mid-1800s and 1945, British, Spanish, German, Japanese, and American interests had all variously predominated throughout the islands. Foreigners moved in, first the beachcombers, then the missionaries and traders, and finally the bureaucrats, soldiers, and laborers. Micronesia was portioned out by agreement of Spain and Germany after the diplomatic crisis of 1885, by Japan and the United States at Versailles in 1919, and then by the United States via United Nations in 1945. Nobody, it seemed, had thought to ask the islanders who *they* wanted to rule them, or if they desired to be ruled at all. It was question that even the Americans would take some time to grapple with.

With little time to waste, the United States began searching for options to legitimizing its control of Micronesia. In 1946, the US Navy supported a bill in Congress to annex Micronesia, with Guam as the capital, putting Micronesia a path to statehood.<sup>61</sup> However, as the United States set out to create a more peaceful world order through the United Nations, the optics of annexing occupied territory were perceived as damaging to America's image abroad by the Truman Administration. Likewise, the USSR disputed America's claim to Micronesia, forcing a deal in which the United States would not contest the Soviet annexation of four of the Kuril Islands north of Japan in exchange for Soviet acquiescence to a United Nations-sanctioned "American Strategic Trusteeship" for the South Pacific. Under this arrangement, the "Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands" (TTPI) was born. It was the only such "strategic" trusteeship that ever was created by the UN. Throughout the process, no Micronesians were consulted on what political status they may have preferred for their own islands.

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<sup>61</sup> Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam*. 192

In 1947, US Secretary of State George Marshall presented the Trust Territory Agreement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Congressional preferences had settled on maintaining control of Micronesia without annexation.<sup>62</sup> The senators held a lengthy discussion on merits of trusteeship over sovereignty, the disadvantages of taking on a rapidly growing native population, and the overall strategic value of the territory. However, with memories of Pearl Harbor still fresh, the overwhelming priority was defensive. Nevertheless, they wondered aloud about the possible difficulties of administering such a territory:

**July 7, 1947 - Senate Foreign Relations Committee<sup>63</sup>**

**Senator Hickenlooper** The whole point of my question is, we look at the fine benefits which we get from security, but there are some human problems we are going to have to take on, and they will be sizable 20 years from now.

**Secretary Marshall** The human problem and the question of the rights of the individual there, in their adaption to their tribal customs and matters of that sort, we will have a very practical problem there.

**The Chairman** Anything else, Senator?

**Senator Hickenlooper** No.

**The Chairman** Senator Lodge?

**Senator Lodge** Do you not feel that, as a matter of fact, the natives will be better off under us than they were before, taking it all in all?

**Secretary Marshall** Yes, sir; if we do not try to change them too much.

**Senator Lodge** Yes. I think they will be immeasurably better off under us.

**The Chairman** If there is nothing more, Mr. Secretary, thank you very much. We will go down through the panel and see if we can discover anything wrong.

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<sup>62</sup> McHenry, *Micronesia, Trust Betrayed*. 67

<sup>63</sup> George Marshall, Hearing on the Trusteeship Agreement for the Territory of the Pacific Islands. 13

### III. The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

“It is possible that the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, as a political entity, is ungovernable”

*-Ruth Van Cleve<sup>64</sup>*

“Our fathers who art in Washington, hallowed be thy funds

Thy authorization come, thy appropriations be done”

*-Micronesian Senator John Mangefel<sup>65</sup>*

The two decades following the end of the Second World War was a time of dramatic political reorganization throughout the Asia-Pacific. Japan was transformed into an American-aligned democracy. The Chinese Civil War was resolved, with the Communists triumphant and the Nationalists sent fleeing to Taipei. Great Britain began withdrawing from its largest colonies, while local nationalists were pushing the French out of Indochina. Across the broader region, the United States and the Soviet Union were ascendant, with highly divergent priorities and interests. This chapter deals with the “Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands”, the American administration of Micronesia after the Second World War.

During the early years of the Trust Territory era the islands were changed immensely: the Japanese population was repatriated, Americans were now in charge, and nuclear weapons were tested at in the Marshalls. Created through the UN, the TTPI was an American invention with only token international oversight. It would take some time, and years of inadequate American administration, for the Micronesian population to become politically energized on the question of their political status. The arduous negotiations between Micronesians and Americans that followed produced the Micronesia of today: independent nations in “Compacts of Free Association” with the United States.

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<sup>64</sup> Van Cleve, *The Office of Territorial Affairs*. 123

<sup>65</sup> Manhard, *The United States and Micronesia in Free Association*. 90

### Naval Administration (1943-1950)

Of the 11 Trusteeships designated worldwide by the United Nations, the TTPI was the only “strategic trust” – giving the territory a unique exemption from international oversight. Immediately after the War, the Truman Administration continued to have the US Navy govern the TTPI, with the islands closed to the outside world. The so-called “zoo policy” ( in reality military rule) permitted the Micronesians to maintain their traditional lifestyles but established the principle that all policy decisions would be made on the basis of the security interests of the United States.<sup>66</sup> For the Navy, the most immediate issue was the distribution of food and medicine to the islanders, who had been deprived of basic necessities during wartime. The more ambitious project of the Micronesia’s Navy government was the undoing of the entire Japanese colonial project in Micronesia.

Soon after the Japan’s surrender, the Navy ordered all Japanese colonists and soldiers to be repatriated to their homeland. By 1945, including civilian and military personnel, there were about 147,000 East Asians in Micronesia – including not only the Japanese but their Korean, Okinawan, and Taiwanese subjects.<sup>67</sup> The undertaking was formidable; requiring what remained of the Japanese government to assemble some of the remains of their decimated navy to facilitate the population transfer. Few Japanese, even those with Micronesian wives and long histories on the islands, were permitted to remain in their former colonies. Throughout the islands, the massive Japanese sugar cane plantations were planted over with soil-binding reeds, and Japanese language and religion were removed from public life – to little resistance from the locals, who returned to using their local languages. Within a couple of years, the Japanese dream of *Nan’yō* was no more.

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<sup>66</sup> Rogers, *Destiny’s Landfall: A History of Guam*. 193

<sup>67</sup> Peattie, *Nan’yō*. 308

The mass deportations meant that native Micronesians were once again the majority on their own islands. No longer were islanders “third-class” citizens behind the Koreans and Okinawans – the thousands of foreign people of alien races who had displaced them were nearly all gone. The Americans who now ruled Micronesia through the TTPI did not bring with them a settler population of ethnic Americans to displace the islanders. Instead, the Naval administration was light-handed, at first distributing aid and leaving civil administration in the hands of the local chiefs who had held sway since before the Japanese occupation.

Not all was well with the new regime. With the Japanese colonial economy gone, Micronesian living standards dropped precipitously; incomes in Yap, for example, dropped from \$26 to \$16, and incomes in Palau from \$44 to \$14.<sup>68</sup> Recognizing the economic problem that had resulted from the expulsion of the Asian population, the Navy began to attempt a handful of economic development initiatives and tried to build an export economy. None (phosphate, copra, scrap metal) were particularly successful. Various other efforts, such as the redistribution of land confiscated by the Japanese, were more successful, but still did not produce economic growth, as the islands were remained closed to commerce under the zoo policy.

