



Statement of

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Hearing on

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Support U.S. Interests and Counter the PRC’s
Influence”**

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Indo-Pacific Task Force Chair Radewagen and Co-Chair Sablan, thank you for inviting the Congressional Research Service to testify at today's hearing. My name is Thomas Lum. I am a Specialist in Asian Affairs. As requested, I will be discussing the Compacts of Free Association and U.S. relations with the Freely Associated States.

History

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and Republic of Palau, known collectively as the Freely Associated States (FAS), cover a maritime area larger than the continental United States, govern over 1,000 islands and atolls, and have a combined population of approximately 200,000. The Freely Associated States are sovereign, United Nations-member states that through bilateral Compacts of Free Association with the United States receive U.S. economic assistance and security guarantees and grant the United States the prerogatives to operate military bases on their soil and make decisions that affect U.S. and FAS security.

In 1947, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Palau, which had been under Japanese control during World War II, became part of the U.S.-administered United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.¹ The Northern Mariana Islands chose commonwealth status in 1975.² In 1978, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau rejected the option of U.S. territorial or commonwealth status and instead chose the status of *free association* with the United States.

The governments of the United States and the Marshall Islands and Micronesia signed Compacts of Free Association in 1982. The RMI and FSM Compacts were approved by plebiscites in the Marshall Islands and Micronesia and by both houses of the U.S. Congress in 1985,³ becoming effective in 1986. Also in 1986, the United States and Palau signed a 50-year Compact of Free Association, which was approved by the both houses of Congress that year, but not ratified in Palau until 1993 (entering into force in 1994).⁴

The U.S. government perceived the Compacts as helping to advance economic development and self-sufficiency among the FAS and to support the national security interests of the United States and the FAS in light of Cold War geopolitical concerns related to the Soviet Union. Although the goals of democratic self-government and mutual security largely have been achieved, economic development and self-sufficiency have remained elusive, particularly in the Marshall Islands and Micronesia.⁵ In addition to economic assistance, key provisions of the Compacts include the following:

- The United States is obligated to defend the FAS against attack or threat of attack. The United States may block FAS government policies that it deems inconsistent with its duty to defend the FAS (also known as the “defense veto”).
- The United States has the prerogative to reject the strategic use of, or military access to, the FAS by third countries (the “right of strategic denial”).

¹ U.S. military forces defeated the Japanese Imperial Army in the Mariana Islands and Palau in 1944. In the Battle of Peleliu in northern Palau, nearly 1,800 American soldiers were killed and 8,000 were wounded.

² Guam, occupied by the United States after the Spanish American War ended in 1898, became an unincorporated territory in 1950.

