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NY TIMES 12/8/75
Mariana Slowdown

Two Senate committees have fortunately applied the brakes to the Administration's drive to extend United States sovereignty and citizenship to the Northern Mariana island chain, far across the Pacific Ocean. Skeptical members of the Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees were successful last week in delaying further consideration of this little-understood measure until late in January.

There is good reason for going slow on this issue. Committee hearings last month raised doubts about the ultimate financial cost of this territorial annexation—the first by the United States in half a century. More significantly, it is becoming increasingly apparent that this country would be heading into a morass of international legal and political complications by unilaterally altering the conditions of a strategic trusteeship mandate conveyed by the United Nations in 1947.

And to what end? Weightier than the reservations is the lack of convincing affirmative arguments that it is in American interest to expand the territorial domain of the United States so close to the Asian continent. Much has been made of the plebiscite last June in which 78 percent of the registered voters approved union with the United States; in actual numbers, of the 15,000 residents, 3,945 persons voted for the covenant, 1,060 voted against.

As one prominent international lawyer, José A. Cabranes of Yale, testified: "If a part of the Philippines or a part of Honduras or a province of Sierra Leone or a province of Greece voted overwhelmingly to become a territory of the United States, we should certainly be flattered—but we should not necessarily conclude that the proposal to expand the territory of the United States makes sense."

We reiterate the argument we made back in July, when the House of Representatives approved the Mariana Islands accord after only the most perfunctory consideration. The burden of proof falls upon the advocates of annexation to explain why the United States should take on these new responsibilities.