"Americanism" and Strategic Security: The Pacific Basin, 1943-1947

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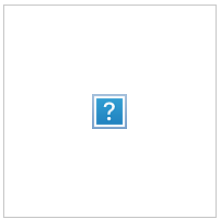

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Portions of this

By Hal M. Friedman

IN THE MID-1940s, the United States set out to guarantee its future security in the Pacific and East Asia by taking direct control over many of the Pacific Islands conquered from Japan during the latter part of World War Two. Several factors convinced American policy makers and planners that future American security in the region could only be guaranteed by unilateral and virtually complete control over islands groups such as Micronesia: These included their perceptions of a failed inter-war treaty system, the trauma of Pearl Harbor and the early defeats in the Pacific War, the costs of the island-hopping campaigns of 1942-1945, and rising tensions with the Soviet Union. Physical control of the region was to be secured by sprinkling the Pacific Basin with strategic bases in areas such as Alaska, Hawaii, the Philippines, Micronesia, and Japan, in addition to patrolling the area with powerful U.S. naval and air forces. Control was to be achieved by exporting to the Pacific Islanders ideas about the "American way of life." Information on American-style politics, economics, and cultural values was seen as a strategic security tool in its own right.[1]

The Strategic Context

To be sure, the United States' first concern in the early Cold War period was to ensure the security of Europe, the Middle East, East Asia, and Latin America from Soviet expansionism. The Pacific Basin, thus, was a lower area of concern for

article appeared in an earlier work, "The Beast in Paradise: The United States Navy in Micronesia, 1943-1947," *Pacific Historical Review* none62 (May 1993), 173-195. Used by permission.

Washington in relation to the Soviet threat. Still, the region had importance to Washington, not least because American strategists usually saw the Pacific and East Asia as intertwined with respect to postwar defense plans.

Throughout the 1943-1947 period, senior U.S. military officers, particularly the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), were convinced that the United States had to have undisputed control over the former Japanese mandates; to this end, they advocated blanketing the Pacific Basin with military bases and alert, mobile forces. In part, the call for postwar bases at practically every location where the United States had wartime forces, in order to police a potentially resurgent Japan or to deter expansionist moves by the Soviet Union, was the military's way to justify a large force structure after the end of the Second World War. Despite the bureaucratic motives apparent behind this policy, officials as high as the President agreed with their planners that the future security of the United States depended upon excluding the Japanese and the U.S.S.R. from the Pacific, as well as keeping a watch on the other Pacific colonial powers, not excluding wartime allies, nations which could not be completely trusted in their postwar designs in the region.

Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, unlike their military strategists, were more fully aware that the U.S. stance on European decolonization prevented the nation from simply annexing the former Japanese mandates, something the JCS called for until the July 1947 trusteeship agreements were signed with the United Nations. Roosevelt, Truman, and advisers such as Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson and Under Secretary Abe Fortas of the Interior Department realized that the United States had to control the region, but in a way that did not smack of imperialism. The middle ground between leaving unoccupied the islands formerly under Japanese mandate and annexing them was "strategic trusteeship" through the UN, an idea developed by Fortas in March 1945. By having itself declared the sole administering authority over Micronesia, the United States obtained sole fortification and basing rights, in addition to uncontested political and economic influence. The United

States' only responsibility to the UN, particularly in the first years after the war, was to submit to an annual inspection designed to determine that it was developing Micronesia toward political, economic, and social independence.

In addition to occupying Japan behind this façade of UN trusteeship, the United States from the late 1940s onward unilaterally exercised effective control over Micronesia, the Ryukyus, the Bonins, the Volcanoes, and Marcus Island. John Foster Dulles, who negotiated the trusteeship agreements as the U.S. delegate to the formal talks in 1946 – 1947, frankly asserted that the U.S. objective in trusteeship matters was not the launching of successful trusteeships in the western Pacific, but rather that of ensuring American security in the region, while simultaneously avoiding the indictment of "colonialism" by other nations.[2] The UN in actuality had little role to play in the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, or in the affairs of the Pacific generally.

Although the American military was not successful in establishing bases at every desired position in the Pacific, the United States did construct a system of bases primarily in prewar U.S. possessions such as Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and American Samoa — this despite the rapid postwar demobilization and cutbacks in personnel and materiel. The newly independent Philippines and newly occupied Okinawa also became major base complexes from which the United States projected power toward the northern Pacific and northeast Asia. Micronesian islands supposedly being developed for the benefit of the indigenous populations, such as Tinian, Saipan, and Kwajalein, became support bases, communications stations, and rest and recreation areas for the Air Force and Navy.

