

# 'Make America Secure'

## Media, militarism, and climate change in the Marianas Archipelago

**Abstract:** The 2018 *Make America Secure Appropriations Act* is the latest United States federal policy which prioritises funds for defence projects at the expense of climate change adaptation planning in the Marianas Archipelago. Since 2006, the US Department of Defense (DoD) has released six Environmental Impact Statement documents which outline construction of bombing ranges on the islands of Guam, Pagan and Tinian. Expanding militarisation of the archipelago is supported by US-owned media through the narrative of pro-American ideologies which frames any resistance as unpatriotic. However, both non-voting US Congress representatives for Guam and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) express concerns with how federal funds are prioritised for military projects instead of climate change adaptation. Further, Indigenous Chamorro and Refaluwasch peoples of the Marianas continue to resist by creating content on alternative digital media platforms and through lawsuits supported by the *National Environmental Protection Act* against the DoD and Department of the Navy. This article illustrates how remaining as insular areas of the US directly dictates the lack of sovereignty the people of the Marianas have in planning for climate change.

**Keywords:** Asia-Pacific Pivot, climate change, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas (CNMI), Guam (Guåhan), media, militarisation, resistance

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### **An insular archipelago**

UNITED STATES militarisation projects in the Marianas Archipelago are prioritised and financed by federal funding at the expense of climate change adaptation planning. This is possible through the political division of the archipelago and insular area status (Office of Insular Affairs, 2015). The two US insular areas include The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the 'unincorporated territory' of Guam (Guåhan) (Borja, 2015; Taitano, 2015). Remaining as non-self-governing possessions is a violation of international law which denies the local community self-determination and greatly hinders the region's ability to formulate climate change mitigation projects (Aguon, 2011). Conversely, the US Department of Defense (DoD) claims that if the residents, who are US citizens, gained more political power,

this would 'compromise' the island's strategic value as a military colony (Clement, 2011, p. 34). Therefore, the local governments of the Marianas Archipelago continue to remain dependent on US federal funds and lack sovereignty and control over their resources (Schwebel, 2018). The US militarisation plans for the region occur without the consent of the local community and is a diversion of funds and energies from climate change resiliency planning and adaptation projects (Natividad & Leon Guerrero, 2010, p. 3).

In July 2017, the *Make America Secure Appropriations Act of 2018*, which provides the US Department of Defense (DoD) with funding for defence related projects on Guam, passed in the US Congress 235 to 192. Guam's non-voting US Congresswoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo issued a statement that this

... additional funding should not come at the expense of our non-defense accounts and I remain concerned about over-reliance on budget gimmicks such as OCO [Overseas Contingency Operations]. I am deeply concerned that the bill handcuffs federal action to safeguard our ocean and coastal resources by defunding the government-wide National Ocean Policy. We need to make thoughtful investments by the federal government in Guam's future. I will continue my work in Congress to safeguard our ocean resources, fisheries, and island and we must take commonsense steps necessary to address threats to ocean health like climate change. (Bordallo, 2017, July 27)

While Congresswoman Bordallo will continue to 'work in Congress', her non-voting position due to Guam's political status limits her power and sovereignty over how federal funds are used and directed. While the DoD acknowledges that climate change is a 'threat', it continues to invest billions of dollars into construction of bases in locations susceptible to climate change (Mooney & Dennis, 2018). These military projects in the Marianas Archipelago are outlined in numerous Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) which have previously been found to be in violation of the United States *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) (Alexander, 2015, p. 5). Due to the continued colonial political status of the Marianas Archipelago, the region and local communities are excluded from climate resiliency and adaptation programmes, and instead are tasked with responding to military plans.

There are designated US federal funds allocated for the Pacific through the five-year Pacific-American Climate Fund (PACAM). Headquartered in the Philippines, the PACAM programme provides grants for civil society organisation 'to reduce long-term vulnerabilities associated with climate change' in 12 countries impacting 8.5 million people in the Pacific. These island states include the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, the Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Sāmoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and

Vanuatu (Pacific-American Climate Fund, 2018). However, because of political status, PACAM does not extend to Guam or the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Instead, as outlined by the 2018 *Keep America Secure Act* and concerns raised by non-voting Congresswoman Bordallo, the US federal government finances and funds militarisation expansion at the expense of climate change resiliency planning or adaptation projects in the Marianas Archipelago.

### **United States-owned media**

The issues of political status and expanding militarisation are ignored by continental US (national) media with the narrative controlled by US-owned outlets in the archipelago (Dalisyay, 2014, p. 12). While the local community resists through alternative media outlets and through legal means, the US-owned media outlets and the US military in the archipelago frame this resistance as ‘unpatriotic’ (Tanji, 2012, p. 109). Further, Chamorro and Refaluwasch understandings of climate change and views for adaptation and resiliency planning remain on the margins.

