If forward military bases are the achilles heel of United States foreign policy, then the Micronesian islands are destined to be a region of increasing struggle in the 1980's and 1990's. With major U.S. military installations in Guam and the Marshall Islands, and bases planned for Tinian, other parts of the Marianas Islands and Palau, Micronesia may become one of the most densely militarized regions in the Pacific. These bases, strategically located along the Asian periphery, will provide the U.S. with staging grounds for future intervention into Asia.

But stepped up campaigns by Micronesians and other Pacific Islanders in support of nuclear free zones and demilitarization are putting U.S. military plans in jeopardy. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 1982 former U.S. ambassador to Fiji, William Bodde, asserted that the U.S. must "do everything in its power to counter the Nuclear Free Pacific movement."

Although during the 1950's and 1960's, U.S. policy makers considered the Pacific to be a region of relatively little importance, by the 1970's that had changed. In 1973, U.S. Secretary of State James Schlesinger said: "The region not only surrounds the access routes to Guam, but also those to the Near East, and our sources of Asian raw materials can be controlled from Micronesia. Moreover, a north-south line of communication, of greater and greater importance, passes through the region, linking our Northern allies, Japan and Korea, to our allies in the South, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines and Indonesia. In the strong sense of the term, the U.S. must remain a Pacific power."

Additionally, with the growing economic importance of the Pacific region, American officials no longer view Micronesia solely for its strategic value. The economic potential, as yet untapped, of the islands which cover three million square miles of ocean area, are an underlying reason for U.S. attempts to gain permanent military control of Micronesia.

Micronesia, consisting of the Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Belau, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas (Guam has been a U.S. Territory since 1898), has been governed by the U.S. under a United Nations Trusteeship Agreement since it took the islands from Japan at the end of World War II. The only "strategic" Trust Territory established, it allows the U.S., in its administration of the islands, to bypass the General Assembly which has increasingly supported independence and liberation movements. The U.S. reports directly to the Security Council where it retains veto power. The Micronesian governments are now in the final stages of deciding their future political status, a process that has spanned more than 13 years.

Unlike Micronesia's three previous colonial rulers (Spain, Germany and Japan) the U.S. has not exploited Micronesia for economic gain. Rather, the islands have been used for their military value. While ignoring its U.N. mandate to develop the islands towards self-sufficiency and to "protect the inhabitants against the loss of their lands and resources," the U.S. was busy blowing up 66 atomic and hydrogen
sentiment sweeping the world, Kennedy instituted federal programs began pouring into the islands. acting to pressure from the political, economic and social standards into line with into a face of the earth, while many others were rendered uninhabitable. Moreover, hundreds of Marshallese citizens today suffer from the severe aftereffects of radiation exposure.

Further, during the 1950's, the CIA ran a secret counterinsurgency base on Saipan, training Chinese nationalists to retake the China mainland. And since the early 1960's, the Kwajalein Missile Range in the Marshall Islands, used to test all of the U.S.'s long range Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, has been at the center of all U.S. nuclear war strategies.

In contrast to the earlier Japanese administration, economic activity in Micronesia during the 1950's was virtually non-existent. But the Kennedy administration dramatically reversed past policies and in the early 1960's millions of dollars and hundreds of federal programs began pouring into the islands. Reacting to pressure from the U.N. and anti-colonial sentiment sweeping the world, Kennedy instituted these changes. But according to National Security Memorandum 145, the goal was to bring Micronesia into a "permanent relationship" with the U.S. by accelerating "development of the area to bring its political, economic and social standards into line with an eventual permanent association."

Today, more than $130 million flows into Micronesia annually for a population of 130,000. That this "aid" policy has succeeded is evident in the large amount of aid, but lacking economic base, although the Islanders were once self-sufficient. Indeed, Micronesia is now dependent on the U.S. for about 90 per cent of its aid. In this atmosphere of economic dependence, the Micronesians began negotiating with the U.S. in 1969 to change their status as a Trust Territory.

