

**“THEIR” ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS
AND OUR OWN: THE UNITED STATES
AND THE PALAU ISLANDS***

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ABSTRACT

The present article is the last in a series on Palau. The Palau Islands are part of the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific. The series examines Palauan attempts to exercise more control over, and protection of, their social and natural resources in the face of complex threats. The first article introduced Palau. The second article concentrated on Palauan strategies and an interaction mode, designed to deal with extent and long-term threats to the island environment. The focus was on the years 1975 to 1981. The present article explicates the maturation of the environment/development dilemma that has faced Palau, and draws parallels between the Palauan problems, and the nuclear and environmental threats that challenge us all.

This article is the last in a series that examines efforts by the inhabitants of a vulnerable and emerging island group to protect their natural and social resources, in the face of complex threats. The islands are those of Palau, a constitutional republic that is still part of the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific. The Palau group is the westernmost of these islands. The first article described Palau's characteristics, including a complex history of interaction with a variety of differing outsiders [1]. The second article examined the content, strengths, and limitations of Palauan strategies to deal with the spasmodic threats, seductive pressures, and other long-range challenges that stand in the way of Palauan environmental protection [2]. The present article recounts the ground crossed in the other two, but concentrates on the maturation of Palau's

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environment/development dilemma. The instructive parallels between Palau's problems, in this regard, and the environmental and nuclear threats that face us all are also explored.

As was described in the first article, on the tiny and fragile resource base that is Palau, a dynamic, syncretic, and externally manipulative culture took root. During the twentieth century, especially, Palauan involvements with foreigners wrought many changes. Palauan labor and resources were heavily exploited under the Japanese, who were dislodged from the islands by the end of World War II. After that war, the United States arrived on the scene as a multi-faceted, and even conflicted, administrative power. Until the 1960s, America maintained a "holding operation" in the islands [1]. This presence required only a minimal outlay of American interest and resources. Starting in the 1960s, however, the comparative quiet of the post-Japanese period was replaced by a massive program of American-sponsored "development." Though disjointed and distorted, this externally-subsidized and largely non-productive path was to prove highly seductive. During the 1970s, Palauan recognition of the distortions and vulnerability caused by overwhelming dependence on United States aid, created some turbulence in the U.S./Palau relationship. Palauan unease was also engendered by islander apprehension over anticipated U.S. military usages of Palau.

The second article focused on the years between 1975 and early 1981; from the time of the controversy over whether to locate a "superport" for oil in Palau, to the early months of Palau's constitutional government. At that point, I left the field. The Palauan efforts to cope with developments revealed much political sophistication. Their efforts were to remain uncertain, however, due to Palau's continued vulnerability and to the islanders' decision, by default, to avoid making hard choices between unpalatable options.

Given Palauan preferences, and the impediments encountered, Palauans' efforts to protect the environment faced many obstacles. Indigenous preferences started to crystalize, in reaction to unwanted scenarios. Palauans wanted modernization, but without damaging the environment. Their ability to pursue this, in the face of opposition, was always a long-shot at best. After all, these inhabitants of a tiny and fragile landscape, one that was fraught with domestic divisiveness and competition, still required economic support from a superpower that had intrusive interests in the region. Moreover, as of the mid-1970s, Palauans were faced with an ambitious and foreign oriented "development" scheme that could badly disrupt the islands' social landscape, and degrade its resources. But though the "superport" project would later be shown to be appropriate, especially at first it promised substantial economic benefits for some Palauans, and perhaps Palau.

Palauan strategies, including those to stop a superport and to reject Micronesian incorporation [3], involved a number of strengths. During these episodes, some Palauans proved remarkably adept in arousing the concern of other Palauans about very complex, envisioned threats to Palau's environment.

Their ability to do this was facilitated by a comparative/anticipatory perspective [4]. Germaine and symbolically fetching, internal mobilization campaigns were coupled with externally relevant, foreign appeals. Pitted against this, however, was internal divisiveness and a combination of economic pressures and incentives. Moreover, Palauans' early, environmentally protective campaigns were primarily reactive and defensive, and quite specific. Nor was a viable alternative put forward to continued economic dependence, with all the vulnerability that it entailed. Slightly thereafter, Palauans moved toward a more assertive and inclusive strategy to control decision making and resources, through constitution-building and nationhood. Palau's dependency kept deepening, however. Nor was a viable, economic base being produced.