Ideas and Strategic Concepts

Not all U.S. strategic planners thought that the exclusive use of military force and political administration was the best way to ensure that the Pacific Basin would become an American "lake." Officials also favored controlling the Pacific Islands by

"Americanizing" them, that is, by indoctrinating the affected islanders with American ideas about politics, economics, and values. Some policy makers argued that Americanizing the local populations was a more effective way than military power to spread democracy in the Pacific Basin, to join the Pacific Islanders to the American polity, and to show the rest of the world that the United States could be a benevolent presence in the international arena. This demonstration of goodwill would, it was hoped, translate into the spread of U. S. influence into East Asia and consequently improve the nation's security stance in an uncertain postwar world. In short, ideas about winning the hearts and minds of the Pacific Islanders were seen as strategic security measures as much as was the employment of military force, building bases, and fostering economic reconstruction.[3]

Paternalism and Americanization

Many officials believed, however, that the Pacific Islanders had a long way to go before they would be able to assimilate the United States' political culture. Reflective of this paternalism were the policies advocated by Navy Captain Harry Pence, a retired officer recalled to active duty because of his experience with U.S. occupation forces in Trieste after the First World War. Pence expressed his attitudes toward Pacific Islanders most clearly in April 1943 while planning for postwar naval control over Micronesia. Assigned in December 1942 as Officer-in-Charge of OP-11X, the Navy's Office for Occupied Areas, he cited what he saw as limited political maturity among Micronesians as a reason for maintaining strong naval government in those islands after the Pacific War.[4]

Pence asserted that the Micronesians possessed a "very primitive" social organization and political tradition and that the development of the island populations along "feudalistic" family, clan, and village lines made it impossible to create any type of "republican" form of government in the future. According to him, "the islanders seldom comprehend or respond rationally to federations or to other features of the

American-European political patterns . . . " and any sudden attempt to introduce "republican" forms of government would destroy whatever "democracy" already existed. Therefore, the interests of the inhabitants would best be served "by establishing in most of the islands a strong but benevolent government — a government paternalistic in character . . . ."[5]

Examples of this attitude are found in the Navy Military Government Section's September 1945 plan for civil government in Micronesia. In the plan it was considered good government, for instance, to incorporate local practices and institutions into Navy civil government to the greatest extent possible and even to adapt the Navy's administration to customary rights. But U.S. citizenship should be accorded only when "these people are capable of assuming such responsibilities." These officers also assumed that "native" culture and institutions would have to be "modified" when they "impeded" social progress.[6]

Private Views on U.S. Role

Private individuals also contributed ideas in this period about the Americanization of the Pacific. While their ideas did not in any way indicate official policy, they suggest the attitudes of contemporary observers. A proposal for the future of an American-dominated Pacific was suggested by a self-appointed strategic planner, one Ted Anderson, in late 1945. Anderson, resident in Hawaii, wrote to the Department of the Interior asking if he might acquire a "small island in the Pacific Ocean, preferably near Guam or in that area." Mr. Anderson was willing to offer his services to the government agency with jurisdiction over the newly acquired Pacific Islands, and he thought it would be a good idea for U.S. interests to be safeguarded by having American citizens residing in the Pacific as supervisors to "police" the area, with "native cooperation," of course. Because the Navy had jurisdiction over that area, the matter was referred to the Navy Department by Interior. Captain Lorenzo Sabin, Officer-in-Charge of the Navy's Island Government Section, simply

responded to the inquirer that it was government policy not to lease or sell land to private, non-indigenous interests until the final status of the islands had been determined.[7]

In the spring of 1946, another private citizen related his ideas on strategic questions in the postwar period, this time with reference to statehood for the Philippines. Demonstrating a seemingly profound ignorance of that archipelago's current status, Walter Simpson of San Francisco suggested to former Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes (who left office in February 1946) that the United States had not explored the idea of annexing the Philippines with a view toward statehood. Forty-eight was apparently not an ideal number of American states for Simpson; he expressed wonder that Hawaii, Alaska, and Puerto Rico, in addition, did not already have statehood status. In Simpson's view, the Filipinos, "standing as a beacon among the apathetic natives of the other captive colonies, by virtue of their struggle against the Japanese for ideals as American as those of Washington, Lincoln, or Jefferson, are valiantly deserving of statehood . . . " and these "staunch defenders of freedom" should be welcomed into the Union if they so desire. "Not only would such a move reaffirm our intention of peaceful development and international cooperation to the world at large, but it would result in an inestimable strengthening of our relations with Latin America."[8]

Whatever he thought of these musings, Ickes saw a potential for Americanization in the Pacific Basin. Writing in the national magazine *Collier's* nonein August 1946, he denounced the administrative role of the American armed forces in Micronesia, based on his perception that the islanders were "just like" Americans, in that they "are born, grow up, play baseball, get married, raise families and die, just as we do here in America. In short, they are people . . . " and people like Americans do not deserve to be ruled by the military.[9] At the very least, Ickes' choice of words is revealing about his own concepts of American exceptionalism. His article takes a tack quite different from the paternalism of Captain Pence, but one can nevertheless draw the implication that "people" are only those that possess cultures

and political and economic systems resembling or equating with mainstream European-American values.