During the 13 years of often stormy political status talks between the U.S. and Micronesia, the U.S. has worked to maintain ultimate control of Micronesia. Schlesinger described the U.S. view of the political status talks as "only to change the form of (the agreement) while retaining the basic objective and responsibility we have had for nearly 30 years." To accomplish this, in the early 1970's the U.S. offered the Micronesians a commonwealth package, similar to Puerto Rico's political status. This was flatly rejected by island leaders in favor of independence, except in the Marianas where there was sentiment for closer ties with the U.S. With the U.S. military position in Asia weakening, the Pentagon was anxious to firm up a strong "fallback" position, which Micronesian independence demands were threatening. In late 1972, the U.S. quickly entered into separate negotiations with the Marianas. U.S. plans to turn Tinian Island into a key Air Force base became a major focus of the talks.

Commented one defense planners in 1974: "Given the changing regional power structures of Pacific-Asia, and the probability of major military adjustments by the United States from our present forward positions, it is quite conceivable that in ten or twenty years the entire U.S. Pacific presence will be centered on a Guam-Tinian axis."

Opposition from Tinian farmers and students, however, stymied U.S. plans to take the entire 40-square mile island and relocate the 900 residents. The U.S. agreed to reduce its plans to 2/3 of the island, but it still includes the best farming land on the island. A commonwealth agreement was signed by U.S. and Marianas leaders in 1975 and in a hurried plebiscite, 78 per cent of the voters approved the new status. The agreements allows for construction of the base at any time. Although no construction has officially begun, the U.S. Congress in November 1982 voted the $33 million necessary to exercise its 50-year lease on Tinian land, paving the way for the base.

Tinian has been described by a Trust Territory agronomist as having the most fertile farming land in all of Micronesia. But a 1974 social impact study by the U.S. Air Force commented that if the base is built, "agriculture activities will be severely limited and the present standard of living will deteriorate... The breakdown of family ties, personal conflicts and social problems because of urbanization, competition and cultural transition will increase..."

Status Negotiations Solidify U.S. Control

Since World War II, the prime U.S. interest in Micronesia has been strategic "denial" — that is, the power to deny entry to the islands by any other nation for military purposes. But with the eroding of U.S. power in Asia, U.S. planners began looking at the Micronesian islands along the Asian periphery as sites for active military installations. A 1973 U.S. Army War College report concluded that: "The only feasible fallback position (from Asia) is unquestionably located in Micronesia, where island bases, unlike those in S.E. Asia, would be under permanent U.S. control... Palau has excellent anchorages, Ponape and Babelthuap (sic) have land areas in excess of 100 square miles and are suitable for nuclear weapons storage and training areas..."

Bases in Belau and the Marianas became a focus of U.S. attention during the political status talks. Meanwhile, the focus of American economic activity in Micronesia became the building of basic infrastructure, which, some writers observed, was designed to support the military. Military civic action teams began working in all parts of the Trust Territory on goodwill development projects. Roger Gale, the former Director of Friends of Micronesia, pointed out that "an interesting pattern emerged. Army engineering teams became responsible for civic action in the Marshalls where Anti-Ballistic Missile testing is done under the Army, Navy Seabees work in the Carolines where naval port facilities and Marine training sites are planned, and Air Force teams operate in the Marianas where reconstruction of World War II airbases on Tinian and Saipan are in the cards."

But the U.S. was working covertly as well to insure military control of Micronesia. In 1973, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had directed the CIA to "assess the possibility of exerting covert influence on key elements of the Micronesian independence movement..."
where necessary to support U.S. strategic objectives.” Later the intelligence agencies were caught bugging, hiring as informants and attempting bribery of key Micronesian leaders. A U.S. Congressional investigation into the CIA activity reported that the CIA recruited “Micronesian residents, some with affiliations with Micronesian political entities,” and that at least one of the informants “served on one of the island government entities developing a compact with the U.S. as to future status.”

The chief U.S. negotiator, F. Haydn Williams, insisted that he was unaware of the CIA activities and was not provided any information. Nevertheless, Williams, when appointed by President Nixon to be U.S. Ambassador to Micronesia, was the President of the Asia Foundation, an organization created by the CIA in the 1950’s.