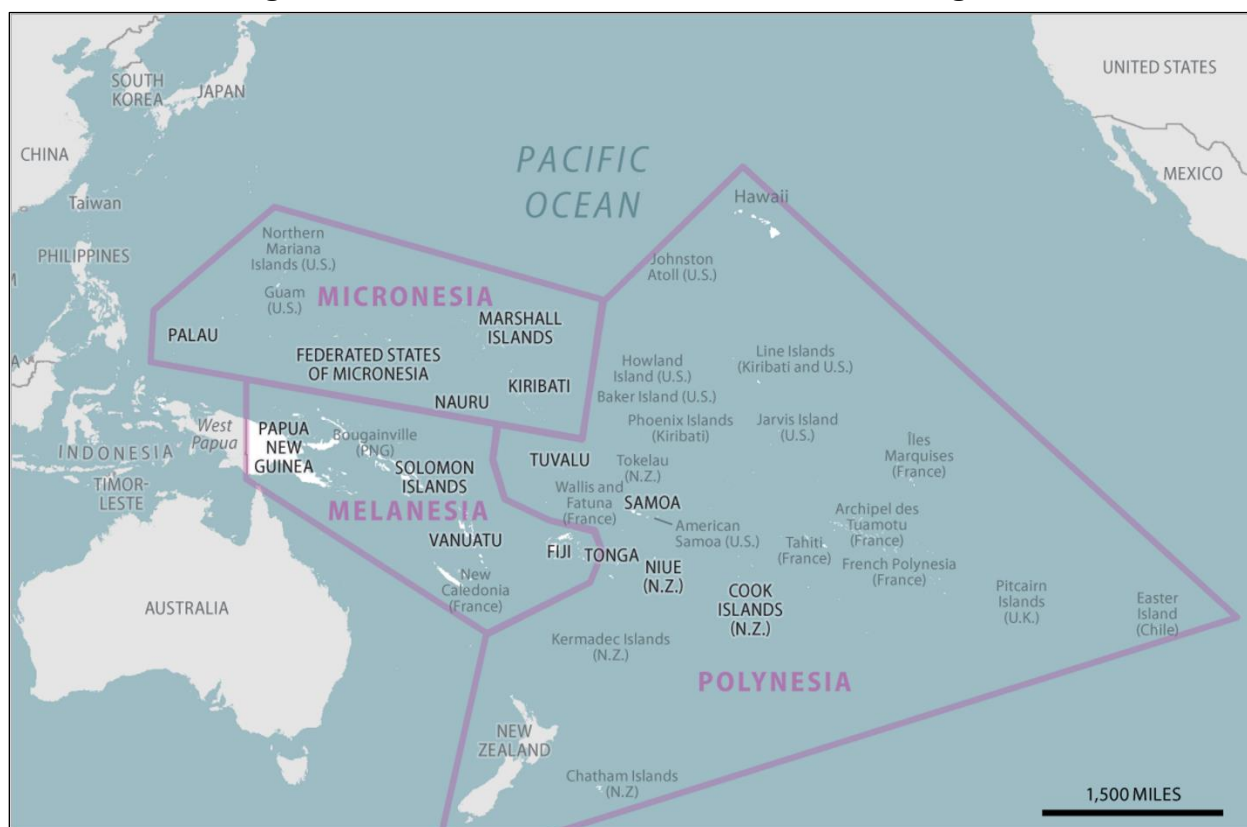
³ [P.L. 99-239](#), Compact of Free Association Act of 1985. With the exception of the economic provisions pursuant to Title II, the Compacts with the Marshall Islands and Palau do not have explicit term limits.

⁴ [P.L. 99-658](#), Palau Compact of Free Association Act and [P.L. 101-219](#), Palau Compact of Free Association Implementation Act.

⁵ For further information on the Compacts of Free Association, see CRS In Focus IF12194, *The Compacts of Free Association* and CRS Report R46573, *The Freely Associated States and Issues for Congress*.

- The United States may establish military facilities in the FAS. The U.S. military operates the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site (RTS) at U.S. Army Garrison-Kwajalein Atoll in the RMI.
- FAS citizens have the right to reside and work in the United States and its territories as lawful non-immigrants.⁶
- FAS citizens are eligible to volunteer for service in the U.S. armed forces.
- The FAS are eligible for some U.S. federal programs and services, both on a mandatory and discretionary basis.

Figure 1. Pacific Islands and Southwest Pacific Subregions



Source: CRS. Boundaries from U.S. Department of State.

Since the end of World War II, the United States has held a dominant economic and security presence in the Micronesian subregion of the Southwest Pacific (see **Figure 1**), where the FAS as well as Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are located. Located roughly 2,500 miles southwest of Hawaii, the FAS play a role in supporting the U.S. security presence in the Pacific Islands region at a time of increasing strategic competition between the United States and its allies, on one hand, and the People’s Republic of China (PRC or China), on the other. Some security and foreign policy experts refer to the Micronesian subregion as forming the southern part of the so-called second island chain in the Pacific, which has strategic importance for both the United States and China. The first island chain includes southern Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

⁶ FAS citizens are allowed to lawfully reside in the United States, but they are not considered Lawful Permanent Residents or U.S. citizens.

