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U.S. Attitude

Wait-And-See On Marshalls Acts

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WASHINGTON — The Marshall Islands threat to stay home from the Micronesian Constitutional Convention and possibly pull out of the Congress of Micronesia will have little effect on U.S. policies toward the Trust Territory, officials at the State and Interior Departments said here yesterday.

Barry Ballou, spokesman for the Micronesian Status Commission, said any intentions of the Marshalls Islanders at this point do not change the commission's basic position that negotiations should proceed with a unified Trust Territory. U.S. Ambassador Franklin Hayden Williams enunciated this position last May 9 at Majuro. Ballou noted, and it remains the commission's policy.

John Dorrance, a State Department official, said he was watching the Marshalls situation but thought it was too early to determine how serious the separatist threat is. Dorrance said he sees no danger as yet to continued progress.

Fred Radewagen, assistant director of the Interior Department's Office of Territories, said he and Stanley S. Carpenter, the director, are awaiting a fuller report on the actions of the Marshalls District Legislature. Radewagen said the territories office will continue to administer its program in the Marshalls just as it has with other TT district.

A consensus of officials familiar with Pacific matters here suggested a "wait-and-see" attitude, at least until the start of a special session of the Congress of Micronesia this summer and the scheduled elections in June of delegates to next year's Micronesian constitutional convention. If the Marshallese do not go to the Congress and do not put

any candidates for delegates on their ballots, then officials here will take the situation more seriously.

The issue that has alienated the Marshallese involves their contention that they should get back a larger share of the \$5 million they pay out in salary, sales and import taxes to the Trust Territory government in Saipan. The money is redistributed among the six districts on the basis of population. The Marshalls object because they generate a disproportionately large share of the revenue from the island of Kwajalein, with its military complex, and get back very little of it because they lack population.

In their legislative struggle to get back at least 50 per cent of tax revenues, the Marshalls have gotten the support of the Marianas and Palau but have been blocked by Truk, Yap and Ponape. Officials here regard this as an internal Micronesian problem at the moment, but do not want to give the public impression that they are downgrading its importance.

The Marshallese developments occurred two weeks after a meeting in Monterey, California, between Williams and Sen. Lazarus Sali, head of the Micronesian status negotiating team.

Meanwhile, Rep. Ataji Balos, a member of the Congress of Micronesia from the Marshalls and also a member of the status commission, was in Washington arranging a series of talks with federal officials that might add more to their understanding of events in his islands, although his main purpose is to seek more funds for rehabilitating Bikini.