Because of the Micronesians overwhelming dependency on American aid, they have been forced to accept a status that falls far short of independence. From the mid-1970’s on, the status talks focused on developing a “Compact of Free Association,” which would grant the Micronesians internal and foreign affairs control, to the extent this doesn’t conflict with overriding U.S. authority for defense of the islands.

Up to 1980, the pact was negotiated to last for a period of 15 years. Suddenly in late 1980, influential members of the U.S. Senate demanded that military denial rights be guaranteed to the U.S. in “perpetuity.” The Micronesian negotiators were severely alienated, viewing this as a last minute demand that significantly altered the agreement. Faced with strong opposition, the U.S. negotiators dropped their demand for denial to 100 years.

The Reagan administration, however, has taken a much stronger public position than earlier administrations on military rights, demanding denial powers for the “longest possible period.” The Compact is well suited for the Pentagon because it ostensibly grants the Micronesians autonomy in internal and foreign affairs, while providing the U.S. with absolute authority for military affairs, including veto power over any Micronesian action in conflict with this authority. In exchange, the Micronesians will receive hundreds of millions of dollars during the life of the Compact—a period of 15, 30 and 50 years for the Federated States, Marshalls and Belau respectively.

Clearly long term military denial, with guaranteed funding aid for only a short period, will undermine Micronesia’s future bargaining position. Despite this, faced with severe Reagan administration budget cuts, beginning in May and ending in October 1982, the Marshalls, Belau and the Federated States all signed the Compact with permanent military denial agreements.

The Battle for Belau

Shortly after the U.S. announced specific plans for military use of about 30 per cent of land in Belau in 1972, more than 50 traditional and elected leaders declared their opposition to the plans: “Whereas, the people of Palau have no desire to have military installations and personnel on Palauan land . . . because this could result in suffering for human beings within or without Palau . . . We hereby declare that we are unequivocally opposed to the use of land in Palau by the United States military . . .”

U.S. plans, outlined in the Compact, include use of 23,000 acres of land on Babeldaob Island for jungle warfare training, weapons storage and other purposes; the main commercial port in Koror; the 2 airports in Angaur and Babeldaob; and access rights of way in or near four villages on Babeldaob for troops, tanks and amphibious landing craft on training exercises.

Military plans are in stark contrast to the subsistence living of the majority of Belauan people. Particularly as the plans to extend the Angaur runway from
9,000 to 12,000 feet will destroy current taro farms on the small 3 square mile island. Moreover, under normal conditions the U.S. is granted “the right to take reasonable and necessary measures for (the) establishment, operation and maintenance” of the port, airfields and Babeldaob military bases. These wide-ranging powers can be used to regulate and disrupt day-to-day activities of the Belauan people such as farming or fishing, if in conflict with military operations. The military will have rights of way in or near four villages for landing assault troops and equipment for war training on Babeldaob. Indeed, the 30,000 acre jungle warfare area encompasses all of the numerous villages in 5 states on Babeldaob.

Additionally, the U.S. is allowed to store nuclear weapons in Belau on ships or aircraft transiting Belau, “during a national emergency declared by the President of the United States, during a state of war declared by the U.S. Congress, in order to defend against an actual or impending armed attack on the United States or Palau including the threat of such an attack, or during a time of other military necessity as determined by the Government of the United States.” The language of the Compact is misleading because it gives the impression that nuclear weapons will not be allowed into Belau except in extreme emergencies. But Belauans ask “couldn’t the storage of nuclear weapons in Belau always be considered a ‘military necessity’?” And it is the U.S. which retains ultimate power to decide when nuclear weapons will be stored in Belau.

Radioactive waste disposal, with few restrictions, is also allowed under the Compact. Again, the technical language used appears to prevent the U.S. from dumping low or high level wastes in the waters or lands of Belau. In fact, however, the Compact allows the storage of high level radioactive waste in certain parts of Belau if below a certain quantity and the disposal of low level radioactive wastes into the ocean with an Environmental Protection Agency permit. Given the Reagan administration attempts to gut EPA safety regulations governing toxic wastes, the EPA is unlikely to provide much protection for the Belauans.