At the point when Palau's constitutional efforts ran into resistance from the United States, Palau's environmental/development dilemma began to assume concrete form. Palauans, after all, sought to institutionalize priorities that could conflict. On the one hand Palauans wanted more political, and other forms of control, over island decision making and resources. But there was also the continuing felt need for massive, sustained economic support from the United States. This was seen as necessary to maintain the "development" that Palau had so far achieved, and to provide vital assistance for nation building. But the United States, for its part, began to communicate the position that Palau's economy would only be maintained and continued if potential environmentally destructive strings were attached. The United States indicated its interest in using much of Palau's arable land and other resources for military operations, including nuclear weapons. The United States also stated that Palau's militarily-restrictive and "nuclear-free" constitution was incompatible with U.S. military interests. Therefore, if Palauans went ahead and adopted their constitution, then the United States might refuse to provide further aid. Palauans might scale down their constitutional demands, so as to avoid the economic deprivation that would spring from a reduction of U.S. aid. But, such a pill would be difficult for many Palauans to swallow. Not only would such a retreat be politically and symbolically frustrating. Given Palauans' harsh history of interaction with militaries and unbridled "superpower" interests [5], the scenario of, once more, having such military use provoked much unease. But just as disturbing, on the other hand, was the prospect of a reduction of withdrawal of U.S. aid.

The People's Committee (PC) in Palau, an oppositional and very popular coalition in 1979-80, tapped into and fanned Palauan concerns about environmental and other forms of degradation. The PC also attracted considerable international sympathy and moral support, from environmental and anti-nuclear groups in the international community. The PC managed to proceed on both these fronts, without defining their position on the fundamental question of indigenous control and environmental protection, versus a sustained and high level of economic support.

During Palau's first presidential campaign, in late 1980, a widespread and considerable degree of public concern over anticipated damage to Palau's

environment remained from earlier events. Furthermore, at least one candidate attempted to exploit these concerns [6]. The unease, however, did not provide an impetus for action and resolution, beyond the campaign. The political situation within Palau, the widespread desire to avoid a painful and useless encounter with the unpalatable coupling of environment/development options, the continuing lack of an acceptable means for both protecting Palau's environment and its relatively comfortable standard of living, and the option to continue relying on the United States, all worked against a head-long assault on Palau's environment/development problems. Having said this, however, some reactive clarification¹ was left to build on from earlier events. During the presidential campaign, the successful candidate began to speak of an avenue for Palau's entry into the modern world, on Palauan terms. Candidate Haruo Remeliik advocated a Palau-oriented and controlled mode of development. Development should be participatory, benefit all Palauans, utilize both indigenous and foreign resources, and do this in an environmentally-protective way.

During the early months of Palau's constitutional government, the Republic's first president began to flesh out his "middle path" for Palauan development. Even before this, however, the spasmodic threat of envisioned degradations from possible U.S. military use once more intruded and provoked controversy. An urgent and sustained sense of vulnerability did not materialize, however. After all, more immediate and intriguing avenues for Palauan politics and faction-fighting were appearing, as opposed to a fixation on rallying against possible environmental threats. Moreover, and as before, an alternative to some accommodation with the United States had not been presented. The United States, characteristically, was also inconstant in its pressure.

Remeliik's "middle course," in large part, was an attempt to avoid repulsive development scenarios such as inappropriate and foreign-oriented schemes that could disrupt Palau and ruin its resources; or relatively massive, probably disruptive, and symbolically frightening U.S. military use in exchange for the promise of continued economic support; or of continuing the *status quo*, with its dependency, vulnerability, and prospects for future degradation. Instead, Remeliik proposed a more moderate and eclectic course. Palauan resources would be developed, to some extent. These would be augmented by foreign assistance that would be controlled by Palauans, and would only be taken at appropriate levels.

