

"In this stage in Micronesia's evolution . . . despite its own flag, its own citizenship, and its own Micronesian Day (July 12) a Micronesian nation does not exist."

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## Diversity in Micronesia

By DONALD F. SMITH

Associate Professor of Education, George Mason University

THE POLITICAL UNITY of Micronesia, the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, has always been fragile, to say the least, but the recent turn of events in the Mariana and Marshall Islands has completely undermined the official American policy of maintaining the area as a political entity.

The announcement last year by the Marianas District Legislature that it was creating its own political status commission to enter into negotiations with the United States regarding its political future was merely another indication of the gulf that exists between the other districts of Micronesia and the Marianas.<sup>1</sup> United States negotiators, meeting in Washington, D.C., with members of the Congress of Micronesia's Future Political Status Committee, announced that separate negotiations with the Marianas would take place concerning their political status.<sup>2</sup> Representatives of the Congress of Micronesia and American negotiators have been carrying on talks concerning the future of the territory as a whole over the past three years.

Increasing friction between the Congress of Micronesia and the Marianas District, which now seeks to be incorporated within the political framework of the United States,<sup>3</sup> has manifested itself in countless ways, ranging from the burning of the Congress of Micronesia buildings to the attempted arson of the high commissioner's residence.<sup>4</sup> These are indications that the elements of diversity are very much alive and working against the tenuous bonds that hold the various cultural and island groups together. The roots of

this diversity, while not always visible to observers of Micronesia, have now surfaced to undermine the official American position that the area should be maintained as a political entity.

Micronesia is probably the least understood of all American political involvements. Officially labeled "The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands," it is an artificial entity consisting of approximately 2,000 islands and atolls with a population of about 100,000. These were under Japanese control until American forces captured them during World War II. Consisting of the Marshall, Caroline, and Mariana Islands groups, the territory's total land area of only 700 square miles makes it smaller than the state of Rhode Island. To complicate the matter further, the islands are sprinkled over an expanse of sea larger than the continental United States. Designated a strategic trust by the United Nations, Micronesia has been under United States administration since 1947.

Neither history nor geography has encouraged the development of a Micronesian national identity. The scattered distribution of the islands over three million square miles has separated peoples and lands so that until recently each scarcely knew that the others existed. Micronesia's ratio of land to water makes the area different from any other in the world. As one scholar put it, "water binds the islands together and gives the area regionality."<sup>5</sup> While providing regionality, the enormous distances between islets have made the problems of intercommunication and the achievement of political unity difficult. The miles and miles of sea separating the islands have resulted in great diversity among the island peoples, who speak at least nine different languages apart from English and Japanese. There are six political subdivisions which follow roughly the linguistic and cultural breakdown of the area. The northernmost district is the Marianas. To the south and running approximately from west to east are the four districts of the Caroline Islands—Palau, Yap, Truk and Ponape. The eastern gateway to the territory is the Marshall Islands District.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Marianas Begin Status Session," *Micronitor* (Marshall Islands), May 23, 1972, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Micronitor* (Marshall Islands), July 25, 1972, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Because of linguistic and cultural ties, some political leaders of the Northern Marianas favor incorporation within the political framework of Guam, which has been an unincorporated territory of the United States since 1898.

<sup>4</sup> Edward E. Johnston, a Honolulu businessman, was appointed High Commissioner of the Trust Territory by the Secretary of the Interior in 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Neal Bowers, "Political Geography of the Trust Territory," *Trust Territory Information Handbook*, 1951, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> *Micronesian Guidebook*, Public Information Office, Nippo, Guam, 1968, pp. 26-46.

Despite the impact of modern political masters little has been achieved in the way of developing an *esprit de corps* among the Micronesian people. As a result, foreign powers, particularly the United States, have overlaid traditional patterns without establishing a new homogeneity. The Marianas have been significantly influenced by the Spanish and the Americans and, to a minor extent, by the Japanese. Herein lie the roots of the strong resistance of the people of the Marianas toward any meaningful unification with the rest of Micronesia.