The largest newspaper on Guam, the *Pacific Daily News*, began in 1947 as the military publication, *The Navy News* and is currently owned by *USA Today*. A Washington-state based researcher found the *Pacific Daily News* ‘serve[s] to hegemonically maintain Guam’s society as an unincorporated American territory’ and employs ‘discursive strategies... to rally support for pro-American ideologies’ (Dalisyay, 2009, pp. 239-240).

Therefore, Chamorro grassroots organisations use alternative outlets and new media platforms to provide space for ‘those who would otherwise not have a voice against oppression’ and reach audiences beyond mainstream media outlets (Cruz III & Somera, 2016, p. 21). New media and visual methods are increasingly used across the Pacific to highlight Indigenous strategies to promote community-based climate change adaptation (Inamara & Thomas, 2017).

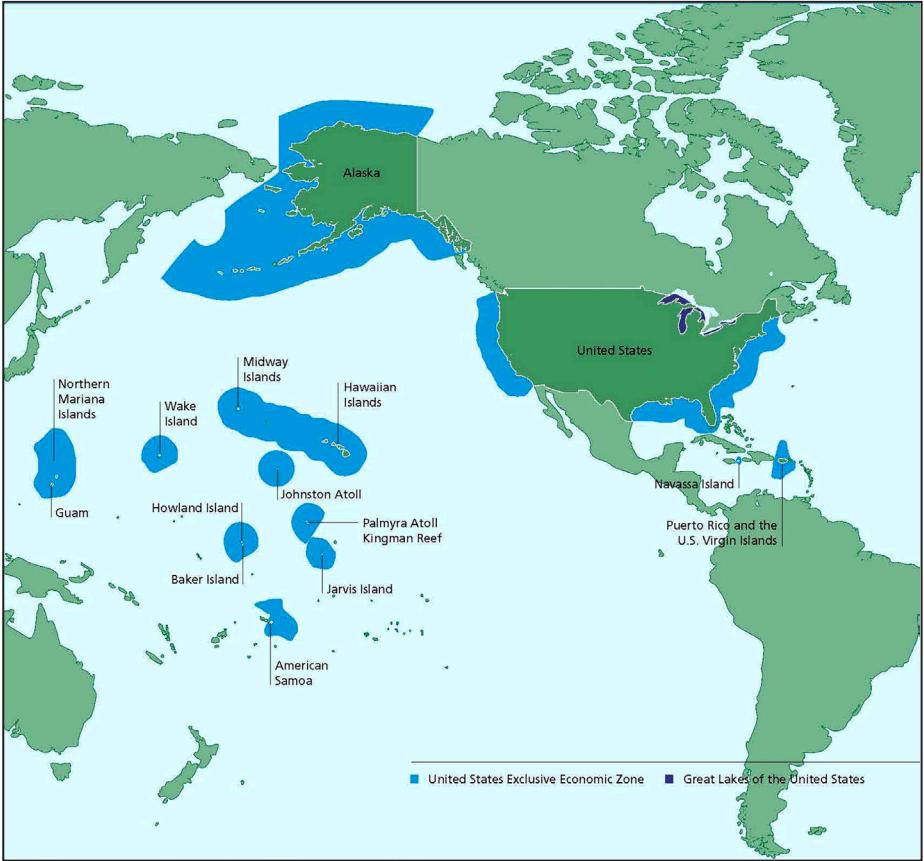
While the local community seeks to formulate plans for climate change adaptation, the US federal government and the DoD control how funding is allocated and consistently prioritise military projects (Green & Skeelee, 2014; Prasad, 1994). Within media discourses, there is no discussion of the role that militaries play in *contributing* to climate change or how current plans *divert* funding from climate change adaptation projects. Reinforced by US-owned media, it is within this militarised and colonial context that climate change planning and policies are controlled. Ignoring the local communities’ sovereignty and perspective on climate change continues to be a contemporary challenge across the region (Bryan-Tokalau, 2018).

### **‘Blue colonisation’ and the ‘Pacific Pathway’**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration renders the United

States ‘a Pacific nation and a Pacific power’ (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2011). As an ‘Ocean Nation’, the security of the US is framed as controlling the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) extending 200 nautical miles offshore of US states and territories (Figure 1). This encompasses diverse ecosystems and vast natural resources. The US EEZ is the largest in the world, spanning over 13,000 miles of coastline and containing 3.4 million square nautical miles of ocean—larger than the combined landmass of all 50 states (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2011).

