**Kwajalein Atoll**

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Kwajalein Atoll - NASA NLT Landsat 7 (Visible Color) Satellite Image

**Kwajalein Atoll** (pronounced /ˈkwɑːdʒɨlɨn/ in English; Marshallese: **Kuwajleen**, pronounced [kʷuwːɔɛt̪ʲl̪ʲɪn̪ʲ]), is part of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). The southernmost and largest island in the atoll is named **Kwajalein Island**, nicknamed **Kwaj** (/ˈkwɑːdʒ/) by English-speaking residents of the U.S. facilities.

The atoll lies in the Ralik Chain, 2,100 nautical miles (3900 km) southwest of Honolulu, Hawaii, at 8°43′N 167°44′E﻿ / ﻿8.717°N 167.733°E﻿ / 8.717; 167.733.

**Geography**

Kwajalein is one of the world's largest coral atolls as measured by area of enclosed water. Comprising 97 islands and islets, it has a land area of 16.4 km² (6.33 mi²), and surrounds one of the largest lagoons in the world, with an area of 2174 km² (839 mi²).

**Kwajalein Island** is the southernmost, and the largest, of the islands in the Kwajalein atoll. The northernmost, and second largest, island is Roi-Namur.

The population of Kwajalein islet is currently below 1,000 individuals, mostly Americans and a small number of Marshall Islanders and other nationals, all of whom have express permission from the U.S. Army to live there. Approximately 13,500 Marshallese citizens live on the atoll, most on Ebeye Island.

The primary mode of personal transportation is the bicycle and housing is free for most personnel, depending on contract or tour of duty.

**Current use by U.S. military**

Short-term accommodations at the "Kwaj Lodge" showing typical Kwajalein housing construction.

These are the two main islands used by the U.S. personnel, and their families are accommodated in trailers or hard housing. Most unaccompanied personnel live in apartment-style housing.

Since 1944, when American forces captured the atoll from the Japanese in the Battle of Kwajalein, it has been used for military purposes by the U.S., while escaping the fates of the nearby atolls of Bikini, Rongelap, and Eniwetok—Kwajalein has never been a site for nuclear detonations and has never been covered with any significant nuclear fallout from the tests that were conducted during the 1940s and 1950s. It was, however, the main support site for this weapons-testing program, namely Operation Crossroads.

**Testing sites**

Eleven of the 97 islands are leased by the United States and are part of the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site (RTS), formerly known as Kwajalein Missile Range. RTS includes radar installations, optics, telemetry, and communications equipment, which are used for ballistic missile and missile-interceptor testing and space operations support. Kwajalein hosts one of five ground stations (others are at Diego Garcia, Ascension Island, Colorado Springs, Colorado, and Hawaii) that assist in the operation of the Global Positioning System (GPS) navigational system.

**SpaceX**

SpaceX updated facilities on Omelek Island to launch its commercial Falcon 1 rockets. The first successful Falcon 1 space launch from Omelek was conducted in 2008.

**History**

**Colonial**

Kwajalein (Kuwajleen) Atoll was an important cultural site to the Marshallese people of the Ralik chain. In Marshall Islander cosmology, Kwajalein island was the site of an abundant flowering utilomar tree from which great blessings flowed, and people from all over would come to gather the "fruits" of this tree. This, explain many elders, is a Marshallese metaphor that describes the past century of colonialism and serves to explain why Kwajalein is still so precious to foreign interests. This story was also the origin of the name Kuwajleen, which apparently derives from Ri-ruk-jan-leen, "the people who harvest the flowers".

**League of Nations Mandate**

The islands of the atoll, particularly the main island, served as a rural copra-trading outpost administered by Japanese civilians under the Japanese Mandated "South Seas" Islands of Micronesia (the Nanyō Guntō) for nearly thirty years. The earliest-known Japanese record of Kwajalein and the Marshall Islands appears in the writings of Suzuki Keikun, who was dispatched to the Marshall Islands in 1885 to investigate a Japanese shipwreck. And although this visit was followed by two decades of German colonial rule in the Marshalls, Japan peacefully took control of the islands from Germany in 1914 and established administrative control in 1922 under a League of Nations Mandate.