But this proposed course was fragile at best. Though moderate, the path would certainly not be easy, as it would require self-imposed moderation and some sacrifice for the longer run. Could Palauans control their strong felt need for continued massive aid, to the degree that would be necessary to

¹ Reactive clarification is the process through which, as part of resisting an unwanted, anticipated scenario, a clearer idea of what is not wanted is gained. To some extent, this can lead to a clarification of preferences, which can be pursued as part of an assertive strategy. For a discussion, in context, see Political Attempts [7, p. 191].

utilize such “help” in a self-reliant and environmentally sound direction? In a more specific vein, could President Remeliik continue to maintain his ambiguous position on whether to commit Palau to a relatively large-scale U.S. military presence that might involve nuclear weapons? As I left the field, these questions remained unsettled. In addition to these uncertainties, a more decisive, possibly effective, and probably environmentally destructive “development” mode was still in the wings [7]. In the shorter run, it was very likely that Palauans would continue to maneuver so as to avoid binding commitments to the United States. Nor were they likely to approve in sufficient numbers a removal of the Palau constitution’s ban on nuclear and other “harmful substances.” Therefore, Palauans were still likely to balk on the option most wanted by the United States.

During the last months of 1980, and during 1981, Palauan leaders began to employ an interaction mode of continual maneuver, to avoid having to take a stance on Palau’s fundamental dilemma. A number of factors encouraged this mode. Palauans traditionally emphasized the manipulation of sociopolitical relationships, including those with outsiders. Historically, Palauans elaborated their skills in this regard, and were presented with opportunities for such maneuver. These opportunities expanded dramatically; under the permissive Americans, particularly as of the 1960s.

During 1981, Remeliik’s positioning shifted the burden of making hard environment/development decisions from the level of leadership to that of the public. Moreover, in light of the inconsistent level of interest and pressure from the United States, Remeliik and most other leaders had come to believe that a stark choice between unpalatable options could be deflected continually. Furthermore, up to that time, international circumstances, as well as American democratic ideals, limited both the necessity and opportunity for the United States to employ relatively coercive measures.

Such circumstances could change, however. International factors might shift in a way that could increase Palau’s immediate strategic value to the United States. Such a change could provoke a more decisive U.S. stance. For instance, under such conditions, the United States might demand that Palau absolutely give the United States the military options that it “required,” or the United States would withdraw both its presence and its aid. In fact, since I left the field, conditions in the Philippines clearly emerged as vital in determining the level of U.S. strategic interest in Palau. Moreover, within Palau by the mid-1980s, Palau’s government was advocating that islanders comply with U.S. strategic demands, as the price for aid. Domestically, any moves by Palau’s national government to promote austerity to restrain dependency, were met by impatience and even violence by the organized workers of Palau’s government economy.²

² The impact of political violence on Palau’s national politics reached an unprecedented level with the assassination of President Remeliik in 1985.

Clearly, the ability of Palauans to continue to rely on manipulation and maneuver was by no means assured. Moreover, even if such an avoidance could be maintained, the cost to Palauans and their environment could be steep indeed. An internally divisive and unstable status quo, coupled with Palau's deepening dependency, could eat away at the option of and even the desire for political control and environmental protection in Palau. In the meantime, if Palauans had continued to rely on outmaneuvering the United States instead of developing an economic base and streamlining their dependency, then Palau would be in an even more vulnerable position. Increasingly, this vulnerability could press Palauans; perhaps forcing them to allow for environmentally-destructive and other intrusive interests.

THE DILEMMA IN ABSTRACT FORM

The choice over costs and benefits, described above, has presented Palau with a very complicated dilemma. It is a dilemma that has two poles of choice. Each has positive and negative aspects embedded in it. One pole contains the positive option of guaranteed and massive economic support. However, also associated is the worrisome scenario of continuing constraints on Palauan control over resources, and the dismantling by Palauans of some of the control that had already been gained. Such loss of control is seen as truly frightening; as it could open Palau to the dislocations and dangers that are seen as flowing from anticipated U.S. military activities.

The other pole contains the positive feature of a relatively high level of Palauan control over resources. This is coupled, however, with the future threat of American aid reduction, or of withdrawal. That, in turn, carries the specter of a drastically reduced standard of living, thus leaving Palau in poverty and isolation. Too close an approach to either pole makes the negative aspect embedded in each, appear as more concrete and pressing, and therefore as repelling. A decisive embrace of either pole risks the possible loss of the other one, altogether. Given these horns of choice, Palau's generally seductive conditions of dependency, the obvious weakness of Palau in any direct struggle with the United States, and Palauan habits, it is no wonder that Palauans stopped short of an all-out confrontation with their dilemma.

