

February 21, 1975

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Willens
FROM: Robert Kelley
RE: Marianas

Attached is a copy of a recent column on the
U.S. - Marianas negotiations by William Safire, titled
"A Destiny No So Manifest."

RKK

cc: MSH

13666

A Destiny Not So Manifest

By William Safire

WASHINGTON, Feb. 12—Any day now, a special representative of the President of the United States will sign a "covenant" that will ultimately make 14,000 native residents of the Marianas Islands—Saipan, Tinian, Rota, Pagan and the rest—citizens of the United States.

The little island empire will affiliate with the U. S. as a commonwealth, like Puerto Rico, and as night follows day, we will soon be hearing angry cries for independence as well as demands for statehood.

What are we getting into, and why? Isn't the ownership of nearby Guam good enough for our aviation needs without spreading American territory all over the Far Eastern Pacific?

In 1824, Andrew Jackson described the U. S. as "a country manifestly called by the Almighty to a destiny

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which Greece and Rome, in the days of their pride, might have envied." This was turned into the slogan, "manifest destiny," by diplomat John O'Sullivan, to rally support for the annexation of Texas in the 1840's, and was revived in 1898 by William McKinley for his takeover of Hawaii.

But "manifest destiny" doesn't have the old zing any more, which is fortunate: Under the Whatshisname Doctrine, enunciated at Guam six years ago and still the basis of U. S. foreign policy, our commitments abroad are limited to the aid of those whom it is in our interest to help defend themselves.

Why, then, are we turning territory 5,000 miles from the continental United States into U. S. soil? Most of our trusteeship of Micronesia—the Carolines and the Marshalls, with familiar names like Truk and Bikini—will ultimately be given "free association" with the U. S., a form of alliance that provides us military bases without locking us in forever.

The first reason given for the first territorial aggrandizement of this nation since we purchased the Virgin Islands from Denmark is military necessity. Think of what we went through in lives and naval vessels to wrest control of Saipan from the Japanese in World War II.

Certainly, our defense establishment wants to be ready for a future conventional war against Japan; it would make sense to secure our hold on Saipan, but in remembering Pearl Harbor, perhaps we are forgetting strategic concepts and weapons that have been developed since that time. The same argument holds for those who might like another resupply point for a land war with China.

Another reason advanced by Special Envoy F. Hayden Williams, head of the Asia Foundation who is avidly waiting to sign on behalf of the U.S., is that the people of this portion of our trusteeship have freely chosen this political status.

That's nice; the people of the Marianas, who have become totally dependent on the U.S. defense establishment already, show good taste in their selection of a patron country.

But under this theory, the people of Bangladesh would deserve to become part of America, if they freely so chose, and Adm. John McCain would probably then make a military case for a foothold on the Indian subcontinent.

Readers whose emotions are easily stirred by demagogic essayists are demanding to know, "Why wasn't I told about this?" You were; this latest conquest was engineered with the full participation of our Imperial Congress, especially Senator Scoop Jackson and Representative Phil Burton. Ironically, this round-the-world thrust is under the supervision of our "Interior" committees. The Congress will have to ratify the agreement, soon to be signed, but that is a formality.

Complaisant Congressmen will repeat the precedent of Hawaii; and since we already have Guam, why not the rest of the islands in that group? At today's prices, weren't Alaska and the Virgin Islands worth the pittance we paid for them?

That misses the point. The destiny of a nation which is manifest to one generation is not so manifest to another. It is no mark of neo-isolationism to pause in our automatic pick-up of more territory to ask if this really fits into our idea of what and where our nation should be.

We ought to be considering the principle of the acquisition of any new territory, even these islands that make up less than half the land area of Rhode Island. Where we firmly plant the flag, we lose the option to decide what to defend; an attack on the island of Rota would be the equivalent of an attack on New York or Peoria; there could be no flexibility to our response.

The Marianas are tempting. Great bases could be built there, with officers' clubs pitched to catch the gentle trade winds that used to blow the Spanish galleons from Acapulco to Manila. High-rise condominiums could be built to attract the tired Japanese businessmen to a tourist paradise via the new American-Iranian Airline (Fly Shan Am).

And there is history on the islands. From Tinian, a B-29 named the Enola Gay took off with a 14-foot explosive device to drop on Hiroshima, opening a new age of man.

But let us pause a moment to ask: Where do we want the United States of America to end?