**Early Japanese influence**

There was some Japanese settlement in Kwajalein Atoll (known in Japanese as Kuezerin Kanshō), comprising mostly traders and their families who worked at local branches of shops headquartered at nearby Jaluit Atoll where Japanese civilians numbered in the several hundred to nearly 1,000 at the height of the Japanese administration. There were also local administrative staff at Kwajalein, and with the establishment of Kwajalein's public school in 1935, schoolteachers were also sent to the island from Japan. Most Marshall Islanders who recall those times describe a peaceful time of cooperation and development between Japanese and Marshallese, although Marshallese (and other Islanders or Okinawans) were still not considered on the same social tier as Japanese.

**Japanese militarism**

In the late 1930s, Japan began to centralize military power in Micronesia in line with its expansionism into the South and throughout Oceania. This was a radical break with the League of Nations Mandate under which the islands had been peacefully administrated, but Japanese commanders justified this action as a defense against increasing aggression from the United States, as well as a protection for Japan's supply routes, as America had been cutting off Japanese resources from abroad. Conscripted laborers were sent throughout the Pacific from Korea under Japanese rule, beginning in the early 1940s, under strict orders from local Japanese-controlled city offices throughout Korea. Over 10,000 were sent to the Micronesia (Nanyo Gunto) area alone—mostly from the southernmost provinces of Korea, and thousands were sent to the Marshall Islands. In some atolls, such as Wotje, those laborers were joined by Japanese prisoners from Hokkaido (mostly political prisoners who had spoken against the Japanese government). In Kwajalein, Koreans were placed in battalions and other specialized groups, sometimes together with Marshallese, to build fortifications throughout the atoll. Whenever there were American air raids, the mainly Korean construction teams had to work night and day to fill up the holes that American bombs had made.

Archaeological evidence and testimonies from Japanese and Marshallese sources indicate that this project would likely not have begun until the 1940s and was not even complete at the time of the American invasion in 1944. A second wave of Japanese naval and ground forces was dispatched to Kwajalein in early 1943 from the Manchurian front, most of whom were between the ages of 18 and 21 and had no experience in the tropics. These young soldiers were poorly trained, were mostly in the army, and the supply ships that were meant to provide them with food rations were sunk by Americans en route. Thus they had a very rough existence on Kwajalein and often succumbed to illness like dengue fever and dysentery—as did many of the laborers. As the tempo of military ideology increased, soldiers at Kwajalein became harsher and more violent toward Marshall Islanders, whom they often suspected of spying for the Americans.

**Forced resettlement**

When the first runway was built on Kwajalein islet by Korean laborers, the Japanese public school was demolished and moved, with all civil administration, to Namu Atoll, and Islanders were forcibly moved to live on some of the smaller islets in the atoll. The trauma of this experience—together with the influx of these young, underprepared troops—surprised the local population, and many Islanders make clear distinctions in their recollections of civilian and military Japanese for this reason. This is the first known instance of forced relocation in Kwajalein Atoll, and similar events happened throughout the Marshall Islands beginning with Japanese militarism. It should be noted that the more significant relocations, however, occurred as a result of American weapons testing and military activity in the islands between 1945 and 1965.

**During and after World War Two**

**American Invasion**

Main article: Battle of Kwajalein

U.S. Infantry inspect a hole after capturing the Kwajalein Atoll from Japan during World War II

On January 31st, 1944, the 1st Battalion, 111th Infantry Regiment performed an Amphibious Assault on Kwajalein, and remained as the garrison force while the remainder of the regiment went elsewhere. On February 1, 1944, Kwajalein was the target of the most concentrated bombardment of the Pacific War. Thirty-six thousand shells from naval ships and ground artillery on a nearby islet struck Kwajalein. American B-24 Liberator bombers aerially bombarded the island, adding to the destruction.