COMPARISONS AND PARALLELS

The environment/development problems that face Palau bear some similarities to the difficulties encountered by the countries that have emerged in the Third World. Palau, certainly, does not occupy a central place in the "developed" world's political and economic activities. Palau also has a resource that a dominant power wants, the islands' strategic location. Moreover, some

Palauans, at times, have employed the rhetoric of autonomy and even of anti-colonialism.

But, on the other hand, in important ways Palau's situation diverges sharply from typical Third World cases. In many colonial situations, a local and foreign-oriented elite, operating in collusion with dominant outside forces, extracts resources and labor from the hinterland to the colonial heartland. However, the United States has not been interested in direct colonialization, nor in the extraction of resources. Rather, the flow has been the other way. Aid has inundated the Palau Islands.

In fact, in contrast to the situation that faced nationalist leaders during decolonialization in the Third World, in Palau removal of the United States would not involve throwing off a grossly oppressive and exploitative, foreign yoke. Instead, it is likely that such a removal would result in at least relative economic deprivation for the short and perhaps even for the longer run. In the meantime, a remarkably pervasive, relatively comfortable, and even seductive dependency has taken firm root in the islands. In fact, many Palauans have come to believe that relative affluence can be enjoyed by many, and that the continued viability of this option depends on a nonviolent and democratic decision by Palauans.

Due to the pervasiveness of Palau's dependency and its liberal conditions, both participation in and the effects of a Palauan decision, on control and protection versus support, stands to impact quite a large segment of the population. The width and depth of penetration has been facilitated by the small size of Palau's population, and its compactness within such a tiny setting.

In Palau, short-range, materially-based, and concrete advantages have been pitted against moderate impingements, and the deepening possibilities for long-range and inclusive harm. The anticipated damage might spring from very complex developments and processes, the exact outlines of which are hard to grasp. Nonetheless, these future consequences may be devastating.

It is both striking and intriguing that the distinctive conjuncture of circumstances facing Palau has aspects in common with, and can shed light upon, the nuclear and environmental dilemmas that face the United States and other "developed" countries. In such countries, and for the entire world, the adverse effects that stem from a failure to protect the environment do not strike everyone as immediate or concrete. Nonetheless, the damage develops incrementally. By the time it is evident, the impacts may be great indeed. Similarly, with the nuclear arms race; the possibility that it will get out of control develops, perhaps exponentially, with the increasing amount and array of weapons. But though the impacts of irreversible environmental damage and from an arms race that ends in nuclear war would be disastrous; an unstable status quo has a lulling effect. This is particularly true, since conditions remain relatively comfortable, and include a consumption-oriented lifestyle that is seductive for many.

CONTEMPORARY THREATS TO THE ENVIRONMENT

The threat of nuclear war, the exponential growth of human population, and the massive consumption and degradation of the earth's natural resources are the primary dangers to the environment as of the late twentieth century [2]. It would not be beneficial to discuss all of these here. Instead, just a brief account of a few cases will suffice for our comparison with Palau. The cases range from those with global dimensions to those that are inter-regional in scope.

Seemingly intractable, environmental problems pit short-range, tangible benefits of the *status quo* against increased evidence of and possibilities for long-range and potentially devastating harm [2, p. 18; 3]. In fact, the human race at this juncture, is locked in a race between the destructive consequences of our impact on the environment and our capacity to recognize and implement a remedial response [2, p. 18]. As of today, the outcome of this race is far from certain.

Given the complexity, momentum, and interdependency of the environmental and social forces at work, the exact shape of things to come cannot easily be discerned. What is clear, however, is that actions taken soon are more likely to be effective and less costly than inaction or feeble measures [3]. Moreover, cooperative and long-term approaches are more likely to benefit everyone than competitive, opportunistic, and short-term moves. In lieu of the former, the future promises more of the same environmental degradation, but proceeding at a faster rate [4].

Among the environmental problems now attracting international attention, atmospheric changes are foremost [3, p. 262]. These include increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, possibly leading to a "greenhouse effect"; the release of fluorocarbons in the upper atmosphere, which may reduce our protective ozone layer; and the phenomena of "acid rain." Actually, the last is a problem that crosses international boundaries, such as between the United States and Canada, and is also a trans-regional problem within the United States.