In 1947, the Navy held the first municipal elections across the Trust Territory. In all districts except for Palau, the traditional chiefs were returned into positions of authority from which the Japanese had removed them. Initially, there was little outward Micronesian enthusiasm for democracy, and a strong desire to return to the pre-Japanese structures of political authority.<sup>69</sup> Incumbent Japanese-appointed chiefs on Yap were replaced with the older hereditary chiefs. The unpopular Japanese-aligned King of Kosrae was ousted and replaced with his more charismatic son. The exception (Palau) is important, as two members of the Japanese-educated elite ousted

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<sup>68</sup> Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A Century of Colonial Rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands*. 265-266

<sup>69</sup> Hezel.

the traditional chiefs on a pro-modernization platform. The municipal elections of 1947 were by no means a soaring exercise in western-style liberal democracy; however they did provide the islanders with some degree of empowerment. Following up, the Navy began planning for state-level elections, and competing pro-traditionalism and pro-modernization political coalitions began emerging on islands like Pohnpei.

The Naval administration of Micronesia was both competent and highly ethically questionable. Retired Admiral Carlton Wright expressed the Navy's governing philosophy as "the best thing we could do . . . is to let them completely alone."<sup>70</sup> As such, the nature of the early TTPI civil administration more resembled that of the distant, half-interested Spanish Empire than of the militant colonizing Japanese. For the United States, the strategic priorities of the early Cold War in Asia were in places like Japan, China, Korea, and Vietnam. Micronesia's utility lay in its occupation of the strategic space between North America and these critical Asian nations. Philip Manhard, US Ambassador to the Trust Territory, affirmed that the overarching American priority during the early-TTPI was strategic – intended to prevent the use of the region by an outside power: "During the first 15 years of its administration, the United States took its security and defense interests and its military prerogatives very seriously, and its political, social, and economic responsibilities relatively lightly."<sup>71</sup>

### **The 1950s: Reform in Guam and Interior in Micronesia**

The creation of the TTPI brought new attention to the status of America's Micronesian territory of Guam, which had been reclaimed from Japan in 1944. Under the *Insular Cases* of 1901, Guam had been effectively ignored by Congress and its inhabitants were not American citizens. Subsequently, the bloody battle to liberate Guam convinced many of the strategic

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<sup>70</sup> Hezel. 270

<sup>71</sup> Manhard, *The United States and Micronesia in Free Association*.



importance of the island, especially as it emerged as a central logistical hub for America's enhanced presence in the Asia-Pacific during the Cold War. Meanwhile, among the Chamorros the desire for US citizenship was the "one issue" of political consensus among an otherwise divided polity.<sup>72</sup> Congress addressed the issue in 1950 with the *Organic Act of Guam*, which extended US citizenship to the Guamanians and allowed for local self-government. However, the *Insular Cases* remained in legal effect and Guam was not given the possibility of statehood – its status simply changed from "unorganized" to "organized" while still an "unincorporated territory."

Also in 1950, the White House transferred control of the TTPI from the Navy to the Department of the Interior, ending military government on the islands. The transition was rocky, as Interior had never before been asked to manage such a distant, large, and geographically difficult territory.<sup>73</sup> The Department kept many of the programs initiated by the Navy, and operated under a tight budget, leaving public services stretched extremely thin. Primary schools were opened with the goal of providing universal education but were staffed with untrained local teachers, and there were only two American doctors for the entirety of the TTPI. Interior policy was to hire Micronesians over Americans wherever possible, a policy was both detrimental to the immediate governance of the islands, but planted the seeds of the English-speaking professional class that would eventually evolve into Micronesia's next generation of political leaders.<sup>74</sup> Small programs to develop export industries and build infrastructure were also carried over through the transition, and Interior continued work towards democratization, creating district-wide elected governments above the municipal level. In 1956, the TTPI convened the first Micronesia-wide advisory body of elected local leaders – what would later become the Congress of Micronesia.

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<sup>72</sup> Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam*. 180, 195

<sup>73</sup> Van Cleve, *The Office of Territorial Affairs*. 129

<sup>74</sup> Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A Century of Colonial Rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands*. 291

As the TTPI reformed, the Mariana Islands remained heavily militarized. Saipan was isolated completely from the outside world, as the newly-created CIA used the island to train an army of Chinese Nationalists to overthrow the upstart Communist government in Beijing. For several years, the Navy and CIA retained control of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, using them for military and intelligence purposes.<sup>75</sup> Interior, which had sought to make Saipan the capital of the TTPI, was forced instead to govern the islands temporarily from distant Honolulu.