Of the 8,782 Japanese personnel deployed to the atoll (including Korean laborers), it has been argued that only 2,200 were combat trained. Despite this likelihood, Japanese resistance was strong and resilient, even given the fact that Japanese troops were outnumbered by tens of thousands of American troops. By the end of the battle, 373 Americans were killed, 7,870 "Japanese" were killed, and an estimated 200 Marshallese were killed. U.S. military documents do not discriminate the Japanese from Korean dead; however, the Korean Government's Truth Commission for Forced Labor Under Japanese Imperialism reports an official figure from the Japanese government of 310 Koreans killed in the American invasion of Kwajalein. Whether this figure represents Kwajalein islet or the whole atoll is unclear.

Kwajalein was one of the few locations in the Pacific war where Islanders were killed while actually fighting for the Japanese, though of course this does not necessarily imply that they were fighting for the same reasons as their comrades. To the great distress of most Koreans, those Korean laborers who died are still enshrined as war hero guardian spirits for the Japanese nation in Yasukuni Shrine—a move that seemed to suggest that those Koreans died for the sake of Japan, when in fact they were forced to work against their will. In contrast, it is worth noting that none of the Marshall Islanders who died for Japan are enshrined. On February 6, 1944, Kwajalein was claimed by the United States and was taken, with the rest of the Marshall Islands, eventually as a Trust Territory of the United States, a move which was often referred to as "liberation," despite widespread ambivalence among Islanders.

**Trust Territory under the United Nations**

Although there is a misperception in some local historical narratives that Kwajalein Atoll was "taken back" by the United States (see for instance many of the archived diaries written by invading Marines, as well as pamphlets produced by the United States Kwajalein Atoll's "Hourglass" newspaper and civilian contractors, like Bell Telephone Laboratories in the 1970s), the Marshall Islands had never been a United States territory prior to the initiation of the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands that followed World War II. In fact, at first Marshall Islanders were treated by the United States as Japanese subjects, and this made perfect sense, since although many who had experienced hardship under the military were eager to welcome the Americans, most Marshallese at the time had been educated in Japanese schools, mixed Japanese and Marshallese customs in their day-to-day lives, spoke Japanese, and even had Japanese ancestry. Some were even applying for full Japanese citizenship at the time of the U.S. Invasion, and, as Higuchi Wakako has argued, they were likely to have it granted by the Japanese government. However, an ambiguous clause in the League of Nations Mandate made it possible for the United States to treat Marshallese as "liberated persons under American wardship." The peculiar contradiction of being "liberated into wardship" foreshadowed the coming decades of ambivalent dependence on the United States throughout the Trust Territory period and thereafter.

Countless archived documents and photographs at the U.S. National Archives make it abundantly clear that American forces proceeded in the coming years to wage a campaign to ensure that all pro-Japanese sentiment amongst Marshallese was eradicated. In recent years, however, elderly Marshallese and other Micronesians have been much more outspoken about their nostalgia for Japanese times and some of their positive regard for the pre-militarized lifestyle in the Marshalls under Japanese rule.

**Evolution into a U.S. Military Installation**

In the years following the American invasion of early 1944, Kwajalein Atoll was swiftly converted not only into a staging area for further campaigns in the advance on the Japanese homeland in the Pacific War, but the United States also used it as a main command center and preparation base for Operation Crossroads and an extensive series of nuclear tests (comprising a total of 67 blasts) at the Marshalls atolls of Bikini and Eniwetok.

By the 1950s, the Marshallese population coming to work at the base at Kwajalein had grown, and the conditions in the makeshift labor camp on Kwajalein islet were such that the U.S. Navy administering the atoll at the time decided to relocate these Islanders to nearby Ebeye, an islet only three islands to the north of Kwajalein and accessible by a short boat ride or walk over the reef at low tide. Nuclear refugees from the atolls irradiated by the American tests were also moved to Ebeye, and in 1964, when the United States initiated its Anti-ballistic missile testing program with the Nike-Zeus program in Kwajalein Atoll, authorities moved also the remaining Marshall Islanders who lived scattered on their land throughout the atoll to the small shantytown of Ebeye which had been erected with plywood housing by American contractors. This relocation from the Mid-Atoll Corridor would eventually precipitate into the numerous landowner resistance movements by the people of Kwajalein Atoll, who deeply resented the continuing American occupation without their consent and without proper compensation.

