

Gary Smith, *Micronesia: Decolonization and US Military Interests in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands*. Canberra: Peace Research Center, Australian National University. \$A12.00.

Reviewed by Norman Meller, University of Hawaii

The introduction of *Micronesia* opens with the declaration that “the islands of Micronesia north of the equator have been denied the political independence which Britain, Australia, and New Zealand have conceded to similar island states in the South Pacific” (p. 1). This curbing of “Micronesian independence in the name of military exigency,” the author says, “represents a major US diplomatic failure, undermining US credentials as a champion of democracy and self-determination. . . . The reasons for the failure lie in the exaggeration of Micronesia’s strategic importance to the United States, and the dominance of the military in decolonization policy making” (p. 3). Much of Gary Smith’s 131-page monograph then concerns itself with developing this thesis.

To summarize the content, I offer the author’s own words: “First, it looks historically at the impact of US military activities and strategic assumptions on the Micronesian islanders since the 1940s, and on the process of Micronesian political self-determination in the 1970s and 1980s as Micronesians sought a new post-trusteeship status. . . . The analysis focuses on political and economic impacts rather than social and cultural developments in Micronesia. It provides [very] detailed coverage of [the complicated negotiations with] Palau, the Marshall Islands, and the Northern Marianas . . . and concentrates on a key interaction: between US military concerns and Micronesian political status. . . . Second, the study presses a reexamination of US military and strategic assumptions . . . that Micronesia is of vital strategic importance to the United States. . . . Third, there is an assessment of the ambiguity of the new international status of free association, in which Micronesians have comprehensive control over foreign affairs while the US has control over all matters affecting security or defense” (pp. 3, 4).

The monograph concludes with an eleven-page bibliography of published materials referred to in the text, probably as extensive and current a listing of sources on the negotiating of the Micronesian compacts of free association as is presently available.

There is no question but that the United States used its dominant position in the Trust Territory to secure military benefits--both existing and prospective--under the compacts of free association that the Micronesians otherwise would not have committed themselves to. Except to the practitioner of realpolitik, it is not a pretty picture. However, this all took shape over many years in an atmosphere of nit-picking wrangling conducted by teams of high-powered lawyers representing the parties, in which monetary benefits for the Micronesians continued to mount as consideration for overcoming their resistance. Smith fails to

develop this element, just as he is too simplistic in attributing everything that has occurred to the military's dictation of American policy toward Micronesia. He does not adequately recognize the multidimensioned character of the United States' policy toward Micronesia, involving the Office of the President, various executive departments besides Defense, and key congressmen playing stellar roles. Nor does he acknowledge the multidimensional political facets that characterized the Micronesian ranks: For example, one leading politician in Palau supported independence, free association, and commonwealth at different times during the negotiations.

The case made by Smith for the freely associated entities being only "quasi-states" because of the powers retained by the United States is not convincing. On the one hand, the Marshalls and the Federated States of Micronesia have not only been admitted to the United Nations as sovereign states, but to date some thirty-seven foreign countries have established diplomatic relationships with them.

Similarly, to write off the islands of Micronesia as having no military relevance to any future events in Southeast Asia--as a base for small American mobile forces destined for trouble spots in that region--is to assert a prescience this reviewer does not possess. One thing that appears probable, with mainland China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan now expressing increased interest in the islands, is that change in the present status quo that may have military significance is in the offing.