

POINT PAPER

Palau Land Survey  
(Update of 15 FEB 74 Scott Memorandum)

1. Background:

a. The information contained in the attached memorandum still applies.  
b. However, subsequently, five events, arising mostly from the activities of the recent COM session, have complicated the survey issue, as well as the overall status negotiations. They are:

- (1) Failure of the COM to pass a public land transfer bill.
- (2) Recent disagreements between Palau Legislature and Chiefs on details of handling public land.
- (3) The rising separation sentiment in the Marshalls (caused in part by defeat in revenue sharing).
- (4) The upcoming meeting of traditional chiefs in Ponape (called by Nanmwarki).
- (5) The COM passage of a constitutional convention bill.

c. Any consideration of this problem should keep in mind the fact that U.S. military needs in Palau are contingent in nature. Therefore precise identification of sites could wait.

2. Discussion:

a. The failure of the public lands transfer bill poses the most apparent political threat to the timing of any U.S. land survey in Palau.

(1) A condition of the November statements by the traditional Palauan chiefs and the January statements of Senator Salii was the early transfer of the land. -- The chiefs made clear that if the COM did not act, they expected the U.S. to do so (by Executive Order).

(2) Therefore, it is reasonable to expect a higher degree of intransigence or even opposition from the Chiefs until the U.S. "completes its side of the bargain".

b. Recent information indicates that the Palauan legislature does not fully support the unrestricted return of public lands to the Chiefs, as they had previously indicated in broad terms. It appears they may want to retain some controls or authority. Thus an early survey that prematurely injects the U.S. in this picture poses political dangers. It could:

(1) Provide a convenient "whipping boy" against which the conflicting parties can unite, decreasing the chances that the Palauan legislature would retain some Democratic control over public land.

(2) Without cooperation of Palauan leadership, create distrust and political conflict between the Reklai and the Ibedul (as the U.S. team would be examining sites in all areas of Palau).

c. The COM failure to pass revenue sharing (bill was "apparently" backed by the Palauans) has created a new wave of separatism talk in the Marshalls.

(1) Such action will strengthen the hand of many "idealists" in Palau who want semi-independence for their District.

(2) However, such a wave of political emotion could have two opposing effects in regard to the survey question:

(a) could abate any Palauan willingness to cooperate, by enhancing the view that the U.S. is losing leverage and authority (while enhancing illusion of Japanese moving in soon) or

(b) could enhance local desires for a military presence, as a means to economic self-sufficiency.

d. The meeting of traditional chiefs in Ponape will undoubtedly result in some unsettling developments. Any joint agreements they may reach, in opposi-

tion to U.S. status or basing objectives, could create additional political obstacles to a survey. -- The greatest impact may very well be a psychological boost for the Palauan chiefs, enhancing their sense of power.

e. The new constitutional convention bill will provide the basis for a new wave of political activity in Palau. There will be controversies over the selection of delegates and many political acts (statements, legislative resolutions and referendums) aimed toward proving Palauan unanimity for a "loose" federation.

(1) This activity could decrease the cooperation given to a U.S. survey effort.

(2) On the other hand, any adverse reaction to a survey during this period, might very well be swamped in the publicity of the more important status (constitutional) issues.

f. Monterey Talks: Without regard to the above, these talks, during which a decision will likely be made on date for the next round of status negotiations will thus decide the timeframe of any survey.

(1) We have promised the JCFS details of U.S. requirements at the next round. -- Defense has insufficient details of land and beach characteristics to make a final decision on maneuver areas or base sites until someone can examine several possible sites.

(2) Therefore, if the next rounds is to be soon, the above political risks must be accepted, and the survey made ASAP.

(3) If, on the other hand, future talks are indefinite, it may be to the overall U.S. advantage to delay the survey.

g. Long-term trends of population expansion and growing anti-U.S. sentiment indicate that the political atmosphere for conducting a survey will continue to erode and can be expected to improve only during short-term swings