With the end of the Cold War and a decreased threat of nuclear attack, many defense programs were canceled in the early 1990s. However, overcrowding on Ebeye remains a major problem, and continuing military operations and various launch or re-entry tests perpetuate the dislocation of Marshall Islanders from their small islands throughout Kwajalein Atoll. The United States Army Kwajalein Atoll test site does not provide logistical support to Ebeye or Ennibur islets.

**Wartime memorials**

Site of the "Japanese Cemetery" on Kwajalein built as a memorial to war dead on the Atoll.

Very few Japanese or Korean remains were ever repatriated from the atoll; thus both Kwajalein and Roi-Namur have ceremonial "cemetery" sites to honor this memory. The memorial on Kwajalein was constructed by the Japan Marshall Islands War-Bereaved Families Association (Māsharu Hōmen Izokukai) in the 1960s, and the memorial on Roi-Namur was constructed by American personnel. Both memorial sites are dedicated not only to Japanese souls but also to the sacrifices of Koreans, Marshallese, and Americans. There are similar (but poorly maintained) memorial sites at various atolls throughout the Marshall Islands, with a large Japanese Peace Park on Majuro and a smaller Korean memorial nearby. U.S. Marine Corps intelligence records and photographs at the U.S. National Archives, together with the testimony of U.S. veterans, indicate that there was a mass-burial site consolidated into one place on Kwajalein islet, at or near the current cemetery. However, remains are also scattered throughout the islet, at Roi-Namur, and in various places throughout the atoll. Bereaved Japanese and Korean families have mixed sentiments about whether or not to return these remains to their home countries, as none of them are identifiable, and various "bone-collecting" missions are sometimes perceived by bereaved Japanese families as an insult to the dead or a political stunt by the Japanese government. Japanese bereaved family members also consider the sites of sunken Japanese shipwrecks in Kwajalein lagoon to be sacred gravesites, and they are often discouraged by the activities of American divers who attempt to disturb these wrecks.

A ceremony is held at Japan's Yasukuni Shrine annually in April (originally held in February to coincide with the anniversary of the battle), where the memories of the Japanese soldiers are honored and surviving families offer prayers to their spirits. Small groups of bereaved Japanese families also have made pilgrimages to Kwajalein on a semi-annual basis since the 1990s, the first of these groups being the Japan Marshall Islands War-Bereaved Families Association, which negotiated its visit with the U.S. Army as far back as 1964 and made its first visit in 1975 at the invitation of the Kwajalein Missile Range. The bereaved families of conscripted Korean laborers have also recently traveled in groups to the Marshall Islands and other parts of Micronesia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, with funding from the Japanese government, although they have not yet paid a group visit to Kwajalein.

**Kwajalein today**

The Adult Pool on Kwajalein is drained and re-filled once a week.

Although the Marshall Islands was officially granted independence from the United States, and became an independent republic in 1986, Kwajalein atoll is still used by the United States for missile testing and various other operations. Although this military history has deeply influenced the lives of the Marshall Islanders who have lived in the atoll through the war to the present, the military history of Kwajalein has made tourism almost non-existent and has kept the environment in relatively pristine condition. American civilians and their families who reside at the military installations in Kwajalein are able to enjoy this environment with few restrictions. The lagoon contains wrecks of mostly Japanese ships, a few planes, and the German heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen. There is spear fishing and deep-sea fishing. Water temperature of 81 °F (27 °C) degrees and 100 feet (30 m) visibility are common when scuba diving on the ocean side of the atoll.

The Ocean View Club, an open-air lounge on the ocean side of Kwajalein.

