

Guam Defense Forum 2025

Opening Remarks

September 17, 2025

Hâfa Adai, Mahalo Nui, Lotu Wo, and a very good morning to each of you.

Distinguished leaders from the Department of War, esteemed representatives from our federal agencies, our honorable senators, mayors, leaders of the government of Guam, community members, NGOs, industry partners, and most especially the men and women in uniform who serve with honor and distinction—on behalf of the people of Guam, it is my privilege to welcome you to the first Guam Defense Forum.

Your presence here underscores Guam's critical role as America's front line in the Pacific, and equally, as a home where families live, work, and serve with pride in advancing peace, prosperity, freedom, and stability across the Indo-Pacific.

Whether you know Guam's history well or only by its line item in a budget, one truth is clear: We are the only U.S. territory in the Western Pacific with the land, location, and infrastructure to project power, sustain forces, and safeguard the freedom of maritime navigation and the democratic values that flow with it. From Andersen Air Force Base to Naval Base Guam, and the newly established Camp Blaz, we host the platforms that can reach any point in the Indo-Pacific within hours. Without Guam, the defense of the Pacific—and the security of the United States—would be far weaker and Guam would be weaker too.

This forum convenes at a pivotal moment. The challenges we face—in security, infrastructure, and healthcare—remind us that Guam's resilience and strength are inseparable from the well-being of our people. Defense is not measured by military power alone, but by the ability of a community to withstand adversity, recover swiftly, and prosper with dignity.

Unlike any other place in the nation, Guam has lived the consequences of strategic competition among the great powers of history for generations.

During the Spanish Colonial era, our people were nearly annihilated—our language, culture, and survival brought to the edge of extinction.

And...

At the height of the Second World War, our parents endured the brutality of an occupation they did not choose—sustained only by the hope that one day they would be free.

These are not just historical wounds, they are lessons...

They remind us that resilience must be planned, not left to chance—that preparing ourselves is wiser than expecting others to prepare on our behalf.

So if Guam is once again to stand the watch so our nation can be safe and free, our own quality of life must also be secured. Let me be clear: there is no national security without human security—without hospitals that heal, schools that teach, utilities that sustain, cyber systems that defend, and homes and jobs that keep families safe. Guam has carried this burden of peace and the promise of prosperity faithfully for generations. And we do not shrink from it now. But partnership cannot mean token recognition—it must mean tangible investment. The United States cannot rely on Guam without also uplifting Guam. We expect not charity, but fairness. If our island is to secure the nation, the nation must help us secure ourselves, especially from the impacts of defense-related activities.

That is why today's focus on civil-military engagement is so important. Solutions to our most pressing issues—modernizing infrastructure, strengthening healthcare, preparing our island for the future—demand a whole-of-government approach, where federal, territorial, military, and civilian leaders work in unison.

We must also acknowledge the recent Record of Decision by the Missile Defense Agency. While I remain dissatisfied with both the outcome and the process, I am committed—as Governor—to ensuring Guam's voice is heard and our concerns addressed. Protecting Guam must mean more than defending its geography; it must also mean safeguarding its people—their health, safety, and dignity. I will continue to advocate for solutions that reflect both Guam's strategic importance and the worth of its people.

These issues taken together are why we have called on senior officials, including Secretary Hegseth, to convene the Economic Adjustment Committee in Congress—so urgent needs can be met with the highest level of federal coordination.

Guam is not just limestone, dirt, and sand in the Pacific. It is the birthplace of our CHamoru people—where our ancestors built homes, told stories, and planted hope. As their heirs, we will continue to fulfill our duty to the security of this nation. But we must also be clear: the nation we love must meet its duty to us. Defense cannot be one-sided. Our people deserve the same security, dignity, and opportunity as the citizens we defend.

Progress is not born from perfect agreement, but from respect—even in our differences. When we engage with dignity, listen in good faith, and seek common ground, we move forward together. That is how we will strengthen our island, serve our people, and advance a prosperous Guam within a secure Indo-Pacific.

As Governor, I pledge myself to this vision and to the partnerships that make it possible. Together, let us ensure our work here not only meets the needs of today but also lays the foundation for generations to come.

I thank you for your leadership, your service, and your steadfast commitment to Guam and our region. May our discussions be fruitful, our debates respectful, and our shared purpose enduring.

As we say in our CHamoru culture, “I Hinanao-ta, i mas takhilo’ na guinaiya-ta”—“Our journey is guided by our greatest love.” Let that love be for our people, our island, and for freedom and democracy.

Welcome to Guam. Welcome to the Guam Defense Forum. Si Yu'os Ma'åse, and may this gathering bring lasting blessings to our island and the Indo-Pacific.

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