

The Gravity of Militarization

Ati adeng-miyu His Excellency Mr. Madhu Raman Acharya, Chairman of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee and Members of the United Nations Fourth Committee,

Guahu si Julian Aguon. I address you this afternoon on behalf of I Nasion Chamoru, which has commissioned me to convey to you the gravity of our current situation in light of the militarization convulsing the Asia-Pacific region.

As I speak, the indigenous people of the longest colonized island in the Pacific Ocean are bracing our selves against a storm of military buildup so volatile in nature, so irreversible in consequence, and set to begin next year. US military realignment in the region seeks to homeport sixty percent of its Pacific Fleet in and around our ancient archipelago.

With no input from the Chamoru people and over our deepening dissent, the US will flood its modern colony with 55,000 people as part of realignment plans. This figure is said to include the 8,000 US Marines and their 9,000 dependents being ousted by our outraged friends in Okinawa. Joining 35,000 US military personnel and their dependents is an outside labor force estimated upwards of 20,000 workers on construction contracts. The Navy recently suggested that six more nuclear submarines will be added to the three already stationed in Guam. There is talk of development of a monstrous Global Strike Force and a sixth aircraft carrier. Deputy Commander of the US Pacific Command Daniel Leaf recently informed us of other programs in the works to establish a strike and intelligence surveillance reconnaissance hub at Andersen Air Force Base.

Though exaggerated, this buildup only complements the impressive Air Force and Navy show of force occupying one-third of our 212 square mile island already. This influx will have devastating consequences on the Chamorus of Guam, who make up only 37% of the 171,000 people living in Guam and who already suffer the signature maladies of a colonial condition. It threatens to put out the fire of our half century struggle to attain some true measure of self-government, the fire of which you are the trusted guardians.

To date, no social or environmental impact study has been done to assess the burdens this buildup will place on the island. Recent fact-finding missions in Okinawa reveal alarmingly high rates of societal violence, including hundreds of rapes and acts of violence against the women of Okinawa. It is reasonable to think our women will face a similar fate. Meanwhile, US Department of Defense officials state nothing definite except that Guam is to be a faster response hub to the loose and alleged threats that are China and North Korea. A mysterious master plan said to detail the transfer has yet to be presented to Guam leaders though it has been promised three times. Our officials wait with bated breath. Of the 10.3 billion dollars settled upon by the US and Japan, nothing has been said as to whether or not this money will be used to improve our flailing infrastructure. Just this June, the largest joint military exercise in recent history conducted what has been casually called war games off our waters. 22,000 US military

personnel, 30 ships, and 280 aircraft partook in “Valiant Shield.” That weekend, water was cut off to a number of villages on the Navy water line. The people of those villages went some thirty out of sixty days without running water.

The suggestion of late is that Guam is expected to foot the bill of this re-occupation. Meetings with defense officials have proved empty. Military officers we have met with inform us only of their inability to commit to anything. In effect, they repeat that they have no working plans to spend money on civilian projects. Dollars tied to this transfer have been allocated to development only within the bases. Two multimillion dollar contracts have been pre-awarded to two American-based companies; one from California, one from Virginia. Money for education in the territory will again be allocated to schools for children of US military personnel and not ours. Meanwhile, virtually every public sector in Guam is being threatened with privatization. Public education in Guam is under duress; local teachers have been threatened with pay less paydays for the last three months and counting. The burden on the Guam Public School System is made heavier by the US failure to justly compensate Guam for shouldering the costs of its compacts of free association with Micronesian states, which strain our limited resources.

There is talk of plans to condemn more of our land to accommodate its accelerated military needs. In contrast, there is no talk of plans to clean up radioactive contaminations of Guam from toxins leftover from its World War II activities and its intense nuclear bombing campaign of the Marshall Islands only 1200 miles from Guam. No word either on whether or not it plans to pay war reparations due to us since it forgave Japan of its crimes of World War II. Bills seeking compensation for both our exposure to radioactive material and our endurance of Japanese concentration camps during the war await congressional action. Our elders continue to die waiting.

But this scene is an old one.

What is happening now – this vulgar re-occupation – is happening without our consent. Like an awful re-run of WWII – when the US unilaterally forgave Japan its horrific war crimes on our people – the US is at the table again with Japan, negotiating away our right to self-determination. Beyond the B-2 bombers in our skies, the ships playing war games in our waters, the additional weapons of mass destruction, and the contamination that has robbed us of so many loved ones by way of our extraordinarily high rates of every kind of radioactivity related cancer, there is a growing desperation back home. A desperate lethargy is in the wind. A realization that if the UN remains unable to slow the manic speed of US militarization, Chamorus as a people will pass.

Only last year we were here, informing you of two very frightening facts: 1) it was recently discovered that the US Department of Interior purposefully killed a presidential directive handed down in 1975. The directive ordered that Guam be given a commonwealth status no less favorable than the one the US was negotiating with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands at that time; and 2) a campaign of the Guam Chamber of Commerce (primarily consisting of US Statesiders) to privatize every one of Guam’s public resources (the island’s only water provider, only power provider, only local telephone provider, public schools, and its only port, on an island that imports 85-90% of its food and where private monopolies of public goods would truly

make us captive to the forces of the market) is undermining our indigenous civilization with violent speed.

Not much has changed since we last were here. Our power provider has been privatized, our telecommunications sold. Our only water provider and one port are under attack. Honorable members: know this. The people of Guam are not unified around this military buildup despite dominant media representations. For all intents and purposes, there is no free press in Guam. Local media only makes noise of the re-occupation, not sense of it.

The Pacific Daily News – the American subsidiary newspaper that dominates the discourse – has cut off the oxygen supply to civil society. Rather than debating this buildup's enormous sociopolitical, environmental and cultural consequences, it has framed the conversation around how best to ask the US (politely) for *de facto* consideration of our concerns. Without appearing un-American, in its endless genuflection toward corporate America, it has privileged potential short-term economic stimulus over every other sociological concern. Dismissed the dream of a decolonized Guam and the people courageous enough to build it. In light of the purpose of the Fourth Committee, we urge you to heed the deepening opposition, uncertainty, and insecurity around this buildup.

We need your help to turn the world's eye to Guam, so that, at the very least, our sisters and brothers can see us before we are ghosts.

The last few weeks on the General Assembly floor have tested our insides. Diplomats from all over have addressed the UN, many rightfully outraged at the imperial appetite of the US and how badly it is starving human hearts of hope. We are here to echo the truth on the floor: the aggressive militarization of our world is laying humanity a premature grave. And we find that unacceptable.

We urge you to pass a resolution condemning this massive military transfer and buildup of Guam as a grave breach of duty on the part of the Administering Power, in no less explicit terms. But we come for another reason apart from our rage. As an indigenous people, we come to offer prayer. That you keep your moral courage close. That you continue to believe that what we are doing here, these words, are the better way. Even when cynicism is winning the day. Even – especially – when words have lost so devastatingly much of their meaning.

– *Sinangan Si Julian Aguon*
Ginnen I Nasion Chamoru