A neighboring island Ebeye has the largest population in the atoll, with approximately 13,000 residents (mostly Marshall Islanders and a small population of migrants and volunteers from other island groups and nations) living on 80 acres (320,000 m²) of land. Ebeye is one of the most densely populated places in the world and its residents live in poverty with a coral reef (visible and able to be traveled at low tide) linking them to Kwajalein and the rest of the outside world.

Roi-Namur used to be 4 separate islands: Roi, Namur, Enedrikdrik (Ane-dikdik), and Kottepina. The pass between the islands was filled in using sand that was dredged from the lagoon by both the Japanese (or, rather, Korean laborers working for the Japanese) and Americans between 1940 and 1945, and after the war the resulting conjoined islands were renamed Roi-Namur.

There are two airbases and three airstrips on Kwajalein Atoll:

* Bucholz Army Airfield (IATA: **KWA**, ICAO: **PKWA**, FAA LID: **KWA**) to the south at Kwajalein: 08°43′12″N 167°43′54″E﻿ / ﻿8.72°N 167.73167°E﻿ / 8.72; 167.73167

* Dyess Army Airfield (ICAO: **PKRO**, FAA LID: **ROI**) to the north at Roi-Namur: 09°23′49″N 167°28′15″E﻿ / ﻿9.39694°N 167.47083°E﻿ / 9.39694; 167.47083

* Ebadon Airstrip (IATA: **EBN**) to the west at Ebadon: 09°19′50″N 166°49′09″E﻿ / ﻿9.33056°N 166.81917°E﻿ / 9.33056; 166.81917

* Mejato Airstrip on Mejato: 09°19′09″N 166°50′54″E﻿ / ﻿9.31917°N 166.84833°E﻿ / 9.31917; 166.84833

* Meck Island Airstrip, an eastern island, between Roi-Namur and Kwajalein: 09°00′00″N 167°43′37.8″E﻿ / ﻿9°N 167.727167°E﻿ / 9; 167.727167

Since 1961, several tests of anti-ballistic missiles were conducted on Kwajalein. Therefore, there are launchpads on Illeginni Island ( 9°00′00″N 167°42′00″E﻿ / ﻿9.0000°N 167.7000°E﻿ / 9.0000; 167.7000﻿ (Illeginni)), Roi-Namur Island ( 9°24′04″N 167°27′59″E﻿ / ﻿9.4012°N 167.4663°E﻿ / 9.4012; 167.4663﻿ (Roi-Namur)) and Kwajalein Drop Zone, Pacific Ocean ( 7°39′00″N 167°42′00″E﻿ / ﻿7.6500°N 167.7000°E﻿ / 7.6500; 167.7000﻿ (Kwajalein Drop Zone)).

**Land lease disputes**

Under the constitution of the Republic of the Marshall Islands the government can only own land under limited circumstances. Practically, all land is private and inherited through one's matriline and clan. Since the United States began leasing land, the issue of proper land payments has been a major issue of contention for landowners which continues today. "Landowners" here refers to the consortium of irooj (chiefs), alaps (clan heads) and rijerbal (workers) who have land rights to the places used for military purposes by the United States. In the case of Kwajalein Atoll in particular, a "senior rijerbal" is also assigned a role to represent families who have claims to land as "workers" of that location.

Unclear and insufficient in the opinion of these landowners, the original lease arrangements for Kwajalein Atoll with the U.S. were finally negotiated only after the landowners and their supporters demonstrated in the early 1980s with a peaceful protest called "Operation Homecoming," in which Islanders re-inhabited their land at Kwajalein, Roi-Namur, and other restricted sites in the atoll. Although Operation Homecoming did not achieve the level of recognition for all people with land title at Kwajalein, nor an amount of compensation that truly remunerated these families for the natural resources and lands they had lost through displacement, the resulting agreements at least set a precedent for future dealings with the United States government. One of these early agreements was the first official Military Use and Operating Rights Agreement (MUORA) between the United States Army and Government of the RMI, which was linked to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that was written into the larger Compact of Free Association with the United States. Article 3 of the MUORA obligated the RMI to lease specific sites from their owners through a Land Use Agreement (LUA) and then sub-lease them to the United States. Effectively, this rendered the land negotiations for use of Kwajalein Atoll a "domestic issue" between the national Marshallese government in Majuro and local "landowners," even though Kwajalein, where the local Marshallese population deals on a daily basis with American military activity, is a considerable distance from Majuro. Many Kwajalein Atoll residents have complained in the past that Majuro is out of touch with the realities of Kwajalein Marshallese, and downplays their suffering while profiting from the income provided by the testing site.

