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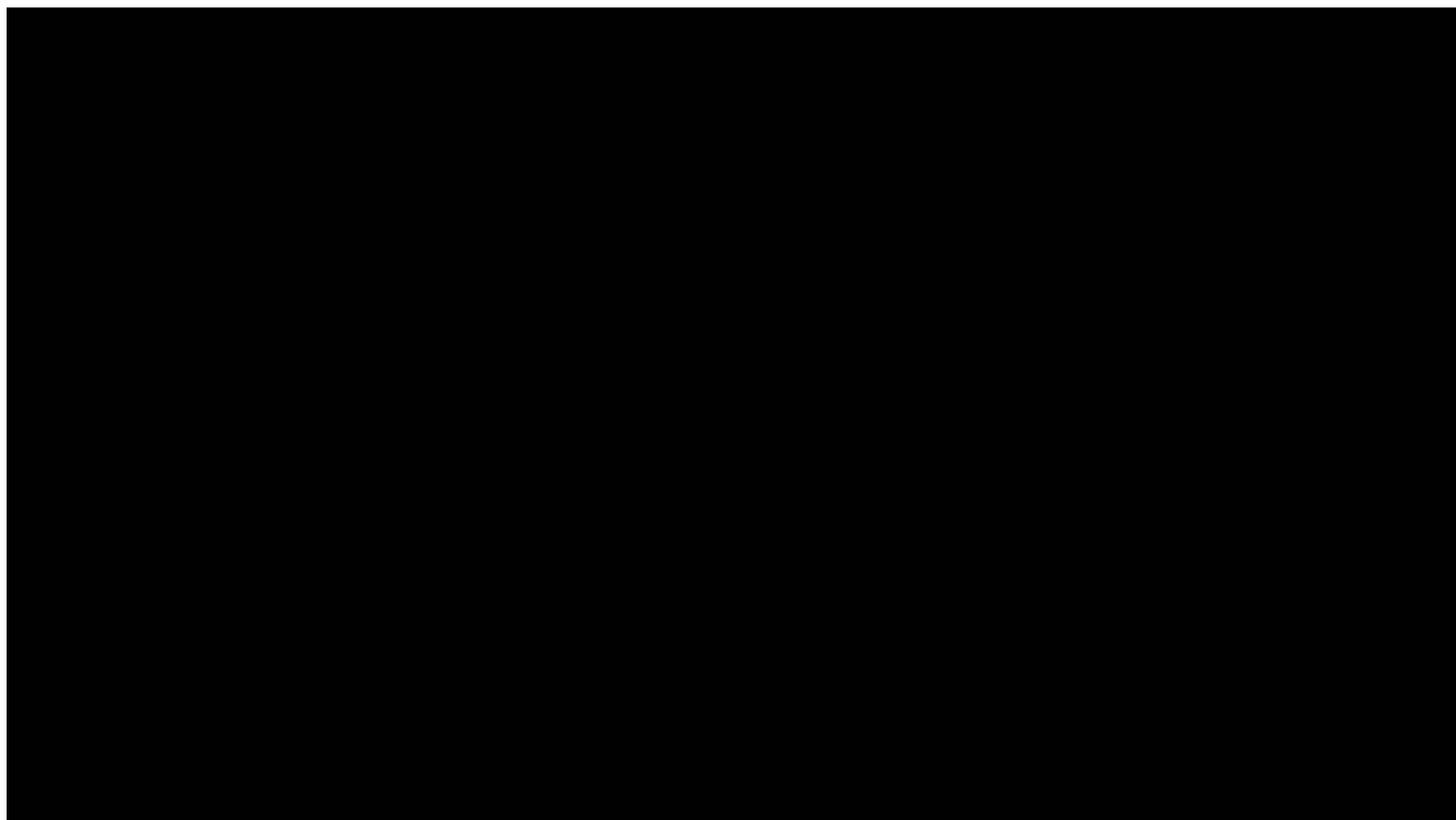
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Report

China Reviving World War II Airfield in America's Backyard

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By [Micah McCartney](#)

China News Reporter



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A groundbreaking ceremony held on a remote Pacific island marked the start of a project—spearheaded by a Chinese state-owned company—to revive a World War II-era airfield.