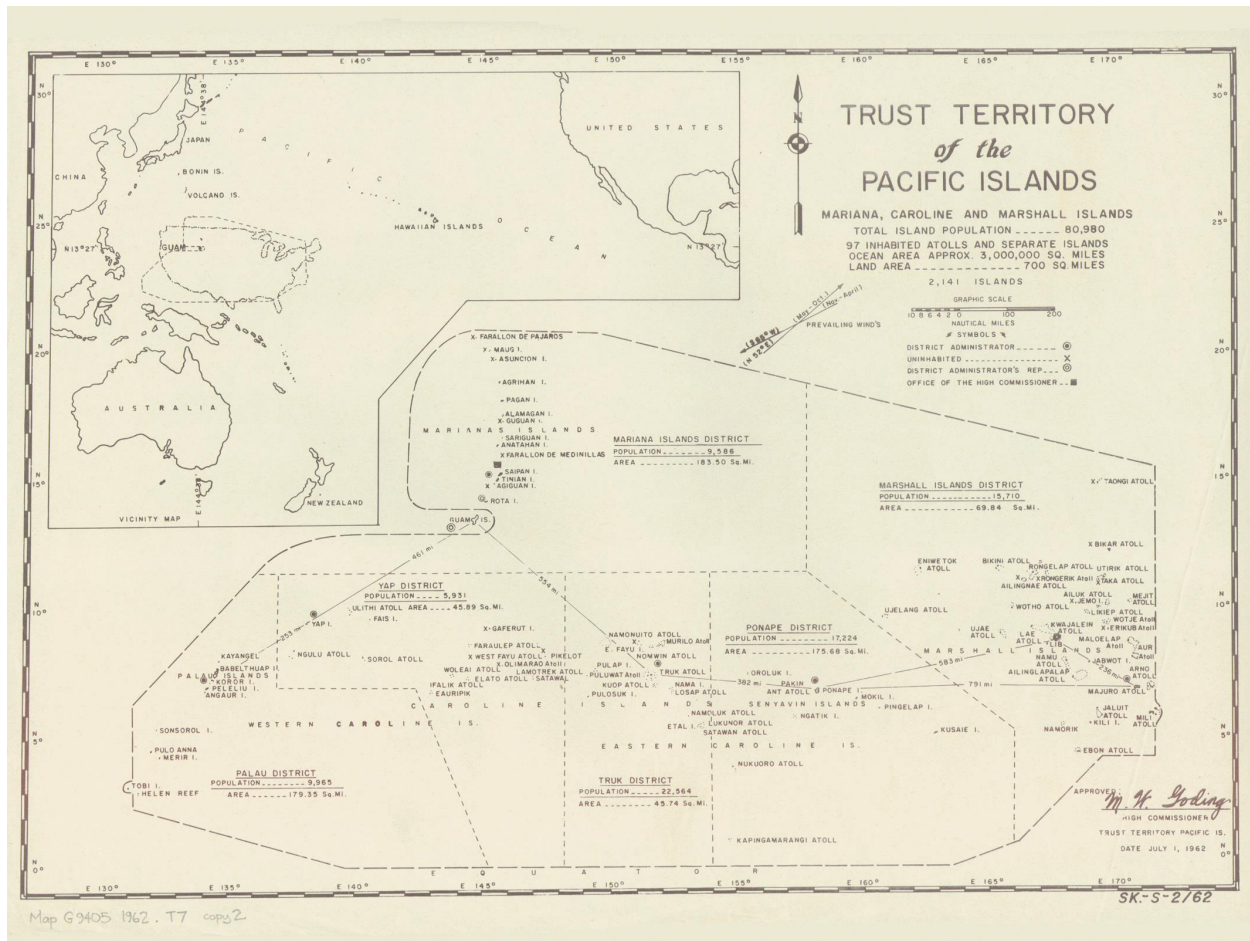


Figure 2: An American Map of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands including the 7 Trust Territory Districts and Guam in the center. Note the size comparison between the TTPI and the continental United States on the top-left.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Hezel. 283

<sup>76</sup> TTPI High Commissioner, "Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands."

## Nuclear Testing in the Marshalls

In February of 1946, Ben Wyatt, Military Governor of the Marshall Islands, arrived at Bikini Atoll via seaplane. Meeting the island's entire population of 167 after church services, he asked the islanders if they would be willing to sacrifice their islands for the sake of world peace, "for the good of mankind and to end all world wars."<sup>77</sup> Wyatt essentially told the people of Bikini Atoll that they were being compelled to relocate, as the United States needed a new proving ground for its nuclear technology. Without any option to dissent, the group's chief acquiesced and told his people that they were moving to the nearby atoll of Rongerik. Just a few decades before, the Marshall Islands were the edge of the world visited only by missionaries and a handful of German copra traders. Now after surviving the hardships of the Pacific War, Chief Juda of Bikini was being told to move his entire tribe so that the most powerful weapons in history could be tested on his home. In July, the first two atomic bombs were detonated at Bikini, one in the air and another underwater. Fran Hezel sums up the subsequent period of nuclear testing in the Marshalls as thus:

*Between 1946 and the last test in 1958, 66 atomic and hydrogen bombs were detonated in the Marshalls, obliterating six islets and rendering many others uninhabitable because of the high radiation levels. The most damaging, in human terms as well as ecological, was the famous Bravo shot in March 1954, when a 15-megaton hydrogen bomb, a thousand times the size of the Hiroshima weapon, was exploded over Bikini<sup>78</sup>*

At the time, the effects of nuclear radiation were little understood. Soon the people of nearby atolls would experience unusual burns, miscarriages, birth defects, and increased

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<sup>77</sup> Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A Century of Colonial Rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands*. 271

<sup>78</sup> Hezel. 273

incidences of cancer. The radiation from testing on Eniwetok and Bikini was carried east by the trade winds, and hit the relocated Bikinians on Rongerik as well as other Marshallese, and over a dozen unlucky Japanese fishermen. In 1954, the Marshall Islands sent a delegate to the Trusteeship Council to formally protest nuclear testing for the first time.<sup>79</sup> The effects of nuclear testing on the Marshallese are contentious and are being litigated even to this day. Since 1956, the US has paid out compensation to affected islanders, but the eligibility pool and amount of compensation given have been hotly disputed. The exact number of cases of cancer and birth defects that can be directly attributed to nuclear testing is unknown, but is thought to be in the hundreds. Strikingly, the nuclear testing of the 1950s and 1960s marks the second time Micronesia became a major setting in the history of nuclear weapons – having first been the place from which the *Enola Gay* launched from Tinian to bomb Hiroshima.

### **Kennedy and Johnson Change Course (1961-1969)**

As the Second World War was fading from the common consciousness in the 1960s, the UN Trusteeship Council and major American media outlets became more critical towards the TTPI, and a consensus emerged that America was mismanaging the “Rust Territory.” As a condition of Trusteeship, the UN had been dispatching regular missions to Micronesia which frequently concluded that the United States was not fulfilling its commitments to adequately feed, educate, and politically develop the Micronesian population. Internally, the State Department shared these concerns. A devastating polio epidemic in 1958 on Ebeye in the Marshalls brought particular attention to the TTPI’s deficiencies.

These issues landed directly on the desk of President John F Kennedy, who was personally outraged and initiated substantial reforms to the TTPI. First, the zoo policy was terminated, allowing outsiders, tourists, and businessmen to come and go from Micronesia. The

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<sup>79</sup> Van Cleve, *The Office of Territorial Affairs*. 130

CIA and Navy were compelled to surrender the Mariana Islands to Interior, which promptly moved the TTPI's capital from Honolulu to Saipan. The annual budget for the TTPI was doubled from \$7.5 million to 15 million. Kennedy also commissioned the formulation of a comprehensive Micronesia strategy by Harvard economist Anthony Solomon, who recommended that a plebiscite be held in 1968 in which the TTPI would be pushed to ratify permanent political association with the United States.<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, the Solomon report was essentially lost in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, and subsequent US Presidents were not as personally attentive to the Micronesian issue. However, Kennedy did succeed in setting the immediate agenda under the principle that the US should develop the TTPI politically and economically while working towards a sustainable political status to be ratified via plebiscite. As a whole, the Kennedy administration was the first to seriously attempt to rectify American values with American strategic interests on the question of Micronesia.

Kennedy also began a program that would become integral in Micronesia's political development: the Peace Corps. By 1968 there were 940 Peace Corps volunteers serving in Micronesia (1 for every 100 Micronesians), forming the largest per capita Peace Corps presence in the entire world. The Peace Corps would become a major political and cultural force across the islands, intermingling with the locals and settling into a distinct social and political role just as the beachcombers and missionaries of the 1800s once had.<sup>81</sup> In the coming years, Peace Corps volunteers would become some of the strongest advocates for Micronesian independence.

Given these massive new investments in economic development, democratization, and education, the US was drifting significantly from Secretary George Marshall's recommendation that "we do not try to change them too much" and the Navy's policy of non-interference. The

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<sup>80</sup> Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A Century of Colonial Rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands*. 300-301

<sup>81</sup> Hezel. 313

new Kennedy agenda did not prioritize preserving the “traditional” Micronesia, but instead sought to build a new, modern, and Americanized Micronesia that would serve the long-term strategic interests of the United States.