But opposition to another threat took precedence over the military plans during the mid-1970’s. Major Japanese corporations, including Nissho-Iwai and the Industrial Bank of Japan, along with U.S. and Iranian interests planned a massive oil storage/refinery/transportation superport (CTS) for Belau. Belau’s natural deep water harbors, location astride the new supertanker route from the Middle East to Japan, small population and lax environmental laws all contributed to the selection of Belau over numerous other sites. But the most important consideration, according to Japanese investors, was the expectation that Belau would be controlled by the U.S. military for at least a generation to come.

Not suprisingly, key military officials endorsed the multi-billion dollar superport project. Admiral Kent Carroll, Commander of U.S. Forces in the Marianas, visited Belau in late 1975 and commented: “The U.S. is certainly not opposed to it...I predict the preliminary studies will show it’s a viable concept...I think it will be difficult for the Palauans to turn down...” An EPA memo on the superport noted that “the Defense Department likes the idea, and sees it as supportive of their own elaborate designs on Palau as a military installation.” In fact, military researcher Robert Aldridge, who speculates the Navy wants Belau as a forward base for the Trident submarine, suggested the public support military officials gave to the superport was a cover for their own plans for Belau.

The military demonstrated that it was more than casually interested in this project. In March, 1976, Guam’s Pacific Daily News exposed Navy Intelligence attempts to bribe the High Chief of Belau and a Daily News reporter to spy on people in connection with U.S. military plans. The offers were turned down, but there may have been other takers.

Despite the involvement of influential Belauan businessmen, who assured the Japanese, Iranian and American businessmen of their “active support and cooperation” in developing the superport, strong grass roots opposition spread throughout Belau. The opposition was fueled, in part, by statements of American officials, such as Naval Commander David Burt, who said during a 1976 visit to Belau: “There are millions of people in Japan and only 14,000 in Palau. It may be necessary to sacrifice those 14,000.”

Belauans were faced with the prospect of 39 per cent to 74 per cent of their 188 square miles of land being taken over by the military and the multinational oil industry. Summing up many Belauans feelings, a petition from Belau’s traditional leaders said the superport “would cause changes in the economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of Palauan life of a magnitude unprecedented in Palau’s history with the possible exception of World War II.”

The superport was one of the first Micronesian issues to spark widespread international outcry from environmental, human rights and other organizations. Together with the “Save Palau Organization”, this opposition forced the Japanese to shelve the project, possibly only temporarily. The Japanese government which wants to increase its oil storage capacity as a hedge against future embargoes, has not found the needed increase in oil storage capacity inside Japan. Faced with strong citizens movements, the Japanese government has decided that the export of unwanted industry is the easiest way to solve its energy problems.

But it was not alone the superport opposition that prevented the Japanese from developing the port. In 1979, a popularly elected Constitutional Convention drafted the now highly publicized constitution banning entry, storage or use of nuclear weapons or waste in Belau without the express approval of 75 per cent of the votes cast in a referendum on this question. The constitution also banned eminent domain powers of the government if it was for the “benefit of a foreign entity”, a clause clearly aimed at stopping the military and superport project.

The U.S. State Department quickly opposed the constitution, stating that the “proposed language could cause problems of the utmost gravity for the
U.S.” The U.S. pressed the Belau Legislature, stating the constitution was “incompatible” with the Compact of Free Association, then in draft form, and thus had to be modified. U.S. Ambassador Peter Rosenblatt flew to Belau meeting in a closed session with the Legislature while hundreds of Belauans demonstrated outside the Legislature, protesting U.S. interference with their right to self-determine their future. Rosenblatt made it clear to the legislators that the U.S. would make no financial commitments for an independent political status.

The economic threat was clear to many of the legislators who then voted to void the constitution. The Peoples Committee for the Palau Constitution, consisting of Con-Con members, teachers, traditional leaders, students and others, formed to support the constitution. In spite of the Legislature’s action, the scheduled July 9 referendum went ahead with U.N. observers, and the constitution was ratified by the unprecedented margin of 92 per cent.