The project, launched on the atoll of Woleai in the Federated States of Micronesia, is approximately 400 miles south of Guam, a U.S. territory and military hub considered key to Washington's ability to project power in the Asia-Pacific.

Why It Matters

Micronesia is one of the South Pacific's Freely Associated States—along with Palau and the Marshall Islands—whose defense and broader stability is guaranteed by Washington. But with the U.S. prioritizing funding elsewhere, China has made inroads in this region through infrastructure projects.

The islands lie along the so-called Second Island Chain, a string of islands Washington has long viewed as strategically important to containing a rising China in the event of a wartime scenario.

Western analysts have raised concerns that this activity could eke away at the [U.S. military](#)'s position in the Pacific, given Beijing's policy of military-civil fusion that enables the People's Liberation Army to co-opt these [dual-use facilities](#).

Newsweek has reached out to the U.S. State Department and Chinese Embassy in Micronesia with written requests for comment.



Satellite imagery captured by the European Space Agency's Sentinel-2 satellites on January 26, 2025, shows Micronesia's Woleai atoll and its disused airfield in the northeast. **COPERNICUS**

What To Know

The Woleai runway was built by Imperial Japanese forces during World War II, but has long fallen into disrepair due to lack of funding.

The project was launched with fanfare Monday in a joint effort by China's Shandong Hengyue Municipal Engineering and Micronesia's Department of Transportation. Micronesian President Wesley Simina traveled in person to attend the ceremony.

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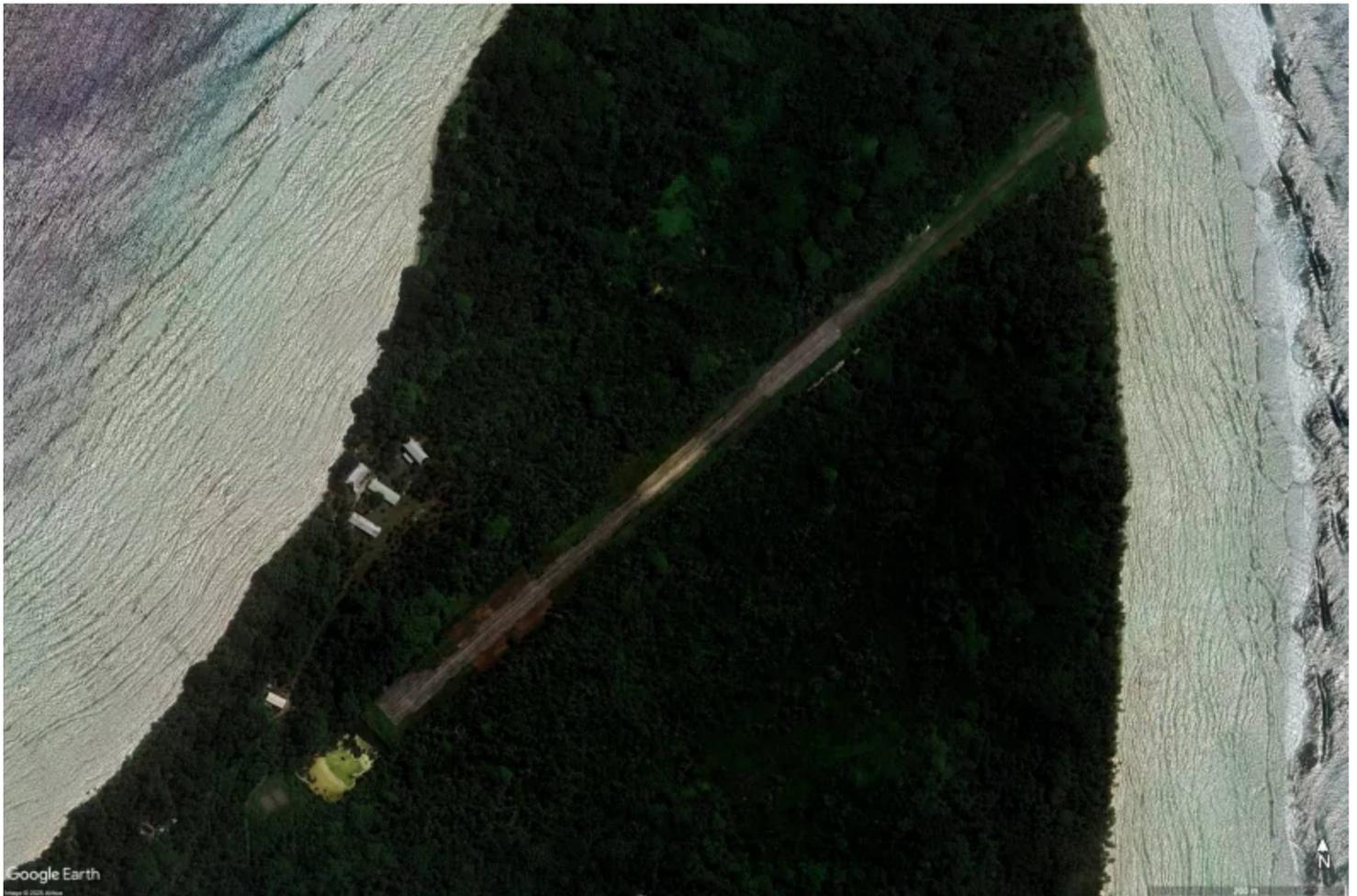
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The airfield will be a major boon to locals, who currently rely on dayslong boat trips to reach the nearest airstrip. It's also expected to support health care, business development, and education in the region.