Perhaps most serious, and of greatest difficulty to control, is the alteration in the balance of the atmosphere's carbon dioxide mix. The rise in the atmospheric level of CO₂ is, to a large extent, the result of the combustion of fossil fuels, an activity the people have been pursuing energetically, particularly as of the twentieth century. Deforestation, and perhaps other causes, have contributed as well [4, p. 25]. Though it is still uncertain that increased CO₂ will lead to a warming of the earth's climate, present evidence points in this direction. Such a temperature rise could have dramatic, adverse effects. The polar ice caps could melt, thus raising the sea level and inundating coastlines where major cities now stand. Shifts in rainfall, areas of food production, desertification, and alterations in forests, fish stocks, and fresh water supplies could also result. In fact, depending on the magnitude and timing of such changes, there could be profound social, economic, and political effects.

Exact causal links are hard to measure. Nonetheless, there is sufficient evidence of the likelihood of major, irreversible changes from an altered CO₂ balance to make the matter a subject of deep and continuing concern [2, p. 225]. Despite this, there are reasons why corrective action has been limited. The threat is invisible and undetectable, at least to the lay person, until it reaches an extent when there are relatively gross, adverse consequences. The threat is cumulative, not dramatic. Economic factors will be discussed shortly.

Ozone depletion is another man-induced environmental change that could have profound consequences globally. This involves manufactured substances that migrate into the upper atmosphere, where these act to dissolve the earth's protective ozone layer.³ An increase in human skin cancer could be the result, along with other adverse effects.⁴ Certainly, the possibility of irreversible damage from ozone depletion requires careful and continuing attention [2, p. 227]. Less clear are steps to mitigate this anticipated environmental effect. Like the CO₂ balance, ozone depletion is a very complex and largely invisible threat, the exact parameters of which are hard to measure [3, p. 37]. Moreover, like the CO₂ balance, ozone depletion is a cumulative threat. It is not one that is gross and dramatic.

Another environmental problem, to examine briefly, is that of "acid rain." Unlike the environmental issues discussed so far, acid rain is regional and national, as well as international in scope [5]. The problem is caused when sulfur and nitrogen compounds—especially from the tall smokestacks of power plants—undergo changes in the atmosphere. This pollution returns to the earth as acid rain [4, p. 109]. In the interim, however, it has been transported considerable distances. Thusly, the manmade ingredients of acid rain that are released in Britain, Belgium, and Germany fall to earth in Norway and Sweden. Similarly, releases from the industrial belt of the American midwest result in acid rain deposition in parts of the American northeast and in eastern Canada.

There are both documented and suspected adverse environmental consequences from acid rain. It is now generally accepted that acid rain deposition impairs sensitive aquatic ecosystems, and also corrodes materials [3, p. 32]. A sharp increase in the acidity of certain freshwater lakes due to acid rain has been recorded. An example is some of the high elevation lakes in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State [5, p. 9]. This acidity, in turn, can lead to the decline or elimination of desirable fish populations in such lakes. The environmentally sensitive brook trout has suffered this fate in some of these lakes.

Less certain, but strongly suspected, is a causal relationship between acid rain and damage to some coniferous forests in the northeastern United States, and in

³ Though at one time there was concern that supersonic transports (SST's) would contribute to this problem, more recently it is the effect of chlorofluorocarbons and some other products that are seen as the culprit.

⁴ Such a depletion might also contribute to temperature changes, affecting the global climate.

Scandinavia. Other possible effects include damage to human health, to crops, soil, and groundwater [3, p. 36]. At least potentially and over the long haul, acid rain could have serious and multi-pronged consequences.

Despite this, there are a number of reasons why the acid rain problem has proven difficult to solve. Perhaps most important is the circumstance, that the areas of heavy industrialization which produce this transboundary pollution have little economic incentive to control their emissions. After all, the benefits of such pollution control would be reaped, primarily, by the down-wind areas [4, p. 113]. Though perhaps less of an insidious and building phenomena than either the CO₂ balance and ozone depletion, still acid rain is a major and subtle threat.

There is also economic dimension to all these problems. In fact, the relatively slow pace of progress with these problems can be explained, to some extent, on economic grounds [3, p. 35]. Economic growth during the period 1979-85 was slow. Nonetheless, many sectors of our society increased their pressure on the environment. Furthermore, there were budget cuts and other constraints on the economic resources that might have otherwise gone to environmental protection. Moreover, the disruptions to industrial growth and lifestyles, if resources are used to deal with environmental problems, often seem more immediate and costly than is the damage expected from these problems. The fact that most of our crucial environmental problems are subtle, complex, and future oriented contributes to the above perception.