The first MUORA guaranteed total payments of roughly USD $11 million to the landowners through the year 2016, the majority of which went, via the provisions of the LUA to the irooj (chiefs), who had the largest stake in the land. Some American and Marshallese observers claimed that these land payments were "misused." However, the recipients of these funds strongly maintain that these have always been "rental" payments (like a tenant pays to a landlord) that landowners could use at their own discretion, separate from whatever funds the U.S. earmarked to help develop or improve Kwajalein Atoll, which were funneled into the now-defunct Kwajalein Atoll Development Authority (KADA.)

In advance of its expiration in 2016, this LUA was renegotiated in 2003 as part of the Compact of Free Association, with the U.S. agreeing to pay the landowners (via the Republic of the Marshall Islands) $15 million a year, adjusted for inflation. In exchange for these payments, the Compact stipulated a new MUORA that gave America the option to use Kwajalein through 2066, renewable through 2086. The landowners, affiliated under the Kwajalein Negotiations Committee (KNC), were very unhappy with the proposed LUA, since they believed they should have been receiving at least double that amount in funds, and that more importantly the LUA did nothing to provide for Marshall Islanders' welfare, health care, safety, and rapidly increasing population on Ebeye. By their independent land appraisals and calculations, the KNC had already determined that the minimum acceptable compensation they should receive for Kwajalein lands was at least $19.1 million annually, adjusted for inflation. The landowners also claimed that there were many other terms by which they wished the U.S. would abide should the lease be extended, including providing better support and infrastructure to Ebeye, improving healthcare and education, guaranteeing that the missile testing was not creating environmental hazards, and providing a comprehensive life and property insurance policy. Despite a consensus among the landowners to refuse to allow the Compact to be signed with this inadequate LUA proposed by the U.S., the new Compact (and the MUORA, by extension) was finalized by officials of the RMI National government and went into effect in 2003.

Stating that they had not been consulted about this agreement, the landowners went on to protest this agreement, and mounted an organized boycott of the new LUA. Although the new Compact and its component MUORA was ratified in 2003, they have since held out and refused to sign the LUA of 2003, insisting, through Kwajalein Atoll elected representatives, that either a new LUA should be drafted that considers their needs or the U.S. will have to leave Kwajalein when the active LUA (which began in the 1980s) expires in 2016.

The U.S., however, considers the Compact to be an "internationally binding" agreement that has been concluded, and it thus pays an annual $15 million to the landowners, as agreed provisionally in the MUORA laid out in the 2003 Compact renegotiation; however, as this new LUA has not been signed, the difference of roughly $4 million has been going into an escrow account. The Compact made it clear that if the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the landowners did not reach an agreement about land payments by the end of 2008, these funds in escrow would be returned to the U.S. Treasury. But in resistance to this "carrot" dangled in front of the noses of the people of Kwajalein, Tony deBrum, in his former role as Kwajalein Senator, stated that it would be "insane" for Marshallese people to put up with another 70 years of the kind of circumstances that exist today in Kwajalein Atoll at Ebeye and other islands.

**Recent changes in Kwajalein Atoll**

In 2008, a new government was voted into power in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, with Litokwa Tomeing as President and Tony deBrum as foreign minister. This new government is sympathetic to the needs of the Ebeye community and the Kwajalein landowners, partly because it is a coalition government formed in part from the Aelon Kein Ad Party (formerly known as the Kabua Party), which represents Kwajalein landowners and is led by Paramount Chief (Iroijlaplap) Imata Kabua. This new government is actively pursuing a more productive and mutually beneficial agreement regarding the Kwajalein Atoll Land Use Agreement with the United States.