The notion of U.S. actions in the Pacific as a model is reflected in another proposal from a private source as late as July 1947. At that time, Harold Moskovit, President of the Affiliated Young Democrats of New York, recommended to President Truman that Richard Wels, a wartime special counsel to the Department of the Navy, be selected as the U.S. representative to the South Pacific Commission, a newly established six-nation regional organization pledged to promoting development and "model democratic government" in the members' respective trusteeships. Moskovit expressed his belief that Wels would help ensure "model representative government" for Guam and the other Pacific Islands, and that this form of political organization would "set an example in democracy for the colonial peoples of the world."[10]

Interior Secretary Julius Krug

Perhaps the definitive formulation of Americanization as a strategic concept in the Pacific came from Julius A. Krug, the former War Production Board Administrator who took Ickes' place as Secretary of the Interior, and who would therefore be involved as an active participant in policy implementation. Krug visited many of the Pacific islands in question in February and March of 1947. His official report to the President is replete with cultural assumptions, value judgments, and prejudices about the islanders and their role in an American sphere. He concluded in general that the islanders hoped to achieve something akin to a domestic American standard of living and that this was ultimately good for U.S. strategic security interests.[11]

Krug began his report with the recommendation that military rule be ended immediately and replaced by civil administration so that the United States would not appear to be hypocritical in relation to its position on European decolonization, and also so that the islands could be held out as an international showcase displaying the "American way of

life." Krug recommended that civil administration stress educational programs designed to "assist these island peoples in raising themselves to a reasonably modern social and cultural level." He held that some aspects of "native culture" should be preserved, but he felt the United States had a responsibility to do more than "preserve them as an exhibit of bygone or 'primitive' culture." Concerning the people of Guam, for instance, Krug asserted that naval administration had taught the Guamanians the general principles of the American way of life and that the Guamanians were ready for autonomy since they

> speak our language with facility; they understand our political philosophy, and have the same social organization and institutions that we have on the mainland. They have been devout Christians for generations and their loyalty to the United States is attested to in suffering and bloodshed.

Krug divided the people of American Samoa into two groups: "Those who live in and around Pago Pago and have worked and associated with the American naval and civilian colony speak our language, practice our religions and social forms, and have a good understanding of our political philosophy;" and Samoans of the "back country," who still lived in a "native" society and economy and retained their tribal customs and language. Back-country Samoans preserved what Krug considered a crude form of political governance called the *fono.* An annual meeting of chiefs and officials employed as advisers by the naval government, the *fono,* to Krug, was nothing more than a "semblance" of a "truly democratic" legislative body. Still, while the *fono* was prone to be dominated by chiefs and family heads, Krug was certain that with "experience in the use of the franchise, American Samoans would soon adapt themselves to democratic institutions."

Krug's views on the intimate relationship between Interior Department civil administration, the creation of American showcase societies in the Pacific, and postwar American security in the region were also evident in the report. As to

Micronesia itself, Krug argued that "a local society of self-respecting human beings, imbued with the love for democracy which comes to those who enjoy its benefits and who themselves perpetuate its existence, can be the greatest asset to our own security and [a] forward bulwark of the American way of life."

Moreover, Krug thought it particularly important that civil administration be instituted on Okinawa, which was becoming one of the most geographically advanced American strategic bases in the region. He believed that "our way of life" had to be established on Okinawa as "proof to the peoples of the Far East that democracy is suited to oriental peoples living in an oriental economy. A truly democratic Okinawa and Japan, lying as they do off the mainland of Asia, can serve as a spearhead of our way of life. Democratization or "Americanization" thus served a strategic purpose for the nation in the Pacific.