US-FAS Ties

Roughly 100,000 FAS citizens live in the United States, including children under age 18 who were born in the United States and hold dual citizenship. The FAS do not have their own militaries; over 1,000 FAS citizens currently serve in the U.S. Armed Forces. On a per capita basis, FAS citizens serve in the U.S. military at a higher rate than many U.S. states' citizens.⁷ Eighteen FAS citizens lost their lives serving in the U.S. military, mostly in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.⁸ The FAS have supported the United States in the United Nations, where the RMI and FSM have among the highest rates of agreement with U.S. positions or votes and consensus resolutions.⁹

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) operates the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site (RTS) at U.S. Army Garrison-Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands. RTS supports missile and missile defense testing, space launch, and space surveillance activities. The amended Compact of 2003 extended U.S. base rights on Kwajalein Atoll through 2066, with the U.S. option to continue the arrangement for an additional 20 years.¹⁰ DOD is building a Tactical Mobile-Over-the-Horizon Radar (TACMOR) system in Palau. In July 2021, U.S. and FSM officials agreed to cooperate on building up a more frequent and permanent U.S. military presence in Micronesia.¹¹

The Marshall Islands and Palau are among four Pacific Island countries that have diplomatic relations with Taiwan but not the PRC.¹² In May 2022, China proposed a sweeping diplomatic, economic, and security pact between the PRC and ten Pacific Island countries with which it has diplomatic relations.¹³ Some Pacific Island countries, including Micronesia, opposed the agreement, causing China to shelve the proposal.

Renewing Economic Provisions of the Compacts

Economic assistance pursuant to Title II of the Compacts of Free Association is set to expire at the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 for the Marshall Islands and Micronesia, and at the end of FY2024 for Palau. Compact provisions related to defense, security, migration, and other areas are to continue unchanged. The Department of the Interior (DOI) funds and administers this assistance, also referred to as grant assistance, through mandatory or permanent appropriations.¹⁴ On May 22 and May 23, 2023, the United States signed agreements with Palau and Micronesia, respectively, on extending the economic assistance provisions of the Compacts of Free Association for another 20 years.¹⁵ The President is to submit the

⁷ Department of State, "U.S. Relations with the Federated States of Micronesia," October 19, 2021.

⁸ Sandra Oudkirk, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Islands, Department of State, Statement before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, "Hearing on U.S. Interests in the Freely Associated States," July 23, 2019.

⁹ Department of State, "Voting Practices in the United Nations 2021," March 31, 2022.

¹⁰ Compact of Free Association Military Use and Operating Rights Agreement between the United States of America and the Marshall Islands, April 30, 2003, Article X.

¹¹ The National Government of the Federated States of Micronesia, "FSM-U.S. High-Level Defense & Security Talks Conclude; Actions Taken, Commitments Made, Essential to FSM & Indo-Pacific Security," press release, July 27, 2021.

¹² Of 14 countries worldwide that recognize Taiwan diplomatically, four are in the Pacific (RMI, Nauru, Palau, and Tuvalu). China does not recognize countries that have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, which it considers to be a part of the PRC.

¹³ Laura Zhou, "China Responds to Pacific Island Rejection with Paper on 'Mutual Respect and Common Development,'" *South China Morning Post*, May 31, 2022; "China Wants 10 Small Pacific Nations to Sign on to 'Game-Changing' Security Agreement," *Associated Press*, May 25, 2022.

¹⁴ See Department of the Interior, "Compact Grants Assistance," at <https://www.doi.gov/oia/compact-grant-assistance>.

¹⁵ Department of State, "Secretary Blinken Witnesses the Signing of the U.S.-Palau 2023 Agreement Following the Compact of Free Association Section 432 Review," media note, May 22, 2023; Department of State, "Signing of the U.S.-FSM Compact of Free Association-Related Agreements," media note, May 23, 2023.

agreements as draft legislation to both houses of Congress, and Congress is to approve the agreements through passing implementing legislation. A final U.S. agreement with the Marshall Islands on extending Compact economic assistance has not yet been reached.¹⁶

Compact economic assistance funded through the Department of the Interior amounts to roughly 75% of all U.S. assistance to the Pacific Islands region.¹⁷ Outside of DOI Compact economic assistance, the Department of State recently has pledged new aid funding and programming for the Pacific Islands region overall. In 2019, the State Department launched a new Pacific Islands regional foreign assistance program. In 2019 and 2020, the Trump Administration committed a total of \$300 million in new funding as part of its “Pacific Pledge.”¹⁸ In September 2022, the Biden Administration announced \$210 million in “additional expanded programs” and \$60 million annually (for a duration of 10 years) to support sustainable fisheries in the Pacific Islands region.¹⁹