With the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States, the new administration of the Marshall Islands, and the looming deadline for signing the LUA, at the end of 2008, President Litokwa Tomeing wrote a letter to George W. Bush asking that the deadline for the LUA be lifted. Within a day of the expiration of this LUA deadline, the United States agreed to shift this deadline back another five years, but it reiterated its stance that the Compact renegotiation was already completed and that it expected the Republic of the Marshall Islands to abide by the MUORA it agreed to in 2003. Government leaders and landowners are hopeful, however, that this extension will allow for more fruitful and mutual talks to provide for a beneficial future for all parties concerned.

Amidst these uneasy and ambivalent negotiations between the Marshall Islands central government and landowners, and between the RMI and U.S. officials, the Marshallese residents of Ebeye, Enniburr (Third Island/Santo) and other islands in Kwajalein Atoll have suffered with increasingly strict regulations at the military installation, along with frequent power outages due to technical malfunctions and fuel shortages. Many Islanders have expressed strong frustration that their local leaders and landowners continue to hold their lives in jeopardy and resist the funding and infrastructure support they desperately need by not signing the LUA.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA) installation has also been downsizing, in part because of budget constraints and technological improvements (such as a new trans-oceanic fiber-optic cable) that will allow the testing range to be operated extensively from sites in the United States, thus minimizing operation costs and the need for on-site workers or residents. Recently, the American population of the Kwajalein installation has dropped dramatically, and the aluminum-sided trailers that once housed the bulk of the contractor population are systematically being removed from the main island. Nevertheless, the enormous investment in these new technologies and recent statements by Army leadership indicate that the United States is deeply committed to remaining in the Marshall Islands at Kwajalein Atoll for the foreseeable future.

Recent turmoil in the RMI government led to the ousting of Tony deBrum as Foreign Minister and a vote of no confidence, mainly from Kwajalein supporters, to President Tomeing in April 2009. Subsequently, outgoing American ambassador Clyde Bishop made comments in the Marshall Islands Journal in late April 2009 that future funding to the entire Republic of the Marshall Islands was dependent on the use of Kwajalein. This strong wording seems to imply that without being allowed to use Kwajalein under the terms that the U.S. specified in its original 2003 Compact of Free Association revision, the U.S. may withhold its promised funding to the entire nation.

**Other islands in the Kwajalein atoll**

Kwajalein Atoll (Jacob, Arnold, etc. are World War II code names for islands)

Other islands in the atoll:

