

Micronesia talks

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Today the Advertiser begins a new column on developments in the Pacific area. The purpose is not to present news, which should be elsewhere in the paper. Nor is it to be especially profound. Rather, it is to bring together items that may be of importance or interest, as we see it, about the island area and Asia. Ideas on such subjects are welcome.

By JOHN GRIFFIN

those talks on the Trust

It is the fate of the Pacific Trust Territory that the question of its future political status is both obscured by and related to larger and more dramatic events in Asia.

So it is now as teams of Micronesian and American negotiators prepare for a third and perhaps vital round of talks in early October at Hana, Maui.

Understandably, the headlines will be going to such events as the maneuvering to get China into the U.N., what's going on in Peking, the economic squabble with Japan, and South Vietnam's non-election.

In fact, the Micronesia status talks are to be in private by mutual agreement. Remote Hana was picked (by the American side which is paying the bill at the expensive hotel) because it offers special solitude from the press or any protesting students.

BUT NONE OF this should obscure the fact that for both sides there is a need to break the deadlock which has existed since the talks began two years ago.

A dozen members of the Congress of Micronesia make up one committee. They will be meeting with staff members and advisers here next week before flying to Maui.

The official Micronesian position is for a future status called "free association," which would mean internal self-government and ownership of their islands but with the U.S. handling defense and foreign affairs. A minority of the Micronesian committee leans toward either more independence or (in the Marianas) to U.S. territorial status.

The U.S. is said to be sending a 15-member delegation of State, Defense and Interior Department officials and others. It is headed by President Nixon's personal representative, special Ambassador Franklin Hayden Williams.

The Americans have offered a form of U.S. territorial status called a "commonwealth," which might be akin to what Puerto Rico has. It has been rejected, and there are reports the U.S. will be coming in with some compromise ideas — a minimum if the talks are to get anywhere.

IN A SIMPLIFIED sense, then, the differences may involve Washington concern for Pacific security (bases or

Pacific view

collected notes and comment
on the islands and Asia

keeping others out) and Micronesian concern for sovereignty, the right to own their islands and control their lives.

The two concepts have only been mutually exclusive in the eyes of American defense planners and some (but not all) advocates of Micronesian independence.

It's tempting to say this third series of talks will be a showdown session, that time is running out for both sides as the post Vietnam fallback approaches.

But what may be more likely is that the Maui talks will be the first of a conclusive series of meetings. With luck, they may reach some broad agreement that will have many hurdles to pass in Micronesia and Washington.

STILL, EVEN IF it's shaded by secrecy and other events, what happens on Maui starting Oct. 4 will say a lot about American morality in a changing Pacific.

It would be bitter irony if a Nixon Administration that seeks to leave Vietnam and find a new era in China relations can't see the need for imaginative policy toward 100,000-people-we-rule-in-trust.