

# Palau Chiefs

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SAIPAN - A delegation of 11 traditional chiefs from Palau District met with President Nixon's personal representative, Ambassador Franklin Hadyr Williams, and restated their position Tuesday that they would have "no objection in principal" to accommodating United States military land requirements - as long as all public lands now held by the Trust Territory government are first returned to the people.

In the meeting, the Palau chiefs reiterated their statement made last December, that before any decision concerning political status is made, their demands must be met, a spokesman for the Palauan delegation said yesterday.

According to official sources, their stand on the land issue was the reason for delaying the next round of status talks between Williams and representatives of the Congress of Micronesia. The talks originally scheduled for this month.

# Firm On Land Issue

The U.S.-controlled Trust Territory government now holds about 68 per cent of Palau District as "public lands" officially classified as "those lands .. which were owned or maintained by the Japanese government" or since acquired by the TT for "public purposes." U.S. military land requirements listed in the draft compact of "free association" for Palau include:

Access and anchorage rights in Malakal harbor and adjacent waters and rights to acquire 40 acres of submerged land to be filled for use within Koror's Malakal harbor area;

Joint airfield use rights - and the right to improve it to meet military specifications - and including the right to develop an exclusive use area for maintenance and support facilities.

The right to acquire 2,000 acres of Babelthuap Island for exclusive use, along with the right for non-exclusive use of a 30,000 adjacent area for an intermittent training area.

According to a spokesman for the ambassador, Tuesday's meeting included "cordial and informal discussion" of the propose land requirements.

"The ambassador re-stated the U.S. position that all public land

will be returned to the people of Micronesia, that the U.S. has no objection to an early return of the public land to the districts if that is the people's wish and provided appropriate mechanisms can be devised to ensure that it is returned to its rightful owners," the spokesman stated.

The ambassador explained that the public land question, which must be addressed to the entire TTPI, is complicated and required considerable further study. The chiefs said that once

the public land has been returned they will have no objection in principle to accommodating the U.S. land requirements listed in the draft compact, provided the landowners concerned area are party to the negotiations."

The chiefs' decision in December to accommodate to the United States on these conditions came less than one month after a declaration "unequivocally opposed" to the use of Palauan land by the United States military.