Pursuant to the Compacts, the United States provided DOI grant assistance worth approximately \$661 million to the Marshall Islands and \$1.54 billion to Micronesia during the first Compact economic assistance term (1987-2003). Following the completion of negotiations in 2003,²⁰ Congress approved agreements amending the Compacts and extending assistance for another 20 years.²¹ Two new features of the assistance were trust funds established with the aim of providing sustainable sources of revenue after 2023 and oversight committees with members from the U.S. and FAS governments. During the second economic assistance term (2004-2023), U.S. grant assistance and trust fund contributions to the Marshall Islands totaled \$722 million and \$276 million, respectively. Micronesia received \$1.6 billion in grant assistance and \$517 million in trust fund contributions during the same period.²² According to the Government Accountability Office, total Compact-related assistance during the second term totaled \$3.6 billion for the two countries, targeting six sectors: education, health, the environment, public sector capacity building, private sector development, and infrastructure.

During Palau’s first Compact economic assistance term (1995-2009), Compact assistance included grants, road construction, and the establishment of a trust fund worth \$574 million.²³ In 2010, the United States and Palau concluded the U.S.-Palau Compact Review Agreement, to extend economic assistance for another 15 years (2010-2024), worth \$229 million.²⁴ Compact assistance under the Review Agreement

¹⁶ In January and February 2023, the United States signed memoranda of understanding with all three Compact countries on the basic levels and types of Compact assistance for the next 20 years.

¹⁷ According to data from USAID (ForeignAssistance.gov), Fiscal Years 2019-2022 (obligated funds in current dollars).

¹⁸ State Department, “U.S. Engagement in the Pacific Islands: 2020 Pacific Pledge,” fact sheet, October 1, 2020, at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-engagement-in-the-pacific-islands-2020-pacific-pledge/index.html>; State Department, “U.S. Engagement in the Pacific Islands: UN General Assembly Update,” fact sheet, October 3, 2019, at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-engagement-in-the-pacific-islands-un-general-assembly-update/index.html>.

¹⁹ The White House, “Fact Sheet: Roadmap for a 21st Century U.S.-Pacific Island Partnership,” September 29, 2022, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/09/29/fact-sheet-roadmap-for-a-21st-century-u-s-pacific-island-partnership/>; Department of State, *FY2024 Congressional Budget Justification*, p. 199.

²⁰ The economic provisions of the Compacts with the Marshall Island and Micronesia expired in 2001. Economic assistance was extended by two years (2002-2003) while bilateral negotiations to amend the Compacts and continue economic assistance took place.

²¹ The Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-188).

²² These amounts do not include nuclear test-related funding and Kwajalein payments to the Marshall Islands, federal program assistance, Compact Impact funding, and other assistance using discretionary funds.

²³ In addition, Palau received Compact federal services worth \$25 million and discretionary federal program assistance amounting to \$267 million. Statement of David Gootnick, Director, International Affairs and Trade, Government Accountability Office, “Compact of Free Association: Proposed U.S. Assistance to Palau for Fiscal Years 2016 to 2024,” Testimony before the House Subcommittee on Indian, Insular, and Alaska Native Affairs, Committee on Natural Resources, July 6, 2016.

²⁴ Department of the Interior, “Budget Justifications and Performance Information, Fiscal Year 2024, Office of Insular Affairs;” Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Palau Following the Compact of Free Association Section 432 Review, September 3, 2010 at <https://www.state.gov/18-919-2/>.

includes support for education, health, and the administration of justice; infrastructure projects and maintenance; debt reduction; and trust fund contributions. The 2010 agreement was not fully funded by Congress until FY2018, largely due to budgetary constraints, raising concerns among the Compact states about U.S. commitment to the FAS.²⁵

The final Palau and Micronesia Compact agreements and the preliminary agreement with the Marshall Islands provide for a total of approximately \$7.1 billion in Compact economic assistance for the 2024-2043 period, including \$6.5 billion in grants and trust fund contributions and \$634 million to continue U.S. Postal Service services in the FAS.²⁶ According to press reports, the next phase of Compact assistance is to include greater support for climate change adaptation, health care, and education. The preliminary agreement with the Marshall Islands reportedly includes a \$700 million trust fund intended for various purposes, including for addressing nuclear legacy issues (see below) and for Kwajalein atoll.²⁷ Under the pending agreements, total annual Compact assistance for the FAS would grow from roughly \$200 million annually to \$325 million (not including Postal Service funding during 2024-2043).

