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Assistant Editors

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Marianas Plebiscite

During the debate on U.S. commonwealth status for the Mariana Islands, it was asserted rather frequently (usually in opposition statements) that commonwealth would simply be a prelude to union with Guam.

Well it might be. Rota, Tinian and Saipan, the principal islands of the proposed new U.S. commonwealth, lie just north of Guam and are its geographic sisters.

Union could make sense politically and geographically.

In a previous plebiscite, the Marianas were in favor of union, but Guam was opposed. Guamanians seemed to think their northern sisters would be a drag on their economy.

Things may have changed since then. The Marianas commonwealth deal with the U.S. is so sweet in terms of aid from the U.S. that Guam could look more favorably on a future union.

In any event, that is for the future and won't happen unless both areas agree to it.

The Marianas plebiscite vote overwhelmingly in favor of becoming a U.S. commonwealth is only one step. Congress and the President must still approve and a Marianas constitution must be written and accepted by the Marianas voters and the President. After that the United Nations must relinquish its trusteeship rights over the area.

All of this could take six years.

But the Northern Marianas now appear to be on a clear path toward becoming the first territorial acquisition to the United States since the Virgin Islands were bought from Denmark in 1917 and Swains Island was annexed to American Samoa in 1925.

The addition of the Marianas to the U.S. is logical from a strategic standpoint, to bolster the forward line that now rests on Guam's limited square mileage.

It is logical, too, from a political standpoint because the islands are natural sisters of Guam, whether merged into a joint political structure or administered as a separate commonwealth.