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COMMENTS ON THE WASHINGTON POST'S
March 11, 1973
ARTICLE ON THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC (TTPI)

The March 11 article on Micronesia in the "Outlook" section of the Washington Post presents a generally fair description of the islands and their peoples, their history, their problems and the quality of their leadership. In certain specifics, however, and in the relative emphasis laid on various aspects of the current situation and the role of the U.S. Government it tends to be misleading.

To begin with the title itself while catchy does not mirror the actual fact. It implies that the United States has maintained a tight grip on large parts of the island territory and left for the Micronesians only a misplaced trust. With the exception of the currently leased land in the Marshalls for the use of the U.S. missile test facility and other small areas in that district held over temporarily from earlier atomic tests (and soon to be returned) the United States holds no land in Micronesia for its exclusive use. It has in fact returned large amounts of public land taken over originally by the Spanish, Germans or Japanese and previously held by the Territorial Administration in trust for the people of Micronesia. The U.S. Government is on record as publicly stating that the remainder will be returned as soon as arrangements can be worked out for handling this highly complex problem.

The Post's article sees "no break in the clouds" so far as future negotiations are concerned. This overlooks the considerable progress already made in negotiations between the U.S. Government and Micronesian representatives aimed at reaching agreement on a new political status for the islands and an end to the United Nations trusteeship. A draft compact has been partially completed covering such important things as internal and external affairs and defense. While these negotiations are by no means completed, they have moved far towards the fulfillment of the stated first preference of the Congress of Micronesia - a future political status based on a compact of free association between Micronesia and the United States. Moreover, the article mis-states the situation when it says that under free association Micronesia would be permitted a "measure of internal self-government and control." Micronesia would have full internal self-government, while the U.S. would be responsible for external affairs including defense.

The article also passes lightly over the separate negotiations opened in December between the Marianas and the U.S. Government aimed at working out a different political relationship with that district.

These negotiations reflect repeatedly expressed popular sentiments in the Marianas (of which Tinian is a part) favoring close and permanent membership in the American political family and welcoming a U.S. military presence. On receptivity to the U.S. military the author quotes instead a leading independence advocate from Truk District, where the U.S. has no military requirements whatever.

Indeed the article gives disproportionately large space to the TTPI's independence advocates. There is a significant, articulate group advocating independence. But to say that independence sentiment is growing "rapidly" is overstating the case. "Free Association" still seems to represent the preponderant choice of the people of most districts. The article quotes the Chairman of the Microensian status delegation on certain aspects of the independence question, but neglects the Senator's observation during the negotiations that first priority should be given to completing the compact of free association and that discussion of independence now would be "diversionary and premature."

It is inaccurate to say that "in recent months a procession of U.S. military men has materialized on Tinian, usually unannounced and sometimes in civilian garb." To the best of our knowledge, the only U.S. military personnel to visit Tinian in the past several months in uniform or civilian clothing was a member of the official U.S. negotiating delegation who went there last December for four hours in the company of other members of the U.S. and Marianas delegations. There is no military land survey team (led by a general officer or by anyone else) going to the Marianas this week as the article states, nor has such a survey been proposed. No visits by any ex-military personnel or other visits for military purposes have been sanctioned.

There is, of course, no active U.S. military presence in the TTPI at the present time other than the research activities in the Marshalls and seven civic action teams located in the districts at local request to do small community construction projects. In addition, the article's discussion of Palauan leaders' views toward U.S. military land requirements makes it appear that the Palauans are opposed to a U.S. presence under any and all conditions. It neglects to mention that the Palauan leaders recently told the U.N. Visiting Mission that they would be ready to negotiate military land requirements when the U.S. returns to the district all public land now held in trust.

Since the U.S. has not yet formally discussed financial arrangements with Micronesian negotiators, it is misleading to say the U.S. "appears intent on paying a relatively modest price for the rights which it seeks to maintain." The article fails to point out that the \$70 million over and above military rents the U.S. presently contributes to Micronesia annually already amounts to about \$700 per year for each Micronesian.

About 1,600 persons rather than the "thousands" cited in the article have been resettled from testing areas in the Marshall Islands. Several hundred are now returning. Those who were moved to other islands were paid initial compensation and resettlement costs, and the U.S. continues to pay \$400,000 yearly in compensation.

It should be noted that U.S. Government "control" has been exercised over the TTPI since the early 1960's by the Department of the Interior not the U.S. military. It is also inaccurate to label the Trusteeship arrangement "made in Washington". All Security Council members agreed to the Trusteeship in 1947, and its terms parallel exactly the language of the U.N. Charter.