China's Relations with the FAS

Although the PRC's influence in the Pacific Islands region is growing, its engagement among the FAS compared to its relations in the rest of the region has been limited, due to the U.S. political, economic, and security presence in the Compact states and to the PRC's lack of diplomatic relations with the Marshall Islands and Palau. China's engagement is greater in Micronesia, with which it has diplomatic relations, as well as a "comprehensive strategic partnership."²⁸ China has provided roughly \$220 million in assistance to Micronesia, particularly infrastructure development, since 2009, according to the Lowy Institute.²⁹ Despite close ties, in March 2023, outgoing FSM President David Panuelo wrote a letter to FSM national and state leaders detailing PRC efforts at economic coercion, bribery, espionage, surveillance, and harassment in Micronesia, including PRC diplomats applying pressure on him personally.³⁰

China is one of the principal trading partners of the Marshall Islands, based largely on the RMI's import of Chinese transport boats. The PRC government imposes extra fees on Marshall Islands-flagged vessels entering PRC ports, which some analysts view as a form of PRC pressure on the RMI to switch diplomatic relations from Taiwan to the PRC.³¹ In late 2017, Beijing banned PRC visitors to Palau, which had grown in number to account for over half of all foreign tourists in Palau. Some observers point to this

²⁵ Elke Larsen, "Prioritizing Palau: Why the Compact Budget Matters," Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 10, 2013; Comments by Senator Lisa Murkowski, Chair, Senate Energy and Natural Resources, Hearing on U.S. Interests in the Freely Associated States, July 23, 2019. The National Defense Authorization Act for FY2018 (P.L. 115-91, Section 1259C) approved the U.S.-Palau Compact Review Agreement and authorized remaining funding under the agreement. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2018 (P.L. 115-141, Division G, Title I, Section 114) appropriated outstanding economic assistance pursuant to the agreement.

²⁶ See Department of State, *FY2024 Congressional Budget Justification*, p. 100.

²⁷ Anita Hofschneider, "Marshall Islands Could Receive Billions Under Renegotiated Treaty," *Civilbeat.org*, January 22, 2023; Matthew Lee, "US Nears New Cooperation Deals with Two Pacific Island Nations," *Saipan Tribune*, January 16, 2023.

²⁸ Cao Desheng, "President Hails Ties with Micronesia in Greetings," *China Daily*, May 21, 2019.

²⁹ Data compiled by the Lowy Institute, an independent, nonpartisan international policy think tank located in Sydney, Australia. The Pacific Aid map and data are accessible at PACIFIC AID MAP | MAP ([lowyinstitute.org](https://www.lowyinstitute.org)). Data for 2021 and 2022 are incomplete.

³⁰ The letter, dated March 9, 2023, is accessible at <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/22037013-letter-from-h-e-david-w-panuelo-to-pacific-island-leaders-may-20-2022-signed>.

³¹ United States Institute of Peace, "China's Influence on the Freely Associated States of the Northern Pacific," 2022.

ban as evidence that China was attempting to pressure Palau into diplomatically recognizing the PRC rather than Taiwan.³²

Nuclear Legacy Issues

Nuclear legacy issues remain a sticking point in U.S.-Marshall Islands negotiations to renew Compact economic provisions. From 1946 to 1958, the United States conducted 67 atmospheric atomic and thermonuclear weapons tests over the Marshall Islands atolls of Bikini and Enewetak.³³ In 1954, “Castle Bravo,” the second test of a hydrogen bomb, was detonated over Bikini atoll. The U.S. military evacuated 312 Marshallese from Bikini and Enewetak prior to the test.³⁴ Reported to be 1,000 times more powerful than the atomic weapon that was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan in 1945, Bravo resulted in radioactive fallout upon the populated atolls of Rongelap and Utrik. Reportedly, 253 residents of these atolls were evacuated within days of the blast, although not all before radioactive ash had begun falling.³⁵