Throughout this period, key geographic divisions began to surface within the Trust Territory. The primary fissures were between the Chamorros of the Mariana Islands, who favored political union with the Guam, and the rest of the Micronesians. Given the Marianas’ unique colonial history and Chamorro heritage, the islanders of Saipan and Tinian were becoming less enthusiastic about the project of Micronesian unity, and instead requested to merge with Guam as a US territory. In a series of four non-binding polls from 1958 to 1969, a strong majority of Mariana Islanders voted for political union with Guam. Guam, however, refused Saipan requests, holding their own plebiscite in 1969 with 58 percent voting against the reunification of the Mariana Islands. Enmity from WW2, in which many Saipanese interpreters had served the brutal Japanese occupiers, and concern that Guam’s booming economy would be dragged down by the poorer Marianas, were the driving forces behind Guam’s refusal.<sup>82</sup> Guam’s rejection, however, simply encouraged the Saipan delegation to seek out other avenues towards political union with the United States. Unity was fraying elsewhere as well as Micronesian politics became more active. To the west, Palau’s increasingly volatile and radical politics were off-putting to the other Micronesians, while to east the Marshallese began (albeit more modestly) to assert their own, unique Marshallese identity.

In 1963 the Micronesian "Inter-District Advisory Committee," a board meant to advise the TTPI government, declared the formation of “Council of Micronesia.” The next year, the body was formally constituted as the elected “Congress of Micronesia,” to meet regularly on Saipan. The regular meetings of the Congress consumed Micronesian political energy for the

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<sup>82</sup> Rogers, *Destiny’s Landfall: A History of Guam*. 230

next few years, as the Congress began to assume jurisdiction over areas previously left to the TTPI administration. After the formation of the Congress, the day-to-day governance of the islands was increasingly a Micronesian responsibility.

By the end of the Kennedy administration, Interior had established a clear policy agenda for Micronesia: begin with a massive development and education program, move the islands towards self-governance, and eventually find a long-lasting political arrangement that would leave the islands affiliated with the United States. But fissures among the federal agencies were already undermining Interior's plan. Doves at the State Department favored independence for the islands as part of a unified Micronesian Federation affiliated with the United States, while more expansionist factions at Defense and Interior pushed to incorporate the TTPI as a Territory or Commonwealth. Interior generally favored Commonwealth, although opinions within the Department itself. All of these options were on the table as negotiations began in earnest in 1963. Yet the clearly inconsistent positions of the federal agencies left no clear American position for the Micronesians to work with.

By early 1964, the new Johnson Administration seems to have misplaced or ignored the Kennedy-commissioned Solomon Report on Micronesian political status, and did not craft a comprehensive strategy of their own. Lacking guidance from Washington, the Congress of Micronesia created the *Micronesian Future Political Status Commission* to study their options, which they narrowed to four: independence, free association or protectorate status, commonwealth or territory within the United States, or continuation as a Trust Territory.<sup>83</sup> Full independence was not included. As the Congress of Micronesia began consolidating around a negotiating position, the American foreign policy bureaucracy never arrived at a coherent inter-agency solution.

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<sup>83</sup> Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A Century of Colonial Rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands*. 311

Meanwhile, the Micronesian population boomed. In 1955, TTPI administrators estimated that there were 63,992 residents in the Trust Territory. By the 1973 census, administrators were counting 115,251. Guam's population also increased markedly, from around 59,000 in 1950 to over 102,000 by 1980. These population explosions were not permanent – and in fact the islands would stop growing in the 1980s and 1990s – but they created an increasing burden on the shoestring TTPI administration. Islanders were also increasingly conscious of the significant population increases – which if continued indefinitely could damage traditional Micronesian systems of communal land ownership. That Micronesia was becoming increasingly crowded helps explain, to some extent, the wave of mass migration to the United States that we will see during the Compact period.

### **Negotiations and the Breakup of the TTPI (1969-1979)**

The Nixon Administration proved even more inept on the issue of Micronesian political status. In 1969, President Nixon brusquely ordered his Interior Secretary to annex Micronesia, with the same unincorporated status as Guam. The decision was divorced from both the evolving preferences of the Congress of Micronesia and the US Government Agencies who had worked on the issue for many years, and sparked outrage and confusion among both camps. By the end of the year, Micronesia and the United States had each set up working groups to come to a compromise. Unfortunately, the Nixon administration remained inflexible and disinterested in the particulars of Micronesian political status. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, apparently bored by the topic of the islanders' political preferences, remarked “There are only 90,000 people out there. Who gives a damn?”<sup>84</sup>

By 1970, the increasingly frustrated Micronesian negotiators wrote up four bedrock demands for resolving the status question: sovereignty, self-government, a constitution, and

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<sup>84</sup> McHenry, *Micronesia, Trust Betrayed*. 87



revocable Compact of Free Association. The Compact of Free Association, to be discussed in depth in the next chapter, was the proposal that a treaty agreement be reached between the United States and an independent and constitutionally-governed Micronesia nation, allowing the United States strategic control of the region while also allowing the islanders nearly-complete self-government. In response, the American negotiators (under the instructions of Kissinger) returned with an offer of Commonwealth status not substantially different from the earlier proposal of annexation.

Meanwhile, the frustration of the Mariana islanders finally boiled over, and by 1972 the Mariana delegation began separate negotiations with the United States, intending to accept the offer of Commonwealth status. The State Department was highly reluctant to allow the splitting of the TTPI, but the Nixon administration seemed satisfied with the prospect of getting at least one of the TTPI districts to accept. By 1975, the Mariana Islanders had officially struck a deal to join the United States as the “Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.” With the Mariana delegation fully out and Jimmy Carter now President of the United States, the exhausted American negotiators conceded to all four bedrock demands of the Congress of Micronesia, and they were put together into a Constitution to be approved by a plebiscite in July 1978 (Note: The Constitution is now known as the “Constitution of 1979”, based on its effective date). The rest of Micronesia, it seems, was on the path to independence with free association.

On election day, Yap voted 94.8% in favor, Chuuk 69.5% in favor, Pohnpei 74.7% in favor, Kosrae 61% in favor; while Palau rejected with 55.1% opposed, as did the Marshalls with 61.5% opposed.<sup>85</sup> Turnout was above 70% in all 6 districts. Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae were thereafter the “Federated States of Micronesia.” The State Department dream of a Micronesian federation had been realized, but without Palau and the Marshalls. The Marshalls,

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<sup>85</sup> Manhard, *The United States and Micronesia in Free Association*. 8

simply wanting a state for their own people, were now constituted as the “Republic of the Marshall Islands” and put on the same timetable towards independence as the newly-created FSM. Meanwhile, Palau’s rejection of the Constitution seems to have surprised even the Palauan delegation, and their path to independence would drag on far longer.

