

by the United States in the Spanish-American War of 1898 and lost the Philippines and Guam as a result. Deciding that the rest of the Spanish East Indies were not viable Spain sold the territories to an imperially hungry Germany. This did not last as the First World War allowed for the sparsely defended islands to be seized by Japan. As part of the victorious allies in the First World War Japan retained the islands as a League of Nations mandate territory after the war¹⁰⁰.

Some 20 years later the Japanese used many of the islands as bases to project power across the Pacific in the Second World War. The US fought hard to secure these islands as part of GEN MacArthur's island hopping campaign. Major battles such as Peleilu, Kwajelein and Truk Lagoon displaced the Japanese at considerable human cost to both sides¹⁰¹.

After the war the United States was awarded the territories as United Nations Trust Territories. The US used some of the remote islands in what is now the Republic of the Marshall Islands to conduct nuclear testing including the largest US atmospheric nuclear test codenamed Castle Bravo which completely destroyed an island in the Eniwetok Atoll chain and contaminated the surrounding area for decades to come¹⁰². The US granted independence to the Trust Territory creating three new states, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) in 1979¹⁰³, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) in 1979¹⁰⁴ and finally the Republic of Palau in 1994¹⁰⁵.

All three of these states were small in terms of their land area and population but following the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea they all have extensive Exclusive Economic Zones. FSM for example has a land area of just 702 square kilometers but it has an EEZ of 2.98 million square kilometers¹⁰⁶. Despite the potential of marine resources all three states are poor with limited natural resources and face the difficulty of dispersed populations on small and fragile islands and atolls. With a combined population of only 200,000 people the issue of defending these newly independent states was a difficult problem.

While no immediate aggressor was apparent the 1980s was an era of Super Power confrontation and still bitter from the experience of Pearl Harbour in the Second World War the United States was keen to ensure that the Pacific remained within its sphere of control¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁰ de Smith, 122-124.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 126-129.

¹⁰² Ibid, 135.

¹⁰³ <https://www.doi.gov/oia/islands/fsm>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.doi.gov/oia/islands/marshallislands>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.doi.gov/oia/islands/palau>

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.fao.org/fishery/facp/FSM/en#CountrySector-GenGeoEconReport>

¹⁰⁷ Amitav Acharya, **The Asia-Pacific Region: Cockpit for Superpower Rivalry**, *The World Today*, Vol. 43, No. 8/9 (Aug. - Sep., 1987), pp. 155-158.