A short while later, the U.S. appointed Chief Justice of the Trust Territory High Court ruled that the Legislature’s action to void the constitution was legal, thus cancelling the results of the popular referendum. A nine member team was appointed by the Legislature which re-drafted the constitution, deleting all the provisions objected to by the U.S.

For this revised constitution, the Belau Legislature appropriated $100,000 for “political education” of Belau’s 7,000 voters, although it had refused to release the $26,000 needed for education on the original version. Nevertheless, on October 23, 1979 Belauans went to the polls again and 70 per cent rejected this revised constitution, demonstrating their support for the original nuclear free version. One observer noted, “The Palauans ate at the barbeques but voted their conscience.” In a major political turn around, pro-nuclear, free constitution candidates swept U.S. supporters out of office during elections at this time. And a year later, on July 9, 1980, the original constitution was again ratified by 78 per cent of the voters. (See AMPO Vol. 12, No.3 1980 for further discussion of this).

The Compact of Free Association is fundamentally at odds with the Belau constitution because it grants the U.S. the right, with few restriction, to use the ports and airfields for nuclear warships and aircraft, to store conventional and nuclear weapons on the islands, and to use the islands for a jungle warfare training base. There is speculation that Belau could become an Asian counterpart to the U.S. Army’s School of the Americas in Panama, where tens of thousands of military personnel from repressive Latin American regimes have trained. Belau’s location near the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and other Asian nations makes it well suited for this.

Of equal importance is the possible future use of Belau as a staging ground for intervention of U.S. forces into Asia. Guam was the launching site for dozens of daily B-52 bombing raids during the Indochina war, and Belau could be used as a backup for similar purposes.

Even in the limited capacity of a transit base for nuclear warships and aircraft puts Belau squarely on the map as a nuclear target. Belauans are fearful of this, having experienced the devastating U.S. attacks on Japanese military fortifications in their islands during World War II. Like the Americans, the Japanese promised that the bases would defend Belauans. The result, however, was just the opposite, as the Japanese military bases drew American attacks.

Nevertheless, the Pentagon is confident Belau voters will support the Compact and has sent numerous Defense planners on tours of the proposed bases.
One resident of Ngardmau Village on Babindaob Island, where the military plans a munitions storage base, commented: "No one has consulted with us to say you are the landowners and we want to talk with you. All kinds of people come in making surveys of the land and ocean but they never tell us what they’re doing."

In views of the strong support shown for the nuclear free constitution passage of the Compact would appear impossible. But in the final version of the Compact, signed by U.S. and Belau negotiators on August 26, 1982, the U.S. has attempted to lure in more Belauans by offering a greater financial aid package then previously agreed. Instead of limiting economic assistance to 15 years, the U.S. has agreed to provide funds totalling about $23 million annually for 50 years, plus four payments of $5 million each as military “impact assistance”. This represents a substantial increase in Belau’s current budget and may be appealing to government workers who comprise the majority of the work force and are threatened by Reagan’s budget cuts.

If the Compact is approved, with its 50-year military pact, and permanent military denial rights for the U.S., Japanese business interests are certain to renew attempts to construct the oil superport in Belau. As an American Embassy official in Japan said, "Without the protection of the U.S. Navy, it will never be built."

Marshall Islands: The Atomic ‘Trust’

Marshall Islands people have felt the brunt of the nuclear age. 66 atomic and hydrogen bomb tests at Bikini and Enewetak atolls severely contaminated hundreds of downwind residents with dangerous radioactive fallout. Today, many of these people suffer from increasing thyroid cancer, birth defects and other health problems. Additionally, the Bikini and Enewetak people were relocated numerous times, suffering malnutrition and psychological trauma from their lives as nuclear nomads.

When the emphasis changed from developing more destructive nuclear bombs to designing super accurate delivery systems for nuclear warheads, the inhabitants of Kwajalein Atoll were unceremoniously picked up and moved to tiny Ebeye Island in the southern part of the atoll. This allowed the Army to shoot its missiles into the central 2/3 of Kwajalein’s massive lagoon. Through a combination of forced relocations with little compensation, and the lure of high paying jobs at the missile range, today 8,000 Marshallese live crowded on 78 acre Ebeye Island (See AMPO Vol.14, No.2 1982). One Micronesian remarked sarcastically that Ebeye is the only “reservation” in the Pacific.

