

Committee on Natural Resources
Full Committee
Oversight Field Hearing
Guam Hilton Hotel
August 24, 2023
10:00 AM (ChST)

“Peace Through Strength: The Strategic Importance of the Pacific Islands to U.S.-led Global Security”

Questions from Rep. Westerman for The Honorable Lourdes Aflague Leon Guerrero, Governor, Guam:

1. Guam has and continues to be strategically important for not only U.S. security, but also peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Question: What do you see as Guam’s role in maintaining peace and stability in the region? Are there areas that you believe Guam could play a greater role in U.S. national security strategy and engagement with the Indo-Pacific?

Response: Guam possesses the potential to assume a more significant role in the United States National Security Strategy and its active involvement in the Indo-Pacific Region. Peace and stability in the region is a critical priority for our people, given our experiences during World War II. Our administration has consistently been deeply engaged in dialogue at the highest echelons of military leadership at the Pentagon, Indo-Pacific Command, and the Joint Region Marianas, as well as meeting with congressional delegates from the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, underscoring the critical nature of national security within this region. Within our team, we have committed individuals who grasp this importance and remain actively involved in deliberations concerning strategy, policy, and cultivating relationships to advance and safeguard U.S. interests in Guam and the Indo-Pacific. Guam has a unique opportunity to play a more significant role as a U.S. Territory and be home to one of the largest and fastest-growing U.S. military contingencies in the Pacific region by engaging in all discussions regarding the Pacific. More notably, Guam should participate in the most recent legislation passed in the NDAA to establish a Regional Security Council. Given the pacing threat of China in the region and recent infiltrations to our cyber security network, Guam must be part of all security concerns and U.S. initiatives in the Pacific.

2. We are deeply concerned about the issue of People’s Republic of China (PRC) nationals illegally entering Guam from the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands. It has

been reported that 27 PRC nationals have been caught attempting to enter Guam from CNMI in the month of June alone.

Question: What are you and your team doing to address this issue? Has it been determined what these individuals were aiming to do once in Guam?

Response: The Guam Customs and Quarantine Agency (GCQA) has assigned officers to our main ports of entry, where they conduct roving surveillance of Guam's shorelines. I have established a multi-agency task force that reports vessel movements between the CNMI and Guam. This task force is dedicated to the issue of illegal entry of Chinese nationals and continues to meet to assess and maintain awareness of this concerning situation. The illegal entry individuals were charged with violations of local and federal statutes. These individuals have stated they made the trip to Guam to continue the pursuit of asylum and employment. Additionally, we have enlisted support of the public to report suspicious activities observed around Guam's reefs and beaches.

3. I think it is fair to say that we are all deeply troubled by reports of the PRC creating so-called "Guam-killer" missiles and simulating attacks on U.S. bases on Guam. It has been argued that U.S. military presence in Guam makes the island a target for our adversaries.

Question: Can you explain to us how it is important for Guam to continue to play a strategic role in U.S. policy in the Indo-Pacific and why you believe that the U.S. military presence on the island is important for Guam's security long-term?

Response: The U.S. military presence in Guam is strategically vital to the security of our island and the Indo-Pacific region. The PRC and other malign actors pose a significant threat to our security, prosperity, and freedoms. Therefore, the U.S. military must continue to have a strong presence in Guam long-term. However, any additional military growth must be balanced and closely coordinated with the government of Guam and the people of Guam. Any growth on the island comes with both challenges and opportunities, and it is critical that all parties take a "Whole of Government" approach to ensure that the benefits to Guam outweigh the costs.

4. The reports of the PRC government launching cyberattacks against U.S. military bases in Guam is unacceptable and alarming. This is a direct threat to our homeland and the American people. This is also a direct threat to stability in the Indo-Pacific and U.S. capacity to deter PRC aggression in the region. It appears these attacks were conducted through what is called the "living off-the land" technique. This involves PRC nationals living on the island and infiltrating Guam's local networks.

Question: What are you and the team doing to address this threat? Can you share with us some of the work being done with federal agencies to prevent future attacks? Why is this threat not only a threat for the military, but also a threat for the residents of Guam?

Response: Being prepared and ready is key. I am working with all critical infrastructure agencies to establish and strengthen their cyber security plans. I have just approved our islandwide cybersecurity plan, and various agency plans will align up this plan. I have also elevated cybersecurity discussions with the highest levels of the Pentagon, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (DHS CISA), and other federal partners to address this concern. My Homeland Security Advisor is engaged with DHS CISA to identify resources and/or funding to support our cyber security priorities. These threats from the PRC put critical infrastructure that the residents of Guam rely on at risk, including telecommunications, healthcare information, financial systems, and critical government websites.