The possibility of full-scale nuclear war is a threat of a different order. It conjures up a scenario that is unprecedented. Past wars may have had high human casualties and serious, local environmental damage. A large-scale nuclear war, however, would seriously disrupt the future prospects for the human species, and would destroy many other species and ecosystems [4, p. 33]. Through the blast, fire, and radiation effects, the population near a detonation would be eliminated, or at least badly decimated. Perhaps 80 percent of the territory of the United States would be set ablaze by firestorms [6]. Attendant effects would include the destruction of land and pollution of ground and surface water.

Aside from the tremendous loss of life and the habitat destruction directly resulting from a full-scale nuclear exchange, there would be severe atmospheric disruptions. These could lead to a "nuclear winter" [8]. When the sunlight finally returned, a depleted ozone layer from the explosions could expose the earth to an overdose of ultraviolet radiation.

A multiplicity of assaults would badly damage those ecosystems that had not already been destroyed by the direct effects of nuclear war [6, p. 98]. While the extinction of *Homo Sapiens* may not be within the reach of even nuclear war, the end of civilization in the industrialized world is a "virtual certainty" [6, p. 100].

There are also environmental consequences resulting from preparations for war: Resources are diverted from environmental projects. There is also the impact of weapons industry and testing, of nuclear proliferation, and the fear about a future war [4, p. 155].

Frightening as this scenario is, a number of factors work to inhibit effective remedial activity. Though potentially cataclysmic, it is hard to image the dimensions of such an unprecedented war. This may be particularly true for Americans, who have not experienced war-induced devastation for a long time. As to the arms buildup itself, until and unless the weapons are used, there are no gross, adverse consequences. Moreover, there is still a perception that to fall behind in an "arms race" means a loss of security and increased vulnerability. Such views are likely to persist, unless the international arena becomes a lot more civilized. Though a nuclear armed *status quo* is seen by many as disturbing, few viable alternatives are seen to exist. Moreover, there are economic pressures and incentives to maintain this *status quo*, though these are not evenly distributed.

FINAL COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSION

In contemporary Palau, a substantial and deepening attachment to "affluence" pervades that society and its political economy. But this affluence is false. It is largely the product of, and could not exist without, the massive transfusions of U.S. aid. A comprehensive and sustained effort by Palauans to control and protect their environment risks jeopardizing the "good life" by alienating its principal donor, the United States.

Various social, economic, and political changes are probably required, both in Palau and in the United States, to successfully attack our respective and related environment/development dilemmas. Such changes may be disturbing and demanding. But in the long run, if these are not made, the ultimate result may be the destruction of the environment and many societies.

In this article, we have seen the many uncanny parallels between the mix of short-and long-term costs and benefits that face "exotic" Palau, and the modern world. From some of the Palauan techniques and strategies that have been described, perhaps we can learn about how to arouse, if not sustain, public concern about subtle and complex problems that threaten everyone's environment. Of course the ultimate threat is that of nuclear war. Palauans, to a remarkable extent, have organized around this envisioned scenario, and have admonished us not to make nuclear and other forms of "development" inseparable.

Before concluding, however, there should be a word about differences. As has been pointed out, Palauans inhabit a very small and fragile resource base. This, plus the continuing influence of their traditional culture, may make Palauans susceptible to being aroused over complex environmental threats, including anticipated ones. The eclectic and absorptive flavor to Palauans' historical experience, coupled with more recent anticipatory/comparative perspective of some Palauans, may also have a sensitizing effect. Moreover, Palauans have had some major scares. There was the destruction that stemmed from World War II, and the recent specter of the proposed "superport" project.

There may also be aspects of the Palauan experience that impede environmental consciousness and indigenous organizing. Plus and minuses, along this vein, may also be associated with the experience of the American people and other “western” countries. Such considerations, though intriguing, are beyond our scope here.

An unstable status quo seems reasonably comfortable, both in Palau and in the United States. Moreover, most of us at times seek to “muddle through” rather than to directly confront disturbing and seemingly intractable problems. Though Palauans may have more reason to avoid their environmental dilemma than do Americans; for the most part, all of us proceed down an increasingly disquieting road. This is particularly true since the risks and costs of any adjustments seem more real and threatening, than do the dimly lit contours and consequences of our subtle and complex, environmental problems. These problems, however, may bury us all.

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