The impact of the U.S. military occupation of the Marshalls has fueled increasing protest movements there, as well as adding to anti-military sentiment in Belau. Kwajalein leader Ataji Balos, then a member of the Congress of Micronesia, said in 1976: "We have only been promised aid provided we give America our lands for military purposes as listed in the so-called Free Association Compact. We have been promised aid only if we forbid other nations from doing what the United States wants to do in our islands – that is, dominate us militarily.” After detailing the forced exile of the Bikini, Enewetak and Kwajalein people, Balos asserted, “I cannot believe that an agreement, any agreement, with a nation which has so abused its sacred trust, will protect our islands and people in the future...

In spite of this, Marshall Islands President Amata Kabua signed the Compact of Free Association in May 1982, along with U.S. representatives, completely ignoring official communications and statements from Kwajalein landowners concerning the terms of the military use agreement for Kwajalein. Within a day, the Kwajalein Atoll Corporation (KAC), representing the majority of the 5,000 political powerful landowners, announced its opposition to the Compact.

By mid-June, the KAC had begun a massive sail in protest to their off limits islands in Kwajalein Atoll, including the two main islands of Kwajalein and Roi-Kwajalein islanders reoccupying their home Island for 4 months in protest as called “the Operation Homecoming.”
Namur. Calling it “Operation Homecoming”, by July more than 1,000 landowners had set up temporary shelters on 11 of their islands. For 20 years, the Army has prevented the people from using these islands or from fishing in the lagoon, except for short periods several times a year.

Specifically, the landowners were objecting to:
1) the lack of U.S. action to construct the much needed capital improvements, such as a sewer system to replace the one that collapsed in 1979, spewing human waste into sinks every time toilets were flushed;
2) U.S. military rights for 50 years use of Kwajalein, with military denial lasting in “perpetuity”;
3) a reduction in rental payments from $9 million a year to $1.9 million annually under the Compact.

Kwajalein people have learned, since they began physically occupying their islands in protest over Ebeye living conditions in 1969, that the only way to force U.S. action is to take action themselves. In 1979, a smaller protest occupation reportedly disrupted missile testing, causing costly delays and after two weeks the U.S. agreed to renegotiate an old and unsatisfactory lease agreement.

At the outset of Operation Homecoming in June 1982, several hundred landowners moved onto Kwajalein, Roi Namur and several Mid-Atoll Corridor Islands. The Army security police responded by arresting 13 KAC leaders as they moved to set up camp near the American’s prime swimming beach. In spite of the presence of hundreds of landowners unprotected on their Mid Corridor Islands, the Army adamantly refused to stop missile shots into the lagoon. KAC leaders charged the Army with violating its own safety rules, but Army spokesmen responded saying, “There is no way they will shut down the operation (of the Kwajalein Missile Range) by occupying these islands.”

Moreover, the Army security police began daily body searches of all Marshallese leaving Kwajalein for Ebeye. Any food, cigarettes and other goods were confiscated. This writer witnessed the police taking a crate of fresh mangoes away from a Marshallese woman who had just arrived from Honolulu. Additionally, for more than a month the Army command barred Marshallese – except missile range employees with ID badges – from travelling to Kwajalein, which prevented Marshallese use of the bank. There is no bank on Ebeye, and Marshallese businessmen, in particular, were hard hit losing thousands of dollars because they could not go to Kwajalein to make loan payments and pay for cargo shipments. The Army also embargoed all food for Ebeye which arrived via Kwajalein, forcing several small businesses to close.