### **Independence and Post-Independence (1979-Present)**

The newly formed Federated States of Micronesia and Republic of the Marshall Islands had finally resolved the question of their political status. In 1986, both the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia gained formal independence. Palau, meanwhile, was looking more and more like a political basketcase. Although it had a domestic government, it remained technically in the TTPI. The island’s first president was assassinated, and Palau’s second president, the charismatic Micronesian icon Lazarus Sallii, committed suicide on the job. To save face after the surprise rejection of the Constitution of 1979, the Palauan delegation conjured up additional concessions from the United States that would forbid nuclear-powered ships from docking on Palau and expand Palau’s EEZ. What followed were excruciating and lengthy negotiations on how to reach an acceptable Compact. Palau’s own domestically-drafted constitution required a 75% affirmative vote via plebiscite for ratification of the Compacts. In various iterations, the Compact was put to vote five times and never reached the 75% threshold, coming as high as 73%. After a few more American concessions in 1993, Palau finally reinterpreted its constitution to require only a majority vote for ratification and approved the Compact in 1994 with 68% of Palauans voting in favor.<sup>86</sup> It was the sixth plebiscite held on the Compact in Palau. Upon independence in 1994, Palau was the last vestige of the TTPI to be granted independence. In fact, it was the last United Nations Trust Territory on the planet.

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<sup>86</sup> Arnold Leibowitz, *Embattled Island: Palau’s Struggle for Independence*. 203

With the political status question finally resolved, life and politics continued across the islands of the new Micronesian nations. In 1997, the Asian financial crisis hit the region. The recession was weathered relatively well in Guam and the Mariana Islands, manifesting only as a temporary drop in tourism and real estate investment – perhaps reflecting that political union with the United States was in fact offering economic security. In Saipan, an influx of foreign direct investment and immigration was beginning a period of growth that would significantly enrich the Northern Marianas. However, the crisis hit the newly-independent Compact countries hard. FSM's government could not finance its debts and required an international bailout. Subsequent Asian Development Bank-imposed economic reforms failed to create lasting economic growth. In FSM and RMI especially, the crisis dimmed hopes that the island nations could create true, self-sustaining economies. No significant export industries could feasibly be developed that would provide high standards of living to the majority of the population – as no resource, be it copra, taro, or fisheries could ever be feasibly mass exported from Micronesia. Tourism, the great white whale of Micronesian economic policy, took off in Palau but never in the more distant FSM and RMI, where it has been stagnant since independence. The failure of the RMI and FSM economies, which today are almost entirely financed by foreign aid from the United States, is a continuing policy reality for Micronesia. There are few serious and feasible proposals to fix it. As such, living standards on FSM and RMI have not improved significantly since independence. Instead, a significant number of Micronesians – perhaps as high as one in the in FSM – have moved to the United States under the migration provisions of the Compacts.

Country/Territory	Population	GDP Per Capita	US Annual Assistance (FY 2012)*
Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)	104,719	\$3,000	\$100,000,000
Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)	73,376	\$3,200	\$70,000,000
Republic of Palau	21,347	\$15,100	\$13,200,000
Guam	162,742	\$30,500	(Territory)
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)	53,467	\$13,300	(Territory)

Table 1: Sourced from the CIA World Factbook and USAID with most recent information. When combined, the population of American-controlled Micronesia is just 415,651, less than that of any American state.

### Reflecting on Micronesia's Path to Independence

The question of Micronesian political status was finally resolved by the end of the century. Due to deficiencies in American leadership, the process took far longer than necessary. During the Kennedy and Johnson years, the consensus emerged that Micronesia should be made to voluntarily accept permanent union with the United States.<sup>87</sup> Such an arrangement would be highly strategically beneficial to the US, and possibly economically beneficial to the Micronesians. But the lack of inter-agency consensus and focus from the Americans, and the subtle racism and condescending posture of the American delegation, led to less than optimal outcome in the Compacts of Free Association.

The lack of inter-agency focus within the US government was clear enough to all sides. According to Donald McHenry, "Resolution of Micronesia's status was needlessly delayed by the failure of the executive branch to reconcile conflicts between Interior, State, and Defense."<sup>88</sup> Likewise, according to Ruth Van Cleve of the Department of the Interior, "Micronesia has no constituency and each Secretary has bigger fish to fry. Washington has no agreed policy with

<sup>87</sup> Willens and Siemer, *National Security and Self-Determination*. 28

<sup>88</sup> McHenry, *Micronesia, Trust Betrayed*. 224

respect to Micronesia.”<sup>89</sup> For the Americans, the desire for permanent strategic control was the only consistent position among all stakeholders. How to achieve this, and what would be the ethical or rational way of doing so, only engendered endless debate and little progress among the Americans.

Amidst their internal disagreements, the subtly racist attitude of the American negotiators further hampered the process. Of all the memoirs and books written of the American perspective throughout the negotiations, none face up to the reality that the Micronesians were never treated as equals. Briefly in 1947 the Navy had pushed for a path for Micronesian citizenship and statehood.<sup>90</sup> With the slightest bit of resistance in the Senate, the proposal was squashed. Guam received US citizenship in 1950, but not the full constitutional rights that would come with statehood. The Northern Mariana Islands became an American Commonwealth with citizenship, but still far from the sort of true self-determination that the remainder of the Micronesians were hoping to achieve. As such, there was never again an offer of full citizenship with the rights of statehood. It would not have been infeasible – Hawai’i, a majority non-white Pacific island territory, was granted statehood in 1949. Micronesia, combined in all the TTPI districts plus Guam, would have had a population approximate with that of Wyoming, the smallest American state. There is little question that the Micronesians would have at the very least seriously considered, if not embraced, such an offer. Instead, they were treated to endlessly frustrating and insulting offers of annexation or neo-colonial “Commonwealth” status. Micronesian Congressman Lazarus Sallii was not shy in his observations of the dynamic, speaking of one of the United States’ latest offers of Commonwealth status: “Micronesians would become the newest, the smallest, the remotest non-white minority in the United States political family—as

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<sup>89</sup> Van Cleve, *The Office of Territorial Affairs*.

<sup>90</sup> Rogers, *Destiny’s Landfall: A History of Guam*.

permanent and as American, shall we say, as the American Indian.”<sup>91</sup> Among the American-educated Micronesian political class of the 1960s and 1970s, this racial dynamic was widely noticed, and it poisoned the negotiations. The eventual solution of a Compact of Free Association was supposed to be a final compromise – the best of both worlds. Instead, as we will see in the subsequent chapter, it has been far from a perfect solution.

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<sup>91</sup> Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A Century of Colonial Rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands*. 333

## IV: Free Association and American Geopolitics

“There are only 90,000 people out there.

Who gives a damn?”

*Henry Kissinger*<sup>92</sup>

“We have the trust, the United States has the territory”

Micronesian Senator Ataji Balos<sup>93</sup>

The Compacts of Free Association are a three-legged stool: self-determination, economic assistance, and security. Although the Compacts of Palau, FSM, and RMI differ slightly, they all essentially provide for the same deal – in essence, the Compact countries cede strategic control of their territory for a highly privileged relationship with the United States. This sort of political relationship is unique to Micronesia. Two Polynesian entities, the Cook Islands and Niue, are freely associated with New Zealand but are not UN member states. During the era of decolonization, other islands and territories around the world were placed into temporary free association status in the transition to independence. Micronesia is the only instance in which, for strategic reasons, such a relationship has been built to be permanent.