### INTEREST IN THE MARIANAS

During the period of Spanish domination, which lasted roughly four and a half centuries,<sup>7</sup> the islands other than the Marianas were largely ignored, since they offered little opportunity for quick material wealth. The interest of the Spanish in the Marianas was mainly the result of missionary zeal which brought about the forceful conversion of the Chamorros (natives of the Marianas) and the use of the islands, particularly Guam, as way-stations for Spanish galleons plying between Mexico and the Philippines. As trade expanded in the Pacific during the nineteenth century, the islands grew in importance. Thus, while an infrastructure of schools, dirt roads, and a water system—albeit meager—was being established by the Spanish in the Marianas, the rest of Micronesia received little attention.<sup>8</sup> Prior to 1886, the political history of most of the Micronesian islands was one of virtual independence, except for the Marianas.

Forced to cede Guam to the United States as a result of the Spanish-American War, Spain ceased to be a Pacific power and sold the remainder of her Micronesian holdings to Germany in 1899.<sup>9</sup> Because of World War I, German administration was shortlived, and the Japanese seized the islands in October, 1914. The Japanese period ended with World War II and the advent of American supremacy in Micronesia.

<sup>7</sup> Spanish administration: 1521–1899; German administration: 1899–1914; Japanese administration: 1914–1945.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Carano and Pedro Sanchez, *A Complete History of Guam* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle and Company, 1964), pp. 89–162.

<sup>9</sup> American missionaries who had been active in the Eastern Carolines since 1852 were heartened by the outbreak of war but disappointed when the United States did not assume sovereignty over the Eastern Carolines. Their hopes were dashed when the Carolines and Marianas, except for Guam, were sold to Germany for 25 million pesetas, or \$4,500,000.

<sup>10</sup> E. J. Kahn, Jr., *A Reporter in Micronesia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), pp. 39–40.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. President Harry S. Truman, following the recommendations of his advisers, suggested that the capital of the territory be located at Truk in the Eastern Carolines since it was the geographic and population center of Micronesia.

<sup>12</sup> A quarterman in the Carolines and Marshalls received \$30.60 per month; on Saipan, the Navy and later the civilian administration paid a Saipanese quarterman \$95.40 a month.

<sup>13</sup> As told to the author by Reverend Cameron, S. J., during an interview at Guam, 1970.

After Micronesia was awarded to the United States by the United Nations in 1947, the Navy was responsible for the islands on an interim basis until the Department of the Interior assumed administration in 1951.

From the very beginning of the American period, the Marianas received “the most favored district” treatment, whether intentionally or not. The reasons, which are many and formidable, go a long way toward explaining the Marianas’ lukewarm attitude toward the rest of the Trust Territory. Until the 1960’s, while precious little was done throughout the territory as a whole, Saipan in the Marianas received a substantial infrastructure of roads, buildings, power and other facilities. The reason for this is that when, in 1951, the rest of Micronesia was shifted to civilian administration, the Navy continued to hold sway on the island of Saipan where the C.I.A., with the Navy serving as a front, was training Chiang Kai-shek’s nationalists in preparation for a return to mainland China.<sup>10</sup>

As a by-product, the Chamorros of Saipan assumed a superior attitude toward the rest of Micronesia because of their higher living standard, thus encouraging separatist tendencies in the Marianas. The manpower required to maintain the enormous complex built under the Navy distorted the economy and lured large numbers of Saipanese away from farming toward good paying jobs with the Navy. Today, the Chamorros on Saipan who advocate association with the United States fondly recall “the good old days” under the military, and the defense activities which kept them employed as wage earners and gave them their higher standard of living.

The preferential treatment continued even after the subsequent return of the Marianas to civilian rule. Saipan became the provisional capital of Micronesia in 1962, in spite of the fact that it was neither the geographic nor the population center.<sup>11</sup> Wages of the Saipanese were also maintained at a higher level than those of their counterparts throughout the other islands. The official position was that an abrupt lowering of wages in the Marianas would be too great a shock, the result of which would be human suffering as well as a serious dislocation of the economy.<sup>12</sup>

Even the Catholic Church has unwittingly contributed to the growth of separatist tendencies in the Marianas. Because of linguistic and cultural ties, the Bishop of Guam requested that the Marianas be included within his diocese after World War II. The rest of Micronesia was included under the auspices of another bishop.<sup>13</sup> Chamorro priests sent to the Northern Marianas from Guam undoubtedly contributed to the assimilation of attitudes encouraging union with Guam and consequently inimical to the growth of unity in the territory.