As if this were not enough, the Army prevented all Marshallese maids and gardeners – approximately 25 per cent of the workforce – from going to work for the duration of Operation Homecoming. After strong protests from the Ebeye Chamber of Commerce, the Army announced it would restore limited banking services – but only on Wednesdays and Saturdays at which time a small number of people were given permits to travel to Kwajalein. A special boat picked them up, and a school bus was waiting for them on arrival at Kwajalein. All the Marshallese were herded into the bus, guarded by Army security agents, and driven to the bank. At this point, 10 people at a time were allowed off the bus, while the other remained incarcerated on the bus. When the 10 finished their banking, they re-entered the bus and another 10 were allowed off. When the entire bus load finished, they were shipped back to Ebeye.

These harsh military reprisals aimed at forcing an end to Operation Homecoming have demonstrated how important the missile range is to the U.S. The Wall Street Journal (July 9, 1982) pointed out that it “would cost as much as $2 billion, according to some Pentagon planners, to set up a similar testing establishment elsewhere. What’s more important, military strategists say, is that it would be extremely difficult to find a comparable site that missiles could reach without flying them over major population centers.”

Virtually every long range Intercontinental Ballistic Missile and Anti-Ballistic Missile, including the Sprint, Spartan, Polaris, Minuteman, Trident and shortly the MX, have been tested at Kwajalein. Moreover, in 1981 Kwajalein went on line into anti-satellite warfare detection. Having one of just two or three Air Force radars capable of high altitude tracking, Kwajalein, in addition to its role in developing ICBM’s, has taken on a key new aspect of the arms race.

Kwajalein has probably contributed more to the nuclear arms race than any other spot on earth. It lies at the heart of every development in the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

The 4-month long Operation Homecoming, while ending in an October agreement that falls short of all the Kwajalein people’s demands, was an important and positive action. The military actions in response to the peaceful protest opened many Micronesians’ eyes to the future they can expect under the U.S. military. Moreover, there is a growing group of Kwajalein people – although not yet a majority – who oppose the nuclear activity on their atoll. Although the settlement reached between the U.S. and Marshallese does not deal with any of the serious U.S. violations of basic rights of the people on Ebeye, it does represent a “foot in the door.” Because it is limited to 3 years, it gives the Kwajalein Atoll Corporation time to educate their people and plan future strategies. In spite of this agreement, feelings against the Compact and its long term military provisions run high.

Military Denial Rights: A Cover for U.S. Intervention

The U.S. wants the power, through the Compact of Free Association, to establish a series of military bases in Belau, the closest U.S.-controlled territory to Asia. Having gained approval of the Marianas commonwealth pact, the U.S. now has the option to build a major Air Force base on Tinian, to relieve densely militarized Guam, 150 miles to the south.

This future network of U.S. bases, combined with permanent military denial rights in all of Micronesia
providing the U.S. military with access rights to port and airfields in all the islands—will increase the likelihood of drawing Micronesia into the front lines of a conflict between the U.S. and Soviet Union, as well as into regional conflicts in Asia.

But the Compact of Free Association is the subject of heated debate in Micronesia. One Micronesian nuclear free Pacific proponent pointed to the deeply held feelings against the military, based on their experience with World War II: “The Japanese, like the Germans and the Spaniards, promised that they would protect and defend us... But we found out that the Japanese military bases did not even defend us during the war... Our relatives, our elder people died. It’s their war, but we lost our life from it.”

Although there is strong grassroots opposition to the Compact in many of the islands, the U.S. has a great stake in winning approval of the Compact. If the Compact is approved by Micronesian voters, it will prove Ataji Balos’ statement from the 1970’s: “The Micronesians have the ‘Trust’: The United States has the ‘Territory’.”

Biographical note: Giff Johnson is a free lance writer who has been published in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, The Nation, Pacific Magazine, Pacific Islands Monthly and others. He recently returned from a 3-month research trip throughout Micronesia. He is currently on the staff of the Pacific Concerns Resource Center in Honolulu, a coordinating center for the nuclear-free and independent Pacific movement.

This is a reprint of the Micronesia Support Committee. Also available from MSC are slide shows, fact sheets, special reports and a quarterly news Bulletin on Micronesia. Extra copies of this reprint may be obtained for 50c (bulk rate prices on request). For further information, write: MSC, 1212 University Avenue, Honolulu, Hawaii 96826. Phone: (808) 942-0437.