### **Principle 1: Self-Determination**

First and foremost, Title I of the Compacts guarantees the independence and sovereignty of the islands. The three Compact countries are traditional nation-states in most respects. They are able to sign treaties, join international organizations, and conduct basic foreign affairs without the interference of the United States. The Compact countries are not subject to the same customs and trade laws as the US mainland. Since independence, the United States has not traditionally meddled in the domestic politics of the islands and there is little reason to doubt the

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<sup>92</sup> McHenry, *Micronesia, Trust Betrayed*, 87.

<sup>93</sup> Diaz, “The Compact of Free Association (COFA): A History of Failures.” 29

authenticity of the guarantee of self-determination granted by the Compacts. Thus, with important exceptions, the Compacts emphasize the requirement of “mutual agreement” between the two entities regarding changes in policy. Importantly, either side is able to revoke the Compact unilaterally. This concession was hard-won by the Micronesian negotiators, who saw the ability to leave voluntarily as essential to their independence.

### **Principle 2: Economic Aid**

Title II of the Compacts mandate that the United States provide substantial economic aid to the partner countries. The first round of Compacts included gradually decreasing annual lump sum payments to both FSM and RMI, to expire in 2003. After the Asian Financial Crisis and the continuing stagnation of both RMI and FSM’s economies, the renewal of the financial portions of FSM/RMI Compacts in 2003 included further economic aid and the creation of a Compact Trust Fund – intended to act as a sort of sovereign wealth fund that would provide permanent assistance to the Compact nations without the need for continuing congressional approval. However, the Compact Trust Fund has significantly underperformed since 2003 (and especially given the impact of the 2008 Financial Crisis). Thus when the economic provisions of the RMI/FSM Compacts come up for renegotiation in 2023, it is expected that both nations will continue to request lump sum aid payments.

Palau’s Compact was structured differently given the longer and much more complex path it took to ratification. Like the RMI/FSM Compacts, Palau’s Compact can be terminated unilaterally by either side but does not build into place deadlines for the expiration of economic aid. Instead, Palau’s Compact requires 15, 30, and 40-year policy reviews by the State Department. The conclusions of the 15-year review, completed in 2011, have been stalled in congress for the past 6 years, despite the efforts of Senator John McCain and many federal



agencies during the Obama administration to pass it. The 15-year review itself called for an increase in direct aid and a shoring up of the Compact Trust Fund, which was met with skepticism in Congress. Recently, there have efforts to get the 15-year review moving forward attached to a larger defense bill.<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, the United States continues to highly subsidize the governments of the Compact States in other ways. Most remarkably, Compact countries use the United States dollar as their official currencies. In addition, USAID, the State Department, the Department of the Interior, and the Peace Corps are constantly engaged on the ground assisting with development projects that are not explicitly part of the Compact economic aid regime. Federal agencies such as the USDA, FAA, USPS, and FDIC all operate and provide services in the Freely Associated States. Furthermore, Compact citizens remain eligible for certain benefits including Pell Grants, though they were stripped of access to traditional American welfare programs (TANF, Medicaid, etc.) in the welfare reforms of the 1990s. Overall, American aid to the Compact states is the most significant and costly foreign assistance regime that the United States manages in Oceania (though one must note it is dwarfed by the foreign aid that the United States provides nations such as Israel and Egypt).

Furthermore, Compact citizens have the unrestricted right to live and work in the United States (and likewise, Americans can live and work in the Compact states without a visa). As discussed briefly at the end of Chapter I, under these privileges tens of thousands of Micronesians have moved to the US. Most numerous are the Micronesian communities in Guam, Hawai'i, and Saipan. However, increasing numbers are moving to the continental United States, where Micronesian migrants are less likely to face prejudice and have better job prospects. According to a 2012 study by Rev. Fran Hezel and Dr. Michael J Levin, the FSM population of

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<sup>94</sup> Clark, "Senate OKs 'Indispensable' Palau Compact In NDAA."

the United States totals 49,840 – including 16,790 born in the United States.<sup>95</sup> If accurate, this implies that approximately one in three FSM Micronesians live in the United States, one of the highest rates of per capita migration to the United States from any nation worldwide. Although a similar census has not been conducted for the Marshallese, it is widely believed among Micronesia experts that immigration into the United States from the Marshall Islands may be of a similar scale. Many migrants are remaining in the United States and keeping American citizenship or dual citizenship if possible (as FSM, unlike RMI, prohibits dual citizenship). However, given the relatively small populations of the Compact countries, it is highly difficult to count Compact migrants.

### **Principle 3: Security and Defense**

Most critically for the United States, Title III of the Compacts state that the United States has "full authority and responsibility for security and defense matters" in the Compact states as well as strategic access to Micronesian territory and waters. The US is also able to seize Micronesian territory in a crisis, should WW2-era airfields and anchorages be required in a hypothetical military conflict. American spies are free to operate across Micronesia, and no doubt are keeping track of the increasing numbers of Chinese visitors.

Compact countries do not have their own militaries. Instead, their citizens are eligible to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States. US military recruiters operate across the Compact states, and rate of service in the United States Armed Forces have been high among Micronesians. It is widely thought that the lack of economic opportunity in Micronesia has created a strong incentive to serve. However, Micronesians who have served also hold a deep sense of pride in their service. Remarkably, FSM sends more per capita recruits into the US

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<sup>95</sup> Francis X. Hezel and Levin, "Survey of Federated States of Micronesia Migrants in the United States Including Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)."

military than any American state.<sup>96</sup> Casualty rates for Micronesians are also extremely high, with nine Micronesian soldiers KIA in Iraq and Afghanistan. In an era of historically low military service, the non-US citizens of Micronesia have acted as some of America's most valiant and patriotic soldiers. On Pohnpei, one can see American flags draped from Micronesian homes and USARMY bumper stickers adorning local cars. Even in prosperous Guam service rates are high. Take this excerpt from an article on Micronesian military service:

*"They have a sense of patriotism that most people just don't understand," is the way Retired Army Major Edward Camacho explains it. How else can you account for the fact that the Northern Marianas now has about 250 men and women serving in Iraq, with hundreds of others posted elsewhere? Young people join the Armed Services, in Camacho's opinion, "because they see for themselves that in the long run it will allow their loved ones to enjoy freedom and prosperity and happiness." David Cohen, head of the Office of Insular Affairs, agrees: "There is a strong sense of patriotism throughout the US territories." Indeed, yellow ribbon decals and stickers carrying the message "Support our troops" can be seen everywhere on Saipan and Guam.<sup>97</sup>*

Overall it seems that Micronesians, both the American citizens of Guam and the CNMI and the Compact citizens of Palau, FSM, and RMI, are deeply proud of their connection to the US military and unusually willing to serve.

In addition, there is a substantial American physical military presence across Micronesia. The United States maintains an active military installation at Kwajalein Atoll, the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site, which is used to test missile defense technologies as well as housing a spaceport for near-equatorial satellite launches. Guam is home to Naval Base Guam

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<sup>96</sup> Azios, "Uncle Sam Wants Micronesians for US Military."

