

# FORUM

(Translated From the Asahi Shimbun's 'Rondan' Column)

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Mariana islanders overwhelmingly voted on June 17 to leave Micronesia and turn their region into an autonomous republic under the U.S. Government. Micronesia, ruled by the U.S. under United Nations trusteeship, consists of about 2,300 islands scattered in the central Pacific.

Involved in the referendum were not only the future of Mariana inhabitants but a fundamental change in the American military setup in Asia.

Following the withdrawal from Indochina, the U.S. is moving to set up new defense points in Micronesia centered around Guam, an American territory. The idea dates back to the Guam Doctrine announced by former President Richard Nixon July 25, 1969.

America has since been holding talks with Micronesian representatives on plans to build big military installations in two of the six Micronesian divisions—Mariana and Palau. The other divisions are Yap, Truk, Marshall and Ponape.

The negotiations ran into difficulty from the beginning. No progress toward resolution of differences has been made except in the Mariana district.

## The Woes of Micronesia

This tells of a sense of distrust and deep-rooted antipathy the Micronesians have toward foreign rule. In the past four and a half centuries, they lived under Spanish, German, Japanese and American rule. Their history has been one of humiliation. Furthermore, the Micronesians suffered from ravages of war every time their foreign ruler was replaced by another. Particularly, battles fought by Japan and the U.S. during World War II embroiled the entire Micronesia. The resulting losses, in human lives and material, still cast a dark shadow on the livelihood of local inhabitants.

With a history like this, the Micronesians are opposed to war and have a strong desire and will to establish autonomy. Their consciousness is fundamentally at odds with the American plans to build military bases.

The fact that Mariana islanders voted for an autonomous republic under the U.S. Government notwithstanding reflects complex regional differences. The primary factor is Mariana's special characteristics.

Micronesian districts, strewn in a vast stretch of sea, differ from one to another ethnically, culturally and language-wise. Mariana islanders, with Spanish and Filipino blood in them, have a standard of living considerably higher than in the rest of Micronesia. They are of the same racial stock as the residents of Guam which geographically belongs to the Marianas. They have thus been strongly desirous of leaving Micronesia.

During its rule of about 30 years, America has seen only strategic value in Micronesia and has done little to foster independent local industry. As a result, Micronesia cannot stand on its feet economically without American aid.

This was why Mariana islanders, although opposed to American military installations, chose to open the way for their construction in exchange for a departure from Micronesia and U.S. guarantees of economic assistance.

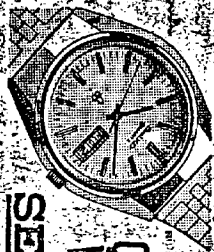
The U.S. and Mariana representatives reached agreement on these points at the end of May, 1974: (1) The local inhabitants will be given broad powers of autonomy, broader, in effect, than the legislative rights accorded on Guam and making for a political system almost identical to that of Puerto Rico; (2) With the construction of military bases as the premise, an annual sum of \$10,500,000 will be supplied in economic aid, and \$8,000,000 will be given additionally for the government budget and \$15,000,000 in credits for economic development.

Considerations to influence the other Micronesian districts wishing for independence are strongly in evidence in the American consent to the major economic preferences for Mariana. As a matter of fact, the Mariana move has shaken the unity of the five other regions and put them out of step, giving rise to a tendency to approve a plan for the creation of a "federation" in which America would be in charge of foreign policy and defense and the local populace would exercise internal administration only.

All five districts are confronted with too many tough problems to realize their aspirations to negate the American presence and achieve independence. The gap between their desire to eliminate foreign rule and the severe realities is too wide.



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