The nuclear testing resulted in hardships and health problems for many Marshall Islanders of the four most affected RMI atolls of Bikini, Enewetak, Rongelap, and Utrik. The people of Rongelap, in particular, have experienced elevated level of cancers, thyroid disorders, and birth deformities.³⁶ Following U.S. government radiological cleanup efforts, the people of Utrik returned in 1955 and Enewetak people returned in 1980. The people of Rongelap returned in 1957 and were re-evacuated in 1985 after new studies revealed unsafe levels of radiation. The U.S. government declared Bikini safe for habitation beginning in 1968, although returnees were re-evacuated in 1978 after “alarming” radiation levels were detected in their bodies, and the atoll has not been permanently resettled.³⁷

Runit Dome

Located on Enewetak atoll, Runit Dome is a concrete roof that U.S. military personnel built over a nuclear crater, which is filled with over 100,000 cubic yards of radioactive soil from U.S. nuclear testing.³⁸ Due to rising sea levels, water reportedly has entered the dome, which has led some local observers to fear that radioactive water could seep out.³⁹ In June 2020, the Department of Energy (DOE) released a report on Runit Dome pursuant to the National Defense Authorization Act, FY2020 (P.L. 116-92, § 364). The report concluded that the dome itself was not in immediate danger of collapse or failure and that there was no data to suggest that there was any flow of contaminated groundwater from beneath the structure that had a “measurable adverse effect on the surrounding environment” or that would likely

³² Stephen Dziedzic, “Beijing Intensifies Lobbying of Pacific Nations to Recognize Taiwan as Part of One China,” *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, February 13, 2019; Lauren McMahan, “Island Paradise in Peril After Incurring Wrath of China,” *News.com.au*, August 21, 2018.

³³ Embassy of the United States in the Marshall Islands, “The Legacy of U.S. Nuclear Testing and Radiation Exposure in the Marshall Islands,” at <https://mh.usembassy.gov/the-legacy-of-u-s-nuclear-testing-and-radiation-exposure-in-the-marshall-islands/>.

³⁴ Bev Keever, “Enewetak Atoll, 50 Years Ago This Week,” *Honolulu Weekly*, October 30, 2002.

³⁵ The U.S. government states that the U.S. military evacuated residents of Rongelap and Utrik within 52 hours of Castle Bravo, while other reports state that not all residents were evacuated until 48-72 hours after the explosion. Embassy of the United States in the Marshall Islands, “The Legacy of U.S. Nuclear Testing and Radiation Exposure in the Marshall Islands”; Dan Zak, “A Ground Zero Forgotten,” *Washington Post*, November 27, 2015; Giff Johnson, “U.S. Seriously Underestimated Marshall Islands Fallout Doses, Risk,” *Marianas Variety*, August 9, 2020.

³⁶ Susanne Rust “How the U.S. Betrayed the Marshall Islands, Kindling the Next Nuclear Disaster,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 2019.

³⁷ Jon Letman, “Nuclear Justice for the Marshall Islands”; RMI Embassy, *Nuclear Testing on the Marshall Islands: A Chronology of Events*.

³⁸ Susanne Rust “How the U.S. Betrayed the Marshall Islands, Kindling the Next Nuclear Disaster,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 2019.

³⁹ Kyle Mizokami, “Congress Demands Investigation into the U.S.’s Nuclear Coffin,” *Popular Mechanics*, December 27, 2019.

cause any adverse effect for up to 20 years.⁴⁰ The National Defense Authorization Act, FY2022 (P.L. 117-81, §3140) mandated a study on the impacts of climate change on Runit Dome.