<sup>97</sup> Hezel, "The Call to Arms: Micronesians in the Military."

and Anderson Air Force Base, two gigantic military installations that serve as a major logistical hub for American forces in the Asia-Pacific. To the North, the island of Farallon de Medinilla in the Marianas is used by Air Force pilots as a practice bombing target. In addition, the US Armed Forces lease land on the island of Tinian, to be used as an emergency Air Force base in the event that one is needed. There are also various radar stations set up across the Compact states by US federal agencies, ostensibly for civilian purposes but rumored to have dual, intelligence-collecting capabilities.

The associated status of the Compact states can be useful to US foreign policy in other ways, as when Palau accepted six Uighur prisoners from Guantanamo Bay in 2010 after no other country would agree to house them.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, as independent nations, they hold seats in the United Nations General Assembly, where they vote with the United States on nearly every resolution – all three are among the top 10 nations in UN General Assembly voting affinity with the US.<sup>99</sup> Overall, while the Compacts have been insufficient in meeting the economic needs of Micronesia, they have met the strategic needs of the United States remarkably well.

### **The Larger Foreign Policy Context in the Asia-Pacific**

The Asia-Pacific has been a principle area of interest to American foreign policy from the Second World War to the present day. Immediately following the War, the United States enjoyed hegemonic great power status in the region. Today, the US remains mostly dominant in the Pacific while also being one of many great powers with interests in Asia. The state of affairs in the Asia-Pacific is frequently described as geopolitical “liberal world order” maintained by the United States and its network of allies and partners. American allies include the Compact States, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the Philippines. American partners include nations like

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<sup>98</sup> Johnston, “Uighurs Leave Guantánamo for Palau.”

<sup>99</sup> US Department of State, “UN General Assembly Voting Coincidence Records.”

Malaysia and Indonesia. American interests are today defined far more expansively than defending American territory – broadly speaking, the United States seeks to ensure political stability in Asia, guarantee freedom of navigation, promote American economic interests, and (sometimes) promote liberal-democratic values. These efforts are backed by America’s physical military posture in addition to the network of relationships and alliances.

Historically, the maintenance of this order has required “grand strategy” in dealing with the Asia-Pacific. Foreign Policy expert Michael J Green defines five key tensions in US grand strategy in the Pacific: *Europe v. Asia*, *China v. Japan*, *Protectionism v. Free Trade*, *Defining the Forward Defensive Line*, and *Self-Determination v. Universal Values*.<sup>100</sup> According to Green, these five questions can be used to understand the main considerations of American grand strategy in the region. For Micronesia – a small component part of the broader Asia-Pacific – the question of *Defining the Forward Defensive Line* has the most utility in understanding in finding a role for Micronesia, as the geographical boundaries of American interests have historically driven American regional engagement.

The current geopolitical order is rapidly eroding. Even before the election of President Donald Trump, the United States was slowly losing relative power in the Pacific due to the rise of the political, economic, and military strength of China. American efforts to contain Chinese influence, such as the effort to boycott the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, have been unsuccessful. The rise of China is the inevitable result of China’s growing economy and large population, articulated thusly by American academic Robert Art:

*If China’s economy continues to grow for two more decades at anything close to the rate of the last two decades, then it will eventually rival and even surpass the United States in the size of its gross domestic product . . . Even if its economy never catches up to*

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<sup>100</sup> Green, *By More than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia-Pacific since 1783*. 6-10

*America's, China's remarkable economic growth has already given it significant political influence in East Asia, and that influence will only grow as China's economy continues to grow . . . If it continues to channel a healthy portion of its GDP into its military forces over several more decades, and if it makes a determined naval and air power projection effort, China might be able to deploy a maritime force that could contest America's supremacy at sea in East Asia.*<sup>101</sup>

Given the economic reality, the rise of China is not a question of *if* but *when*, and eventually the United States will need to revise its priorities and find a sustainable geopolitical position in the Asia-Pacific. When this occurs, America should realize the value of Micronesia as a strategic asset and incorporate it into any new Asia-Pacific strategy.

### **China in Oceania**

For island nations, China offers a fundamentally different relationship than has the United States and its junior partners of Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, which have traditionally acted as the political custodians for various parts of Oceania. China promotes non-interference in the political systems of other countries as a core tenant of its foreign policy – for Beijing, there are no rogue states. These new dynamics first manifested in the Pacific around Fiji in 2006, after Commodore Frank Bainimarama staged a military coup and ousted Fiji's elected government. New Zealand and Australia, Fiji's traditional patrons, instituted a travel ban and sanctions to incentivize a restoration of the legitimate government. China however, embraced the coup, sextupling aid to Fiji and inviting the Commodore to the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.<sup>102</sup> With this action, China essentially displaced Australia and New Zealand as the predominant outside power in Fiji. Much of the increase in Chinese aid to Fiji came in the form of preferential

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<sup>101</sup> Art, "The United States and the Rise of China: Implications for the Long Haul."

<sup>102</sup> Yang, *The Pacific Islands in China's Grand Strategy*. 83-84

loans rather than grants, to fund infrastructure built by Chinese contractors, but without the legal or economic reform requirements of other outside aid. Given the example of Fiji, the United States cannot assume that the Compact States will remain indefinitely subservient to American interests. In recent years, China has continued to increase direct aid, long-term investment, and diplomatic engagement with all of the countries of Oceania.<sup>103</sup> If the United States neglects Micronesia's priorities for too long, and China offers a "better deal" as happened in Fiji, then it is entirely plausible that a Compact state with a fraying relationship with the United States (i.e. Palau) will switch allegiance to China and unilaterally terminate their Compact.

There is also mounting evidence that Beijing aims to become the dominant naval power in the Western Pacific. In Chinese security academia, the concept of the "two island chains" posits that China should seek in the short-term to establish strategic control within the "first island chain" (The East and South China Seas, including Taiwan) and in the medium term establish strategic control to the "second island chain" (running south from Tokyo Bay, along the Mariana Islands, Guam, and the Palauan islands).<sup>104</sup> In particular, the concept of the second island chain is a direct challenge to American control of Western Micronesia and the strategic interior of the Asia-Pacific.

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<sup>103</sup> Wesley-Smith, "China's Rise in Oceania: Issues and Perspectives."

<sup>104</sup> Department of Defense, "Asia-Pacific: Maritime Security Strategy."



