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American Colonialism

Would Russian bases in the Indian Ocean be a threat to the United States?

Would Russian bases in the Central Pacific Ocean be a threat to the United States?

These questions certainly have been asked and answered privately within the councils of the U.S. Government.

The time is at hand when they ought to be asked and answered publicly.

There is good reason to believe that the private answer to both questions is at least a qualified yes, because some of our policy moves are consistent with that answer.

There is a certain concern that the re-opening of the Suez Canal will bring the Russian Navy into the Indian Ocean in greater force—reflected in talk of the need to keep a U.S.—British presence in the area as a balance.

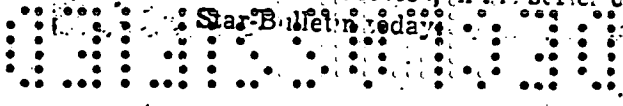
We are not trying to deny Indian Ocean bases to the Russians, but there are expressions that we and the British should stay there, too—lest Russia's voice become dominant in the area. (An adjoining article discusses these.)

The Central Pacific situation is somewhat different. The Russians aren't there yet, but they—or someone else—may be coming.

Fear of this seems to lie at the heart of our unwillingness to take a chance that the six districts of Micronesia might slip out of U.S. control.

This, in turn, makes us unwilling to grant self-determination to the Micronesians via a plebiscite until we are sure things will turn out our way. It all adds up to the rather nasty situation described by Gardiner Jones, editor of Pacific News Service, in the series of articles concluded in the Star-Bulletin today.

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The Micronesians have embraced the American dream of democracy and self-determination, he points out, only to find America hesitant about its application in their case.

The United States needs to ask itself in a public national debate—probably in Congress—whether it really matters if some or all of Micronesia slips out of our hands.

We live now with the Russians in Cuba, no farther from Florida than Maui is from Oahu. We don't like it, but we live with it.

We live now with Russian rockets trained on us from the Russian mainland.

Would it really matter, then, if Russia or China or Japan or someone else at some future date got bases in Micronesia, thousands of miles away from the U.S. Mainland and even ranging from 2,000 to 5,000 miles away from Hawaii?

Suppose we arrive at a situation where we and quite a few other nations had bases on the Central Pacific islands? Would that injure the American national interest?

It is hard from here to see that it would but if there are those in the National Security Council, the State Department or the Pentagon who feel otherwise, they ought to be heard.

Unless they can make a very strong case—and soon—we ought to move ahead with allowing self-determination to the people of the Micronesian islands.

The fact is that they will probably want to maintain a relationship with us.

The people of the Mariana Islands lying just north of Guam want a close and permanent U.S. relationship, judging by expressions of their Legislature.

The other five districts Palau, Yap, Truk, Ponape and the Marshalls—appear to want a looser liaison with America, one in which they have internal autonomy but lean on the U.S. for foreign affairs representation.

They also appear to want (and these appear to be the sticking points) full control of their own land (meaning the right to say "no" to U.S. military bases) and the right unilaterally to sever their U.S. ties at some future date if they so choose.

The only overriding reason why the United States could not grant these requests would be a fear of letting some other nation into the islands. This hardly seems a problem. Let those who feel otherwise speak up and explain themselves.

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