* Ebeye is not part of the Reagan Test Site; it is a Marshallese island-city with shops, restaurants and an active commercial port. It is the administrative center of the Republic of the Marshall Islands at Kwajalein Atoll, and the Kwajalein Atoll Local Government (KALGOV), completely separate from the United States military operations in the atoll.
* Enubuj or "Carlson" Islet (its 1944 U.S. operation codename) is situated next to Kwajalein Islet to the northwest. It was from this island that U.S. forces launched their amphibious invasion of Kwajalein. Today, it is the site of a small Marshallese village with a church and small cemetery. The sunken vessel Prinz Eugen, used during the Bikini Atoll atomic weapons tests, is located here along the islet's northern lagoon side.
* Ennylabagen or "Carlos" Islet (codename) is also site of a small Marshall Islander community that has decreased in size in recent decades but was once a bigger village. Until recently, it was actively utilized by the Reagan Test Site for tracking activities during missions, and has been one of the only non-restricted Marshallese-populated islands used by the United States Army. As such, power and clean drinking water were provided to this island free-of-charge like on the other military-leased islands. This is likely to be phased out if the island ceases to be used for future mission support.
* Ebadon is located at the westernmost tip of the atoll. It was the second-largest island in the atoll before the formation of Roi-Namur. Like Ebeye, it falls fully under the jurisdiction of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and is not part of the Reagan Test Site. The village of Ebadon was much more largely populated before the war and it was where some of the irooj (chiefs) of Kwajalein Atoll grew up. Like many other key islets in the atoll, it has much cultural and spiritual significance in Marshallese cosmology.
* Enmat is "mo" or taboo, birthplace of the irooj (chiefly families) and off-limits to anyone without the blessing of the Iroijlaplap (paramount chief). The remains of a small Marshallese village and burial sites are still intact, but this island is located in the Mid-Atoll Corridor, and no one can reside there or on surrounding islands due to missile tests.
* Meck is a launch site for anti-ballistic missiles and is probably the most restricted island of all the U.S.-leased sites.
* Roi-Namur has several radar installations and a small residential community of unaccompanied U.S. personnel who deal with missions support and radar tracking. Japanese bunkers and buildings from World War II are still in good condition and preserved. Roi and Namur were originally separate islets that were joined by a causeway built predominately by Korean conscripted laborers working under the Japanese military. There is a significant indigenous Marshall Islander workforce that commutes to Roi-Namur from the nearby island of Enniburr, much like workers commute from Ebeye to Kwajalein. These workers are badged and have limited access to the island like their counterparts on Kwajalein, although access is granted for Islanders who need to use the air terminal to fly down to Kwajalein.
* Bigej (Marshallese "Pikeej") is uninhabited and has no buildings on it but many people from Kwajalein island in the south of the atoll come up to visit it for picnics and camping. It is covered with lush tropical palm trees and jungle. It is a site of cultural significance to the indigenous people of Kwajalein, as are most of the small islands throughout the atoll. Some Kwajalein landowners have proposed developing Bigej to look similar to the landscaped beauty of Kwajalein, for the exclusive use of Kwajalein atoll landowners and their families. Recently Kwajalein landowners have already begun resettling Bigej, establishing several tents and simple homes there along the southern lagoon side.
* Legan (Marshallese "Ambo") is uninhabited but does have a few buildings on the southern part of the island. Most of the island is thick jungle like most islands in the Marshall Islands. Unlike most islands though, Legan has a very small lake in the middle.
* Omelek is uninhabited and leased by the U.S. military. Site of SpaceX launch facility.
* Little Bustard (Marshallese "Drebubbu") is the first island north of Kwajalein on the East reef. During low tide and with protective boots, it is possible to wade across the reef between Kwajalein and Little Bustard.
* Nell Island (Marshallese "Nol") has a unique convergence of protected channels and small islands. The Nell area is unique and a popular destination for locals and Americans sailing through the area with proper permissions from the Republic of the Marshall Islands. (All non-leased islands are strictly off-limits to American base residents and personnel without applying for official permission.)

**Passes near Kwajalein Island**

* SAR Pass (Search And Rescue Pass) is closest to Kwajalein on the West reef. This pass is manmade and was created in the mid-1950s, it is very narrow and shallow compared to the other natural passes in the lagoon and is only used by small boats."
* South Pass is also on the West reef, north of SAR Pass. It is very wide.
* Gea Pass is a deep water pass between Gea and Ninni islands.
* Bijej Pass is the first pass on the East reef North of Kwajalein & Ebeye.

**See also**

Ballistic missile testing occurs at Kwajalein.

* [National Missile Defense](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Missile_Defense)
* [Space and Missile Defense Command](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space_and_Missile_Defense_Command)
* [Ground-Based Midcourse Defense](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ground-Based_Midcourse_Defense)
* [Missile Defense Agency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missile_Defense_Agency)
* [Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ronald_Reagan_Ballistic_Missile_Defense_Test_Site)
* [Marshall Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marshall_Islands)
* [Battle of Kwajalein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Kwajalein)
* [USS *Kwajalein* (CVE-98)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Kwajalein_%28CVE-98%29)
* [Communications in the Marshall Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communications_in_the_Marshall_Islands)
* [History of the Marshall Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Marshall_Islands)
* [Geography of the Marshall Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_the_Marshall_Islands)

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