Satellite imagery captured by a commercial airplane on July 9, 2023, and provided by Google Earth shows Micronesia's disused Woleai airfield, which was built by Imperial Japanese forces in World War II and bombed by... [More](#) **AIRBUS/GOOGLE EARTH**

Cleo Paskal, a non-resident senior fellow at the neoconservative think tank Foundation

for Defense of Democracies, said that while \$2 billion has been invested in Micronesia's Yap State, outer islands like Woleai have been neglected.

"Getting to the groundbreaking of the Woleai runway reconstruction was only possible by traveling for four days on a transport ship from Yap—a ship provided by China aid. The president arrived on a patrol boat provided by Australia. The U.S. was nowhere to be seen," Paskal wrote in a social media post.

"Tomorrow is Woleai's high school graduation. Don't expect to see any U.S. government representatives there either," she wrote. "The Chinese will be there though. Showing up is (more than) half the battle."



Cleo Paskal

@CleoPaskal



Groundbreaking ceremony today on Woleai, Yap, Federated States of Micronesia for (re)construction of Japanese World War II-era runway by Chinese company. FSM President Simina in attendance. Without a runway locals must travel days by infrequent boat to reach another runway.



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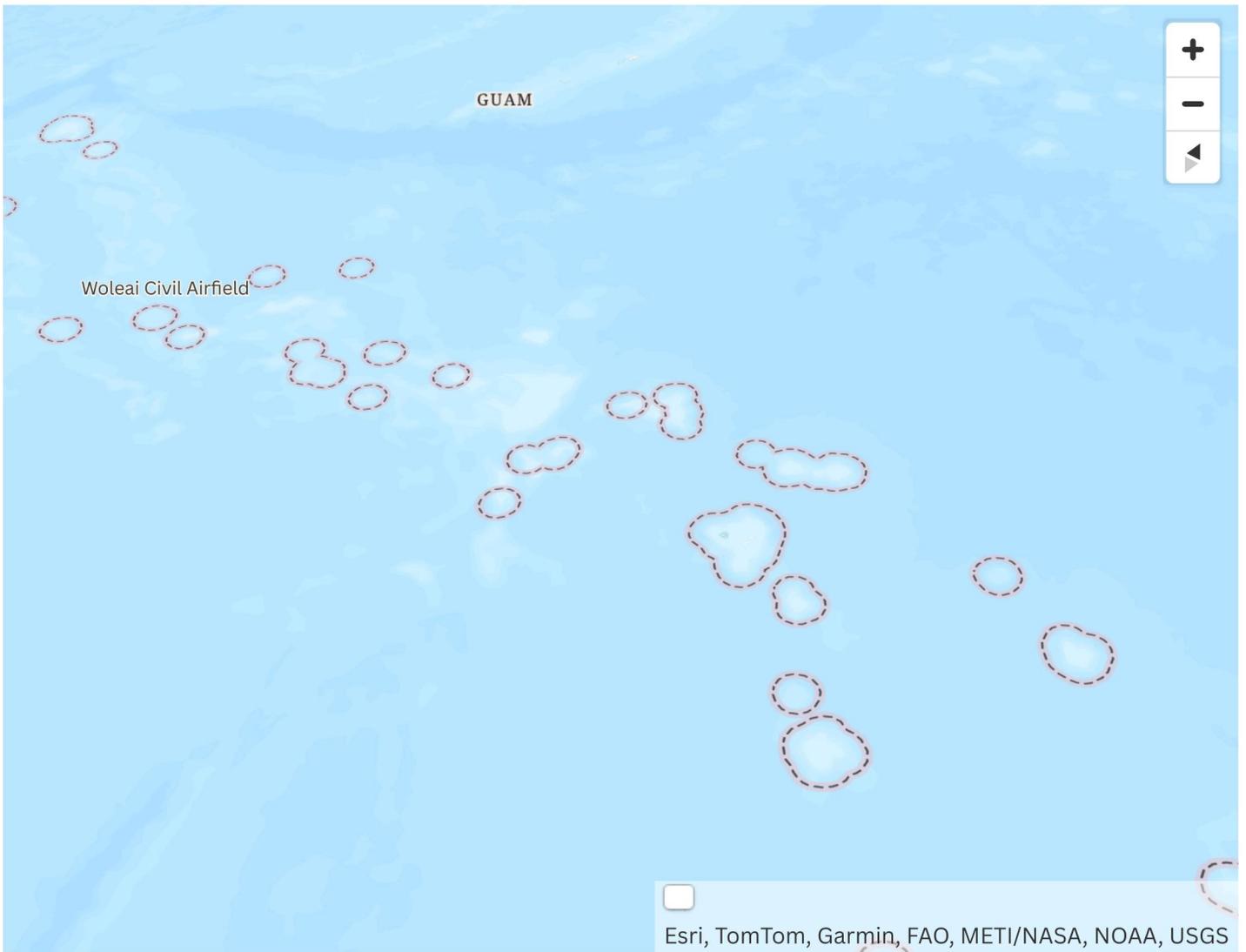
What People Are Saying

Domingo I-Kwei Yang, assistant research fellow at Taiwan's Institute for National Defense and Security Research, wrote in a recent report: "China aims to establish a Southern Link, connecting Asia and South America via Pacific strategic infrastructure hubs. Control over Pacific ports, airstrips, and ICT systems could serve dual-use purposes, enabling transit, logistics, and expanded influence in the U.S. backyard."

The Pentagon said in its 2024 report on Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China [PRC]: "Since 2015, the PRC has probably viewed engagement and deliberate corruption in the Pacific Island countries as an opportunity to expand its regional influence, press countries to switch diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing, increase influence with regional security forces, and advance the PRC's responsible great power narrative."

What's Next

Elsewhere in the Pacific, the U.S. military is reclaiming another World War II-era airfield on the [island of Tinian](#) in the Northern Mariana Islands, part of efforts to bolster the Second Island Chain as its Chinese rival closes the power gap.



Newsweek

*A Flourish data visualization