

Micronesian decisions,

What could be the most crucial session in the short history of the Congress of Micronesia is now under way at Saipan.

Lawmakers from the six districts of the Trust Territory of the Pacific are meeting at a turning point in the political growth of those islands.

HANGING OVER the session are the questions of political independence vs. continued ties with the United States and the future military value of Micronesia. Answers will be hard to come by.

As with all legislative bodies, the meaning of the session will probably not come clear until near the end—in this case early in March. But some themes are apparent:

• The Micronesians are no longer firmly on the path toward a status of "free association" with the U.S. in which they handle their own internal affairs while the U.S. takes care of international matters. Even as talks between the two sides seemed close to completing an agreement of free association, the Congress of Micronesia decided that the option of independence should be explored as well.

The merits of complete independence will doubtless be discussed during this session of the congress. The newly-elected president of the senate, for example, is Tosiwo Nakayama who has long supported the idea of independence. In addition, there is some sentiment for independence at the district level.

• The military value to the U.S. of Trust Territory lands may be declining. Many Micronesians have considered the strategic value of their islands as a trump card in deal-

ing with the United States. This may no longer be so.

If the U.S. begins its military disengagement from Asia, advanced military bases in the Pacific may become less important. The news that the U.S. plans to close several major bases in Japan is evidence of that.

FURTHER, the Mariana Islands district is conducting its own talks with the U.S. with an eye toward close economic and political ties. This would undoubtedly include military use of Saipan, Rota, Tinian and other islands if needed. Military use of land in any of the other five districts may become unnecessary.

Finally, there is evidence the Defense Department plans to develop missile-testing facilities at Wake Island. While some consider Wake geographically part of Micronesia, it is firmly in American hands. Vital missile facilities could be built there without Micronesian permission.

The upshot of all this may mean Micronesia will be forced to face the future with less support from the U.S. than originally anticipated. Thus, it is crucial for the congress to lay the groundwork for a workable political future at this session.

THREE BILLS, which failed the first time they were introduced, offer a framework. They call for a constitutional convention, an "office of transition" which would prepare for the practical problems of self-government and a commission on national unity.

But first, the congress should attempt to clarify its position on independence vs. free association.