

**Opening remarks delivered by Lieutenant Governor Joshua F. Tenorio**  
***Guam Defense Forum 2025***  
***Thursday, September 18, 2025 8 a.m., Dusit Thani Grand Ballroom***

Hafa Adai and Good Morning. Manana si Yu'os.

Welcome to the second day of the Guam Defense Forum 2025. Yesterday, we confronted the sobering realities of our region: the accelerating shifts in global power, the persistent threats to peace, and the urgent demands they place on our island and our people.

Almost 20 years ago, the agreement between the United States and Japan to realign thousands of Marines from Okinawa to Guam was first made. Studies were established. Community input was gathered. And year after year, the scope and scale of the realignment - the how, the when, and the cost - has evolved and changed so much that what is being executed today is much different in scope to what was initially thought and proposed.

It is true that we are living in a sobering time filled with many, many challenges, but in these challenges it is our duty to fight for opportunities that will improve the quality of life for our people, safeguard our cultural resources and build island resilience.

But there are some lasting truths that have been acknowledged by leaders across the board. An effective and sustainable defense strategy for our nation will depend on the health, security and success of our island and our people - this host community.

We are not just a staging ground or a strategic location. We are a living, breathing, and vibrant community forever tied to our land, our waters, and our way of life. Our collective vision for Guam, our One Guam approach, must recognize that what strengthens the defense mission must also strengthen the people who call Guam home.

This host community, our host community, must have solid, reliable infrastructure, a robust and sustainable economy, and a skilled, educated workforce to keep Guam strong - to keep America strong. We must make our island capable of handling our nation's call to protect and defend our side of the globe to ensure that Guam will continue to stand strong on the frontlines of freedom.

That huge responsibility, that duty to our neighbors, that mission to the world, may be thought of as a lot to ask from such a small island. And it has been asked before. Guam has always welcomed and supported our service members and their families. We value the contributions of our defense partners. We have always understood the mission, not across a fence, but side by side. Because fences can divide, and our approach must rise above them.

Thousands of years ago, our brave ancestors sailed this vast ocean and first stepped foot on these shores, and came to call the island Guahan, derived from the CHamoru words "we have," recognizing the abundant natural resources that would sustain life long into the future. And even today, with all the science we have learned, with all the inventions mastered by geniuses, as far as we've come from the sails and proas that took our ancestors from island to island - Guam retains its identity, this refuge of life.

But our importance - being the largest island in all of Micronesia, our abundance of life-sustaining drinking water, our deep water harbors, our strategic location - became a double edge sword. Because the unfortunate reality is Guam is threatened by the enemies of democracy and the free world. We are yet again in the strategic crosshairs - the intended target for killer missiles and a priority for coordinated cyber attacks. And this is unsettling to our people who desire an unbreakable peace in our homeland and throughout our ocean.

That is the reality of the geopolitics forced upon Guam. It is the burden the people of this American community carry, a burden they have shouldered for generations including that great and painful sacrifice - the loss of 10% of our population, our families and loved ones, lost to violence and illness during World War II. And this burden is the moral direction and compass for Guam's leadership, guiding our local efforts and response surrounding this new period of militarization.

Our One Guam approach means that the defense mission cannot succeed unless it also strengthens civilian life. A new hospital, safe drinking water, resilient energy, cyber protection, reliable communication systems, modernized ports and road networks are not luxuries - they are requirements that support the vibrancy and survival of our entire community as much as the effectiveness of our service members.

Peace through strength does not only mean weapons and warfighters. It means Guam can withstand natural disasters, recovering quickly, and serving as a trusted partner in the Pacific. It means our people, indigenous and migrant, civilian and military, share in the benefits of progress, and not just the burdens of policy.

That is why I speak of civil responsibility. Defense is not only about bases and budgets. It is about housing costs, labor supply, cultural resources, and the daily lives of families outside the fence. Unless the buildup works for the community, it will not endure.

Billions of dollars have been invested in Guam's defense infrastructure, and rightly so. But that investment must be coupled and matched with investments to Guam's civilian infrastructure. A strong Guam is a strategic asset. A struggling Guam places the mission at risk.

Just a few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to discuss Guam's needs with our federal partners-how critical support from federal agencies and Congress would be in our quest to build a new hospital. The needs of a modern medical facility capable of serving civilian citizens and military servicemembers during times of peace, preparation, war, and mass casualty crisis has been underscored by both the Department of War and the GAO.

But there are other key projects to move forward with as well.

Improving our power grid will benefit our residents and businesses, and will also minimize interruptions for critical military programs and missions. As Typhoon Mawar taught us, installing major power transmission lines underground will make recovery faster, and create a needed redundancy to respond to weather-related and manmade damage.

And as Mawar also showed, a telecommunications blackout does a disservice to the mom trying to make sure her daughter is fine just as much as a submarine commander trying to get help from his home base. Safe drinking water must be assured through effective capital investment - and threats to Guam's residents from contaminants must be eliminated.

Upgrading and repairing our seaport facilities with new cranes will help with construction and cargo movement, and prevent costly delays for important capital projects needed to harden Guam. And the movement of cargo, supplies, and personnel will be easier and safer through critical improvements to major bridges and highways like Marine Corps Drive, the backroad to Andersen, and Routes 9 and 17.

A strong Guam, resilient against natural disasters, ready to defend against cyber attacks, and positioned as a key partner in the Pacific certainly will preserve peace throughout the region.

Recently I had the chance to participate in the Pacific Islands Forum, an organization where Guam is now an associate member and no longer just an observer. This coalition of Pacific island nations provides yet another avenue to work with our neighbors to address interconnectivity, commercial air and sea transportation, reliable communications, sea level rise and other concerns shared across the Pacific. This work is important and advances Guam's responsibility to promote unity and peace in our region.

Whether we're talking about base infrastructure upgrades and installations, or missile defense mechanisms and stationing throughout the island, there is nothing more important to our success than how we will proceed together - in a collaborative partnership with Guam that incorporates our peoples' success into the overall mission.

At the end of the day, Guam's priorities are nonpartisan. No matter who leads in Washington, our island's role remains the same: America's lynchpin in the Indo-Pacific. And together, we must ensure that role is fulfilled with fairness, foresight, and respect for the people of Guam.

So as we begin today's discussions, let us commit to three tasks:

1. Address the risks the buildup heightens;
2. Maximize the opportunities it creates;
3. Minimize the mystery by keeping our people fully informed and engaged.

Because whether your roots trace back to the first CHamoru voyagers, or to the families that recovered and expanded Guam's economy, or to those serving in uniform today, we all share stewardship of this island, which is our home. Protecting Guam means more than defending against enemies of democracy, it means uplifting our community, safeguarding our environment, and ensuring prosperity for generations.

So to our federal, military, and industry partners: Guam stands ready. Guam is committed. And Guam believes in the mission.

But we must build together - not just for defense, but for our dignity; not just for strategic gain, but for sustainable growth; not just inside the fence, but across the island we all share and call home.

Because only together as “One Guam” can we defend what matters most.

Si Yu’os ma’ase, and welcome again to this final day of the 2025 Guam Defense Forum.

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