Figure 4: The First and Second Island Chains<sup>105</sup>

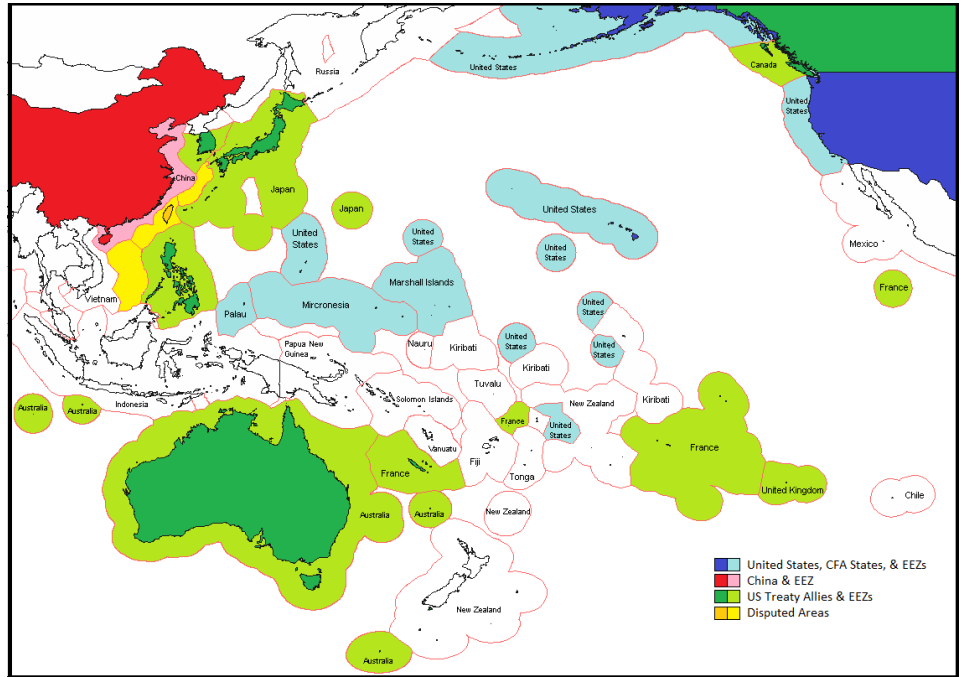


Figure 5: This map shows America and the freely associated states in blue, US treaty allies in Green, and China in red. Note how the Compact states form the “strategic interior” of the Asia-Pacific.

<sup>105</sup> “Who Rules the Waves?” *The Economist*



## American Strategy in the Pacific and Micronesia's Role

The best possible American response to the rise of China in Micronesia rests on how America seeks to define its forward defensive line. Is the forward defensive line our treaty allies on the Pacific Rim (Japan, South Korea) or all the way back in Hawai'i? If it is the former, maintaining control of Micronesia as the "strategic interior" is critical, as having it fall into the hands of an adversary would greatly reduce the capability of the United States to project power in East Asia. If the forward defensive line is instead set in Hawai'i (a determination that would leave behind the American citizens of the CNMI and Guam) then strategic control of Micronesia would *still* be critical in that it would deny the area to a potentially adversarial China. Throughout the history of the US-Micronesian relationship, this concept of "strategic denial" has been a driving force behind the American presence in the region, with the goal of preventing another nation using the region to launch a Pearl Harbor-style attack on the United States. In 1898 and 1917 the United States defined the forward defensive line too close to the mainland and was therefore left vulnerable to military attack. Micronesia has also historically been considered a "fallback position" in the event of a loss of American predominance in Asia, particularly in the event that the US-Philippines relationship frays.<sup>106</sup> Given this history, wherever one defines the forward defensive line still leaves a significant role for Micronesia. Unless some radically new understanding or accommodation is reached with China that leaves the United States feeling secure in the Asia-Pacific, then there remains significant reason to invest in the continued American strategic predominance of Micronesia.

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<sup>106</sup> Webb, *Micronesia and U.S. Pacific Strategy*.

### **Concluding Thoughts: How to Improve the US-Micronesian Relationship**

Should the United States continue to see a vital strategic interest in the region, American policymakers would be wise to not underestimate the people of Micronesia in future negotiations. First and foremost, the people of the islands have shouldered many of America's most unseemly burdens, from the nuclear testing Eniwetok and Bikini to the Uighyer terrorists transferred to Palau from Guantanamo. They have sent their own sons and daughters, in per capita numbers higher than that of any US state, to serve and die for the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. They have nearly-uniformly acted in good faith towards the United States despite the shortcomings, inconsistencies, and sometimes cruelties of American policymakers. From the end of the Second World War to today, the people of Micronesia have always been at the table, willing to work with America to find areas of mutual interest. Yet Kennedy appears to be the last President to appreciate how good America's friends from the islands actually are.

Micronesian culture is highly rooted in traditional behaviors of respect and deference to elders. Social signals are often conveyed with facial expresses or pauses rather than words. Micronesians tend to wait long after another is done speaking to contribute their own opinions. Because of this, the American administrators of the TTPI often found it awkward to chat with the local Micronesians.<sup>107</sup> This cultural divide combined with subtle American racism to create the idea that the Micronesians were slow, unintelligent, and unambitious. In fact, the Micronesians were exercising their traditional form of respect. When the negotiations for political status began in earnest in the late 1960s, the Micronesians carefully crafted a set of demands and a strategy to obtain them. They outmaneuvered the Americans on nearly every issue – not out of bad faith, but because the Americans never came to the table treating the Micronesians as equals.

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<sup>107</sup> Hezel, *Making Sense of Micronesia: The Logic of Pacific Island Culture*. 86

First and foremost, Americans should learn more about the Compacts, the history of the US-Micronesian relationship, and why previous generations have viewed the region as being of great strategic utility to the United States. Should one believe my central argument, that this relationship is both critical to US interests and highly underappreciated, then it follows that the US can and should examine ways in which these mutual ties could be strengthened. The stakes are clear: the Compacts are mutual agreements that can be terminated unilaterally, the rise of China threatens the political status quo in Oceania, and there is no concrete reason for the Micronesians to remain in the American camp if China offers a better deal, especially given years of American neglect.

The Micronesian political class is not terribly ideological, but immensely practical. They have no grand illusions that their countries will reach western levels of prosperity or ever truly be outside of the sphere of influence of a foreign power. They have thus learned to navigate their political situation with practicality. Under the Spanish and Germans, this meant forcing the colonial powers to work within local power structures. Under the militant Japanese, it meant keeping down their heads until the storm had passed. Under the Americans, who brought something resembling democratic values and the rule of law to the islands, they used every available opportunity to enhance their political status and leverage more aid and autonomy from the TTPI negotiations. The Micronesians today are not hostile to the Compacts of Free Association, but are keenly aware of the flaws of the arrangement. They realize without naiveté that the foremost American concern has always been geopolitical and they are not oblivious to the rise of China as another world-shaking event for their tiny nations. In FSM President Peter Christian's Inaugural address, he publically said as much:

*The World Wars have ended. The cold war, a secret myth of yesterday. And in all such sad conflicts, there are those who claim victory. But, victors must be humble in their triumphs. Many nations involved in the conflicts have risen from the debris of war to become dominant economic powers in the world. They now wage economic wars against each other often leaving in their wake victims of selfish globalization. And where they are generous, often this generosity comes with a Pavlovian leash.*<sup>108</sup>

It is worth noting, perhaps, this same President Christian was invited to Beijing by Chinese President Xi Jinping, where he was treated to the equivalent of a state dinner, at which two discussed Chinese investment in Micronesia, opportunities for cultural exchange, and their shared concern over climate change.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps above anything, China's newfound and enthusiastic engagement in Micronesia should serve as evidence to the United States of the continued importance of these tiny islands.

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<sup>108</sup> Christian, "Inaugural Address, His Excellency Peter M. Christian."

<sup>109</sup> FSM Information Service, "Official Visit to China by President Peter M. Christian."

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