

Micronesia, bastion of US strategy

From PAMELA G. HOLLIE
in Saipan

The United States' experience in south-east Asia has made it increasingly apparent that Micronesia's strategic position is of utmost importance to the American military.

Should the US be threatened in the western Pacific, "the Trust Territory would become important overnight", says Rear Admiral Kent Carroll, commander of Naval Forces, Marianas. "The buildup would be tremendous".

It appears that Micronesia, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, is the best possible position from which the US could operate with relative freedom in the Pacific. The US has held the 2,100 islands as a "strategic trust" under a United Nations Trusteeship Agreement since 1947.

Still, large military bases—now in the planning stages—are new to Micronesia. For 28 years, military buildup has only been a possibility not a reality. Except for isolated testing on some islands in the Marshalls and a Central Intelligence Agency headquarters on Saipan in the Marianas, the US has concentrated its military might on Guam, its "bastion of power in the Pacific".

Guam, an American possession since 1898, is a huge military installation. The military now makes up one-fourth of the island's 115,000 population and contributes over \$US175 million to the island's economy.

"The fall of South-east Asia, our pullout of Thailand, the detente with China and the subsequent weakening of ties with Taiwan, will cause Guam to become more important with each passing day", Carroll says.

In terms of military activity, he says, Guam comes first, then Tinian (Marianas) and third Babelthup (Palau).

The Marianas, which last June voted overwhelmingly to become a US commonwealth, based negotiations for commonwealth status on the islands' military potential. The US already holds about 90 per cent of the land on the 14 islands of the Marianas.

In the covenant establishing the commonwealth, the US obtained rights to nearly two-thirds of Tinian,

about 17,800 acres. The 100-year lease will cost the US \$17.5 million a year, or about \$9.83 per acre for the next 100 years. Also included in the land arrangement are 177 acres at Saipan's harbour for \$2 million and 206 acres on Farallon de Medinilla. In effect, the US got the whole island for \$20,600.

The military's plans for Tinian are to build a supply base, ammunition storage depot and a Marine amphibious training site. Tinian would be an "interior position"—what military strategists call a securely American-held island territory.

While there is a counter campaign against those who oppose the proposed new commonwealth of the Marianas on the grounds that it will be a "military colony", the fact remains that without the military's interest in the Marianas, the islands probably would not have been able to enter into separate negotiations with the United States.

With Tinian pretty well secured, the third "fallback" position in Micronesia is expected to be Palau's largest island, Babelthup. But, in the case of Palau, negotiations for the nearly 32,000 acres for the military have not yet begun. The military has tentative plans for an intermittent ground force training and manoeuvres installation and a submarine base. The military also wants joint use of Palau's airport.

Like the Marianas, Palau has asked for separate negotiations with the US, but unlike their neighbours to the north, Palau hasn't decided what status it wants. Yet one thing



Kwajalein, a United States base in the Marshalls—just one of a chain, US Defence Department hopes.

is certain; after watching the Marianas' problems with their covenant, Palau would be expected to drive a harder bargain for its land.

Although the US has not said yes or no to Palau's request for separate political status talks, the district is confident that the military's interest in Palau will put the district in a strong bargaining position.

While there is also some opposition in Micronesia to the military, specifically to the use of Micronesian lands to dispose of dangerous wastes or to test nuclear weapons, "there

is an appeal", says Johnson Toribiong, a freshman legislator and floor leader of the Palau district legislature. "A small country with undeveloped resources will always see the military base as a means of bringing money into the area".

But, he fears that the US will slowly take over more and more of Micronesia for military purposes.

"There's that nagging feeling that we're (Palau) being surrounded . . . first they took Bikini, then Kwajalein, Guam, the Marianas and now we see helicopters".

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The New Hebrides was an absurd example of colonialism and the worst example of non-co-operation between two colonial powers. This was the view of the Fiji Government expressed by one of her delegates, Mr Satya Nandan, speaking in December before the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr Nandan tabled a resolution deploring France's "continued refusal" to co-operate with the Committee of 24 in the examination of the New Hebrides, and asking France to take part in the committee's proceedings.

The New Hebrides problem was unique because it had two colonial masters, said Mr Nandan. The joint British-French administration had divided political power between them without regard for the interests of the local people. Thus, the people were artificially divided into two nations.

The condominium gave a

THAT ABSURD CONDOMINIUM

unique opportunity to compare the attitudes of Britain and France to decolonisation. It was clear Britain wanted to decolonise. It had co-operated with the UN Committee of 24.

France, on the other hand, neither co-operated with the committee, nor would she submit information about the New Hebrides. France's future attitude would either be very negative, or unclear.

Mr Nandan was critical of the recent Anglo-French agreement on constitutional change in the New Hebrides. It was minor and rudimentary and referred only to local government representation and administrative co-operation in some areas, such as airport

administration. The agreement failed to record the right of self-determination of the people of the New Hebrides.

The New Hebridean people were not consulted about the changes, he said.

The agreement did not mention any overall programme for constitutional development to implement the general assembly's declaration on decolonisation. Thus the ultimate aims of Britain and France were unclear.

Mr Nandan appealed to both countries, and particularly to France, to let the international community know their attitudes to decolonisation of the New Hebrides.

The Fiji resolution also welcomed Britain's positive attitude about receiving visiting missions in its territories, and asked France to reconsider its attitude to visiting missions to the New Hebrides.