Assessment and Conclusion

There was nothing new about these suggestions on Americanization in the 1940s. Policy makers worked from a long historical tradition of thinking that ideas about American values were the most important export the United States could send to the world. While a question about the significance of these ideas as expressed by such private individuals as those cited above cannot be resolved definitively, it is important to realize that, while they seem to have been out of touch with the reality of postwar planning, they did suggest in more stark terms what some strategists and planners were considering all along: how the United States could, in a seemingly benign fashion, exercise hegemony in the Pacific Basin so that it would never again be threatened by East Asian nations.[12]

The perceptions of the above sample of American strategic policy makers, planners, and thinkers toward Pacific Islanders illustrate a number of concerns and attitudes. Ideas about converting the Pacific culturally into an American lake

suggest how prevalent fears were about guaranteeing the future territorial security of the region. In addition, the impact of the inter-war, Pacific War, and early Cold War periods on American strategic thinking also is apparent, given that concepts of Americanization formed an explicit argument in strategic security policy and were seriously discussed by the historical participants. Although no one suggested that U.S. security could be achieved in the region without a preponderance of mobile power and support bases, Krug and others less charged with responsibility thought that the exportation and implantation of American-style politics, economics, and values would also be a strong means to bind the Pacific Islanders to the United States and a worthy complement to military and economic power. Ideas, in the end, were considered a powerful agency of rule, as well as the most desirable of American gifts to the peoples of the Pacific Basin.

END NOTES

1. A fuller treatment of this topic may be found in Hal M. Friedman, "Creating an American Lake: United States Imperialism, Strategic Security, and the Pacific Basin, 1945-1947." Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1996.

2. U.S. Government, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States,* 1946, Vol. I United Nations (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), 669, 684-5. As the individual primarily responsible, Dulles was involved in obtaining a "strategic trusteeship" for the United States against the opposition of the Soviet Union and, at times, Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands. These powers (excluding the U. S. S. R.) gained trusteeships in the Pacific and elsewhere, while two Pacific nations, Australia and New Zealand, also administered trusteeships in the region. None, however, obtained exclusive fortification and military base rights — only the United States.
For a more complete account of these diplomatic negotiations and the postwar base structure in the Pacific

Basin, see Hal M. Friedman, "The Limitations of collective Security: The United States and the Micronesian Trusteeship, 1945-1947," *ISLA: A Journal of Micronesian Studies,* 3:2 (Dry Season 1995), 339-70.

3. The reader can find a perspective on the United States' similar attempts to inculcate ideas in postwar Austria in Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

4. Dorothy Richard, *United States Naval Administration Of The Trust Territory Of The Pacific Islands* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, 1957), vol. 1, 16; and OinC, OP-11X Memorandum, April 22, 1943, 18-20. The Office of Occupied Areas was subsequently redesignated the Occupied Areas Section (OP-50E) and then the Military Government Section (OP-13-2) in August 1944. See also Arnold Fisch, *Military Government In The Ryukyu Islands, 1945-1950* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1988), 13.

5. Richard, *United States Naval Administration,* vol. 1, 19.

6. "Proposed Plan for Civil Government by the Navy of Certain Pacific Islands Under United States Control," September 24, 1945, box 13, series 4, Politico-Military Affairs Records, Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as OA, NHC). See also Dirk Ballendorf, "The Japanese And The Americans: Contrasting Historical Periods of Economic and Social Development in Palau," *Journal of The Pacific Society* 11(October 1988): 10; and Harold Ickes, "The Navy at Its Worst," *Collier's* 117 (August 31, 1946): 23.

7. Ted Anderson's letter of October 7, 1945 and Capt. Lorenzo Sabin's reply of November 7, 1945, in file 9-0-48, Part 1, December 1, 1944 to December 1, 1945, box 156, Records of the Office of Territories and Possessions, Record Group 126, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland.

8. Walter Simpson to Harold L. Ickes, undated, in folder "Pacific Islands, 1946-1948," box 407, Papers of Harold Ickes, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

9. Ickes, "Navy at Its Worst," *Collier's,* 22.

10. Harold Moskovit to Pres. Harry S Truman, July 8, 1947, folder 145.2-1, White House Official Files, box 1664, HSTL. The South Pacific Commission was established in 1947 at Canberra, Australia. The membership consisted of the United States, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. Each nation was allowed two delegates. Wels had a long record of service in legal matters to the Navy, the Congress, and the Democratic party. Truman did not appoint him, however, designating instead Professor Felix Keesing of Stanford University and attorney Milton Shalleck of New York City.
The Commission was still in existence as of the early 1990s, although it does not seem to have been active in the promotion of independence for the new Pacific nations. See John Dorrance, *The United States and the Pacific Islands* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 28-31.

11. Points hereinafter concerning Krug's findings and recommendations are drawn from "Report to the President: Pacific Island Inspection Tour of J. A. Krug, Secretary of the Interior, February-March 1947," file OF 85-L, White House Official Files, box 572, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO.

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