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Yg Trukh  
Most in [?]  
built in WWII

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## DIVERSITY IN MICRONESIA

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lein and Eniwetok are potentially valuable bargaining weapons in securing a more generous slice of the American military dollar.<sup>22</sup> The present coconut economy of the Marshalls is supplemented by military expenditures on Kwajalein and Eniwetok. Because of the anti-missile station on Kwajalein, a large community of Marshallese laborers has been attracted by higher wages and is crowded on the small nearby island of Ebeye. Aware of the impact of these defense expenditures, both materially and economically, many Micronesians see the Marshalls' move for self-determination as a means of obtaining the best possible terms for their land. Since they realize that the only real interest the United States has in their islands is the strategic location of their atolls, they intend to drive as hard a bargain as possible.<sup>23</sup> The Marshalls, like so much of Micronesia, have very little economic potential. Other than fishing<sup>24</sup> and copra production, their only source of revenue is their most treasured possession—land. The Marshallese believe that by leasing land to the Defense Department at high rates, they could be provided with an important source of revenue, while indirect funds would flow into their district through wages and from expenditures by servicemen.

Clearly, the history and geography of Micronesia have been handicaps to unity, and the various societies or subcultures have little in common except the fact that up to now they have all been under the same political control. Their differences are linguistic as well as cultural.

Linguistic loyalties in Micronesia have deep historical roots that divide the cultures, in view of the fact that languages serve as vehicles for carrying cultures. What is considered valuable in Palau, Yap, Truk, Ponape, or the Marshalls can only be understood by a Micronesian sharing these values as a result of a shared language. Languages have created the Trukese people, the Yapese people, and the other peoples of the Micronesian area. The languages of the vari-

<sup>22</sup> The Marshallese believe their islands are as valuable to the United States military posture as are our bases in Spain.

<sup>23</sup> *Micronitor* (Marshall Islands), February 5, 1973, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Commercial fishing is a largely untapped resource, with Van Camp operating a tuna-catching and freezing operation in the Palau District.

<sup>25</sup> This legislative body is bicameral and is modeled after the United States legislature. The Senate has 2 members from each district with 4-year terms; the House of Representatives has 21 members with representation according to population.

<sup>26</sup> Norman Meller, *The Congress of Micronesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1969), pp. 373-75.

<sup>27</sup> On May 23, 1973, the Marianas Status Commission and the United States delegation announced that tentative agreement on a commonwealth status that would give the Mariana islanders a choice of American citizenship had been reached.

ous island groups represent values intelligible and acceptable only to the average Micronesian from the particular island group. There is no such thing as a Micronesian language which could create a Micronesian citizen.

With nine distinct regional tongues, English is the only vehicle serving as a unifying force among the subcultures. Since this language is spoken by only a small percentage of the population, however, it also divides the Micronesians into the few English-speaking who govern and the many who are governed.

While a few nations have emerged and progressed in spite of linguistic and cultural diversity, some political unity is necessary to support a stable polity. The Congress of Micronesia<sup>25</sup> created in 1964 was envisaged by the United Nations visiting missions as an instrument for unification of the territory.<sup>26</sup> After seven years, and with the present attitude among the various political leaders in the islands toward Micronesia as a nation, it is obvious that the contribution of the Congress in achieving unification has not been satisfactory. This ineffectiveness is due to a number of political and economic factors ranging from its meager influence over the administration's budget to its subordinate relationship to the irremovable non-Micronesian executive branch. The lack of political parties which generally provide a sense of direction in many nations is also missing in Micronesia.

In this stage in Micronesia's evolution, the concept of unity in diversity, which has appealed to many observers of the island scene, seems an elusive ideal. Despite its own flag, its own citizenship, and its own Micronesian Day (July 12), a Micronesian nation does not exist. The future is in doubt, and we must await the conclusion of negotiations with the Marianas and the broader talks with Micronesia as a whole.<sup>27</sup>

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## THE STRATEGIC BALANCE IN EAST ASIA

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travention of our contractual obligations—in the summer of 1973, has been destroying the psychological basis of the alliance. And the Nixon-Brezhnev Renunciation of War Pact cut deeply into the *raison d'être* of the American military presence in Japan. The pressure in Congress to reduce American overseas bases drastically is growing, while the President's control of foreign policy is being challenged. Congress has already begun to use the President's *détente* to undercut the administration's arguments in favor of overseas bases.

If the present line of United States policy toward Japan is continued, it is likely to result in the withdrawal of United States forces to the mid-Pacific, and to the emasculation, if not the immediate termination,