

JUL 23 1973

Kindness and Benefit to All

By C.I. Sulzberger

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y. — From a strategic point of view there isn't any doubt that the Trust Territories of Micronesia, whose supervision was awarded to Washington by U.N. following World War II, have great significance.

In the first issue of "Strategic Review," published by the United States Strategic Institute, Adm. John S. McCain Jr., formerly commander in chief, Pacific, for all American forces including those in South Korea, Japan and Indochina, writes of the need "to do something" with the Trust Territories:

"Because if the trust territories are not kept under the immediate control of the United States, the next fall-back position is Honolulu, and that's a long way back. The Trust Territories, if properly used, will put the United States in a position not too remote from advanced bases in the Philippines and other forward positions."

TECHNICALLY Washington does not "own" the enormous and sparsely populated Trust Territories of Micronesia which, in theory, are a U.N. tutelage. But, as administrator, the U.S.A. has grave responsibilities to the Melanesian and Polynesian peoples who inhabit the area

Nowadays the Defense Department thinks of Micronesia primarily in terms of potential and actual base facilities relatively close to Asia, the Philippines and Japan. But its initial concern was with the convenience of the Trust Territories for nuclear testing.

Indeed, some of the most famous of these gruesome experiments were made on little-known Pacific islands. The United States paid as little attention to the safety or convenience of nearby peoples then as France has later in atmospheric tests close to the Tahiti archipelago, which have been opposed by the World Court and which outraged international opinion.

OF THE HUMAN beings who suffered from American tests, the best known are the handful of seafarers who originally inhabited Bikini, an atoll since immortalized by scanty bathing suits. Hamlet J. Barry II, directing attorney of the Marshall Islands Office of Micronesian Legal Services Corp., wrote to President Nixon May 4, 1973, on behalf of the displaced Bikinians who were removed to make way for the blast.

Barry reminded the chief executive that on Jan. 24, 1946, the Pentagon announced Bikini had been selected for a series of nuclear explosions. One reason was that it contained "only a few people." Barry

adds: "They may have been 'few' from the United States point of view, but from the Bikinians' own point of view, they were all the people."

NEVERTHELESS, the Irioj (or chief), Juda, had told the military governor of the Marshalls that "the United States could use Bikini if it would result in kindness and benefit to all mankind." On Feb. 23 the 200 Bikinians were removed to uninhabited Rongerik in the northern Marshalls.

The Bikinians traditionally associate Rongerik with Libokra, a poisonous female spirit. Since many of the fish on Rongerik were indeed poisonous and there was little other food, the Bikinians suffered illness and malnutrition. Therefore Washington ordered them sent to another atoll, Ujelang.

BUT THE PENTAGON resolved to start a new test series on Eniwetok and the inhabitants of that island instead were sent to Ujelang. The Bikinians had to stay on hated Rongerik. When they were found to be almost starving, they were again shipped off, this time to Kwajalein. Still later, they were sent to Kili.

Kili proved almost devoid of the maritime resources on which Bikinians depend. Food became so short

that a ton was airdropped; since parachutes were not used, most of this spoiled. The Bikinians were given an old converted whaleboat which was promptly wrecked. They decided "Kili Enana, Kili is no good." A second boat given to them was destroyed by Typhoon Lola in 1957. A small trust fund set aside for them failed because of poor investment planning.

IN 1968 PRESIDENT Johnson promised that part of the original Bikini atoll would be cleaned up so the inhabitants could return. Nothing has happened. The Bikinians don't know if they'll ever go home. What they call home remains bulldozed and radioactive. Last Jan. 30, the exiles requested compensation and return to a sanitized homeland. The record leaves them little reason for optimism.

Meanwhile the lovely Pacific islands that once attracted Paul Gauguin and Robert Louis Stevenson to dwell among them remain strategic pawns (for the U.S.A.) or nuclear laboratories (for France). When great nations are advised "to do something" about these atolls, that "something" appears to have little "to do" with the people who inhabit them.