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'Pragmatism' Changed Palacios' Mind

By Joan King
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SAIPAN — Revealing that there is a "plan" to control immigration into the Marianas, Dr. Francisco T. Palacios, president of the Territorial party, member of the Marianas Political Status Commission (MPSC) and former Congress of Micronesia (COM) senator, explained why he has changed his mind about United States sovereignty over the islands.

Palacios, whose party was swept into victory last November in COM elections, had campaigned on the premises that status negotiations should be slowed and that the covenant should not be signed immediately, as the Popular party was urging.

In October, Palacios said the difference between the two political groups was that the Territorial party opposed U.S. sovereignty over the Marianas. (Sovereignty means the "supreme political power in a state, supremacy in rule or power.")

Questioned after his recent

press release as Territorial president supporting the covenant, the middle-aged Palacios, seated comfortably and sipping tomato juice during an interview at the Continental Hotel, agreed to answer questions about his shift from an anticovenant to a pro-covenant position.

Maintaining that "strategy and tactics are different when you're not negotiating," Palacios slowly and patiently set forth his pragmatic approach which hinges on his "Let's be realistic" attitude.

Q. The Territorial party in February 1973 adopted a resolution with four basic principles:

—Sovereignty resides in the people, and duly constituted government of the people of the Marianas.

—People have the right to adopt their own constitution and to amend, change or revoke any constitution at any time.

—People possess the right of self-determination.

—Association with the United States at any time is a negotiable compact.

Q. How do these principles apply to the covenant?

Palacios. As part of the United States, the Marianas also has sovereignty. Since the Marianas will be part of the U.S., in other words, it won't make any difference.

Q. You said last October that the difference between the Territorial and Popular parties was that the former opposed U.S. sovereignty over the Marianas and the latter didn't "understand the impact of applying U.S. sovereignty to the Marianas." What do you say now?

Palacios. I see sovereignty as symbolic. The covenant gives enough protections to the people.

Q. Are you satisfied with the land and immigration provisions in the covenant?

Palacios. We (the leaders) have a plan to control immigration, although I can't say what it is at this time. But we do have a plan.

Q. In 1973 you said that "Permanent ties with the United States would end things once and for all." How do you feel now?

Palacios. We are still the Marianas, even if we are U.S. citizens. Nothing in the covenant says "permanent." Any major changes in certain provisions need mutual consent. In 40 years, if the majority of the Marianas people wanted changes, the U.S. would agree — or it would not be following its principles.

Q. You said, "People of the Marianas would then (as U.S. citizens) become the smallest and thereby weakest brown-skinned minority group in the United States."

Palacios. I began to realize that every individual is a minority of one. In the U.S. system, nonwhite minorities can make it. We will have a chance. It's up to the individual — if you want to get rich, work hard.

Q. You have maintained that it was the desire of the U.S. to protect its military interests here, and that this desire alone prompted the U.S. to begin separate talks with the Marianas people.

Palacios. I still agree. Let's be realistic.

Q. A nonpermanent but

friendly relationship with the U.S. "would keep destiny in our own hands," you said, and with permanent ties we would place our destiny in the hands of the U.S. "To tie ourselves to a government thousands of miles away could not truly serve our needs."

How do you feel now?

Palacios. It's not a permanent relationship, but the arrangement is that we will be heard. Our resident representative in Washington should suffice — if we appeal to their (U.S.) sympathy. The U.S. as a country has a conscience.

Before leaving to attend a meeting, Palacios explained that, in his view of the Marianas economy, "agriculture and fishing are of prime importance and tourism is secondary."

"The important thing is to be able to produce material and spiritual goods for the needs of society," he said. "Agriculture is very important. It is the power of the U.S. and what makes it great. The car can collapse tomorrow and nobody would feel bad or miss it, but if agriculture collapses people would starve."

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