

New York Times  
Aug. 15, 1975

N.Y.T. 8/15/75  
Marianas: The Issue

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To the Editor:  
The defense of the proposed annexation of the Northern Marianas by the special negotiator, appointed by President Nixon [letter July 23] usefully corrects some typographical errors in your otherwise excellent editorial but may lead to some misunderstanding of this important issue.

First, saying the plebiscite was U.N. observed gives the impression that it was internationally and impartially supervised, but President Ford's letter of transmittal states that it was supervised by the former editor of an American newspaper, and says nothing of U.N. approval of the methods or of observation.

Second, there is the impression that there has been full public discussion, including Congress. However, it has been played very "low key" and public knowledge is still quite small. Consideration in Congress has been confined almost entirely to the two Interior Committees. It is obvious that this does not lead to considerations of the important international and strategic implications.

The treaty (which in effect it is) was brought to the House so quickly that it gives the impression of being a rush job before the American people wake up to the fact that they have annexed about a million square miles of the Pacific, 6,200 miles from home.

The negotiator emphasizes that the Pentagon has said it has no "current" intention to build bases. Then why annex it and arrange to lease Tinian? We are surely not so naive as to believe that it is merely because the local people have been clamoring for twenty years. The Navy has had its eye on this area since World War II, and that is our principal justification—a military interest cloaked weakly by a plebiscite run by us.

The critic of your editorial has not addressed himself to the main issue: Why has the U.S. arbitrarily, i.e., without consulting the U.N. or Micronesia, sliced off about a quarter of the area and an eighth of the population of Micronesia to serve its imperial interests?

Now that the House hurriedly consented on July 21, it is important that discussion not be confined to the Interior Committee of the Senate but that it be treated as an important international agreement, which involves the United Nations, our future role in the Pacific and our responsibility to humankind.

JAMES W. GOULD  
Cotuit, Mass., July 25, 1975  
The writer is professor of international relations, Scripps College, California.