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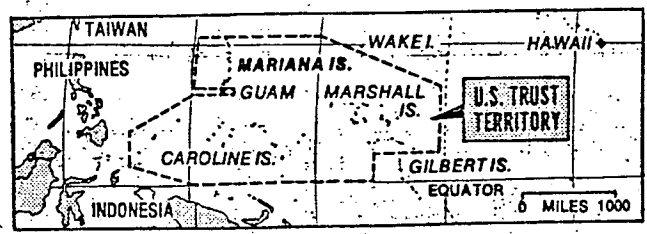
Planning for a Flag

The United States is poised on the verge of a questionable new economic and military commitment thousands of miles overseas, without as yet even a semblance of serious Congressional consideration.

By executive branch decision and planning, the Mariana Island chain of the western Pacific has been offered commonwealth status under the formal sovereignty of the United States. If carried through, this would become the first territorial annexation by this country since 1925.

Even if such a historic transaction were straightforward and without controversy, it would have seemed proper for the Congress to be consulted and involved from the early planning stages. As it happens, the proposed annexation of the Marianas is far from straightforward and it is surrounded by controversy.

The United States may already be in defiance of the United Nations in drawing a political separation between the Northern Marianas and the broader Micronesia Trust Territory, which the U.N. assigned as a single unit to United States administration in 1948. As local authorities across Micronesia began to agitate for eventual independ-



ence, the United States singled out the more docile Marianas for special treatment. American negotiators agreed to provide some \$140 million in development funds annually for seven years, announced plans for a lucrative new naval base and presented the islands' 15,000 residents with a take-it-or-leave-it choice. A plebiscite this month produced the expected result, a vote of nearly 80 per cent in favor of commonwealth status and the prospect of becoming United States citizens.

The strategic reasons for extending United States sovereignty deep into the Pacific, 3,300 miles west of Hawaii and alongside the established base at Guam, may have merit—but this may well be vitiated by the increased responsibilities and exposure. That is a decision which the Pentagon or the White House cannot be allowed to make on their own.

When all the relevant decisions are finally submitted to Congress, as President Ford said they will be soon, legislators need feel no obligation to give the rubber-stamp approval that is apparently expected of them. Here is one opportunity for the Congress to consider carefully a possible new American commitment in all its implications—political, economic and military—before discovering a *fait accompli*.

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