Nuclear Compensation

The RMI government and peoples of the four most affected atolls have long argued that U.S. compensation and assistance to Marshall Islanders for personal injuries or adverse effects on health, the loss of land, and property damages has been inadequate. Under the Compact of Free Association, Section 177, the United States “accept[ed] responsibility for compensation owing to the citizens of the Marshall Islands...for loss or damage to property and person...resulting from the nuclear testing program...”⁴¹ The Compact established a \$150 million Nuclear Claims Fund to provide compensation for nuclear contamination-related injuries and damages, and a Nuclear Claims Tribunal (NCT) to adjudicate claims and grant awards from the Fund. The Fund was intended to generate, through returns on investments, a perpetual source of revenue to be distributed among the 177 Health Program, trust funds for the four most affected atolls, and the NCT. Section 177 constituted a “full and final settlement” of related claims, thereby ending nuclear compensation lawsuits by Marshall Islanders against the U.S. government that were pending in U.S. courts.⁴² In 2004, the U.S. government released a report evaluating a Marshall Islands petition for greater compensation pursuant to Article IX of the 177 Agreement (the Changed Circumstances Clause)⁴³, concluding that there was no legal basis for considering additional compensation payments.⁴⁴

According to U.S. government sources, between 1958 and 2004, the United States provided \$531 million to the Marshall Islands for nuclear test damages, environmental cleanup and restoration, resettlement, and health and medical programs;⁴⁵ this compensation grew to roughly \$600 million by 2019.⁴⁶ The U.S. government has provided compensation pursuant to the Compact of Free Association, through congressional ex gratia payments,⁴⁷ and through health sector grants during the second Compact assistance term (2004-2023).⁴⁸ According to the Marshall Islands government, the depletion of the

⁴⁰ Department of Energy, “Report on the Status of Runit Dome in the Marshall Islands: Report to Congress,” June 2020, at <https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2020/06/f76/DOE-Runit-Dome-Report-to-Congress.pdf>.

⁴¹ See P.L. 99-239, Title I, Article VII, Sec. 177 and the Agreement between the Government of the United States and the Government of the Marshall Islands for the Implementation of Section 177, at Section 177 Agreement (doi.gov).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Article IX states: “If loss or damage to property and person of the citizens of the Marshall Islands, resulting from the Nuclear Testing Program, arises or is discovered after the effective date of this Agreement, and such injuries were not and could not reasonably have been identified as of the effective date of this Agreement, and if such injuries render the provisions of this Agreement manifestly inadequate, the Government of the Marshall Islands may request that the Government of the United States provide for such injuries by submitting such a request to the Congress of the United States for its consideration.

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Report Evaluating the Request of the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands Presented to the Congress of the United States of America*, November 2004.

⁴⁵ Department of State, “U.S. Medical and Environmental Assistance to the Marshall Islands,” fact sheet, January 4, 2005, at U.S. Medical and Environmental Assistance to the Marshall Islands (state.gov); Department of State, *Report Evaluating the Request of the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands Presented to the Congress of the United States of America*.

⁴⁶ Susanne Rust, “How the U.S. Betrayed the Marshall Islands, Kindling the Next Nuclear Disaster”; Embassy of the United States, Majuro, Marshall Islands, “The Legacy of U.S. Nuclear Testing and Radiation Exposure in the Marshall Islands.”

⁴⁷ Congressional ex gratia payments are not compelled by legal right or formal agreement.

⁴⁸ For information about DOE programs for medical surveillance and care, environmental monitoring and characterization, and dose assessment for the peoples of the nuclear affected atolls, see Department of Energy, International Health Studies and Activities, at <https://www.energy.gov/ehss/international-health-studies-and-activities>.

Nuclear Claims Fund (in 2009) left \$23 million in personal injury awards and \$2.2 billion in property damages awards unpaid.⁴⁹

Conclusion

To conclude, under the Compacts of Free Association, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Republic of Palau serve as key diplomatic and security partners of the United States in the Pacific. In an era of growing strategic competition between the United States and China in the Pacific Islands region, the U.S. government has pledged greater assistance and attention to Pacific Island countries and the Freely Associated States. Renewing the economic provisions of the Compacts reflect U.S. commitment to the region and aim to respond to ongoing issues in U.S.-FAS relations.

⁴⁹ Marshall Islands National Nuclear Commission, “Nuclear Justice for the Marshall Islands – A Strategy for Coordinated Action, FY2020-FY2023,” 2019, at <https://rmi-data.sprep.org/system/files/RMI%20NNC%20Strategy%202019.pdf>.