
Marshall Islanders campaign against nuclear testing sites, 1982

- ([mainly or initiated by](#)) [indigenous participants](#) [1]

Timing

June 19,
1982
to:
June
1983

Location and Goals

Country:

Marshall Islands

Location City/State/Province:

Kwajalein Atoll

Location Description:

Islands of the Kwajalein Atoll

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

To prevent the operation of the base at which nuclear testing and missile testing took place, to gain monetary compensation for the landowners most affected by their forced removal, and to shorten, if not end, the lease agreement.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 183. Nonviolent land seizure

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 183. Nonviolent land seizure

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation

- 183. Nonviolent land seizure

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Segment Length:

2 months

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Kwajalein Atoll landowners

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Ataji L. Balos, Kwajalein Atoll Corporation

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Ataji L. Balos, former Minister of Internal Security of Marshall Islands cabinet

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Kwajalein Atoll Corporation
- Kwajalein Atoll landowners

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

2 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

United States government, Marshall Islands government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Arrests, orders to shoot to wound

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

8 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

The United States agreed to shorten its lease from 50 years to 30 years, created a fund for the improvement of the islands, and the Marshallese government agreed to give the lease money to the Kwajalein Atoll natives.

The Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands is home to the Kwajalein Missile Range, which the government leased to the United States beginning in 1978. From the beginning, Marshall Islands natives protested U.S. usage of the range. After the Marshall Islands government renewed the lease agreement for a third time with the United States for the next 50 years, natives responded by initiating Operation Homecoming to prevent the operation of the base. Natives protested the lack of compensation, the length of the lease, the lack of funds earmarked for Marshall Islands improvements, and the disrespectful treatment of the Marshallese. Weapons testing also limited the islands on which natives of the Atoll could live, forcing most to live in slum conditions on the island of Ebeye.

Operation Homecoming began on June 19, 1982. 800-1,000 landowners re-occupied their home islands on Kwajalein, Roi-Namur, and the islands of the Mid-Corridor group. Police arrested about 15 people but the arrests did not discourage others. The Marshallese continued to re-occupy their home islands and set up camps. Operation Homecoming gained popularity and an increasing number of natives came back to their homelands. They also returned to their traditional living and working patterns that were a daily part of life before the Kwajalein Atoll became a site for missile testing.

On August 3, 1982, the occupation forced the cancellation of a missile test as protesters refused to evacuate or move to safety. As the protest and re-occupation continued, the United States applied economic and social pressures in an attempt to end the protest. The United States increased the number and intensity of security searches for workers traveling between Ebeye and Kwajalein, suspended all unessential workers employed on Kwajalein Island, closed banking facilities, shut off water in areas occupied by the protesters, and stopped the shipment of food sent for Ebeye through Kwajalein.

After a 4-month occupation, the United States and Marshall Islands governments agreed to talks with the Kwajalein Atoll Corporation (KAC), a group that represented the interests of Kwajalein landowners. The occupation temporarily ended and the natives went back to Ebeye while the negotiations occurred. The talks

resulted in a reduction of the lease from 50 to 30 years, 10 million dollars earmarked for capital improvements for Ebeye, the return of six islands to natives, and access to the Mid-Corridor islands for 3 six week periods a year. In June 1983, the governments signed a revised lease agreement called the Compact of Free Association and held a general plebiscite in September. Kwajalein Atoll natives continued to reject the new lease agreement because they did not agree with the 30-year lease and the intervention of the Marshall Islands government in the use and distribution of lease compensation for the Kwajalein natives.

Landowners resumed the occupation of the missile range and other restricted areas in the Atoll. Police forcibly removed protesters and the commander of the Kwajalein Missile Range ordered police to shoot to wound protesters if necessary. The Marshall Islands government reasserted its ownership of the Kwajalein Island and surrounding restricted zones. The government also reaffirmed the Compact of Free Association and its 30-year lease agreement. However, the government later rescinded this condemnation and agreed to give all lease profits to the Kwajalein landowners. The natives did not succeed in ending the use of their homelands for nuclear and weapons testing, but did succeed in shortening the lease agreement from 50 to 30 years, obtaining the profits from the lease, and gaining a capital improvements fund worth millions of dollars for the island of Ebeye.

Research Notes

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Additional Notes:

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