The US continues to privatise and militarise the EEZs and the greater Pacific region, recognising the economic value of the EEZs and the importance of US control over the ‘Pacific Pathway’ (Polk, 2017, p. 1; also see C. S. Perez, 2014). Through conservation efforts and the establishment of ‘Marine Protected Areas’, the DoD is able to use these spaces for war training and weapon testing, as it is exempt from environmental protections (Cagurangan, 2017). Chamorro poet and



**Figure 1: The United States Exclusive Economic Zones.**

**Source:** [www.gc.noaa.gov/documents/2011/012711\\_gcil\\_maritime\\_eez\\_map.pdf](http://www.gc.noaa.gov/documents/2011/012711_gcil_maritime_eez_map.pdf)



Figure 2: 'US Pacific Command Area of Responsibility', p. ES-2, 2015.  
 Source: [www.cnmijointmilitarytrainingeis.com/documents](http://www.cnmijointmilitarytrainingeis.com/documents)

scholar Craig Santos Perez argues on the alternative new media outlet, *Hawaiian Independent*, this 'blue capitalism' occurs through the creation of 'national monuments' and 'protected areas', which are easier to 'secure and protect [US] shipping and military routes, as well as to issue licenses and leases for maritime investment and development projects' (2015a, p. 3). Within these ocean conservation frameworks, climate change resiliency policies and adaptation projects are not included (Jones, 2016).

The Pacific Ocean is also viewed as a 'strategic water barrier' protecting the continental US from potential enemies (Na'puti & Frain, 2017, p. 14). Current US military sites and training ranges span the 64 million square miles of Pacific Ocean. There are more than 160 US military installations throughout the Pacific region that fall under the authority of the US Pacific Command (PACOM), headquartered on O'ahu, Hawai'i (K. L. Camacho, 2011, p. xii; Genz et al., 2016). The Mariana Islands, as well as Aotearoa New Zealand, are included within PACOM's area of responsibility, with more than 3.5 billion people, 36 nation-states and 20 territories and 10 possessions of the US in the region (Keating, 2008) (Figure 2).

The US military base network in the Pacific today 'serves to maintain the hierarchy of power and privilege created as a result of World War II' (Carroll & Calhoun, 2001, p. 27). Both US bases and weapons training complexes extend beyond the US EEZs with foreign US bases in Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, South Korea and, most recently, Australia's Northern Territory (Vine, 2015, p. 7). The base network especially occupies the landscapes, seascapes and airspace of the Pacific insular areas and 'quasi-colonies' of the United States: American Sāmoa, Hawai'i, Johnston Atoll, Wake Island, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia (Davis, 2011, p. 221). Micronesia is part of the US militarised 'imperial archipelago' with 52 bases, installations, and outposts (C. S. Perez, 2015b, p. 619). The irony of the continuing imperial ideology is that the US continues to use insular locations for militaristic purposes to support US forces worldwide in the name of 'freedom' and 'democracy' while denying the island residents self-determination (Dardani, 2017, pp. 34-35).

The history of the archipelago includes the systematic implementation of DoD projects too risky for the continental US (Winchester, 2015). The militarisation of the Marianas Archipelago has been consistently explained in the name of US 'national security' (US Marine Corps Forces Pacific, 2015). While the DoD recognises climate change as a 'significant and direct threat' to the US military itself, it continues investment into military projects at installations in high risk zones across the Asia-Pacific, which many in the region see as directly preventing local expertise from practical climate change resiliency planning (Foley, 2012; Mooney & Dennis, 2018; Reuters, 2016).

## The Asia-Pacific Pivot

The Asia-Pacific Pivot foreign policy advances the US economic agenda through the DoD (C. S. Perez, 2015a, p. 3). US military advisers at the Pentagon, defence corporation lobbyists and neoconservative leaders in Washington, DC promote the militarisation of the Asia Pacific region. According to the former US Secretary of Defense, Ashton B. Carter, the DoD is ‘realigning’, ‘rebalancing’ and ‘refocusing’ US foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific since the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan are ‘winding down’ (Carter, 2013).

In 2006, a ‘bilateral’ decision between the US and Japan was formalised as the United States-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation Agreement. This Roadmap comes with a price tag of US\$10.2 billion with Japan contributing US\$6 billion (US Secretary of State Rice, US Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Aso, & Japanese Minister of State for Defense Nukaga, 2006). In addition to the returning military hardware and personnel, all departments of the armed forces repositioning in the Asia-Pacific region will need to maintain a ‘forward presence’ and require locations for Live-Fire Training Range Complexes (LFTRCs) or bombing ranges (US Marine Corps Forces Pacific, 2015). The original Roadmap included relocating 8,000 Marines and 9,000 Marine dependents from Okinawa to Guam, which would cause the population of Guam to become 42 percent US military (Bevacqua & Bowman, 2016, p. 79).

While the DoD pledges to ‘clean-up’ former sites in the Roadmap agreement, the environmental track record in the Pacific indicates otherwise (Chan, 2015; Zucker, 1984). To clean up DoD locations in Hawai‘i, American Sāmoa, Guam, and the CNMI, the US Army Corps of Engineers receive between US\$12-15 million every year. Hawai‘i’s former Waikoloa Training Range is estimated to cost \$723 million alone, with an additional US\$1.7 billion needed (Hofschneider, 2016a). Guam’s funding rate is four percent, while other states and territories receive 16 percent to clean up former military sites (*ibid*, 2016). Thus far, Guam has received US\$12 million with an additional US\$113 million needed (Hofschneider, 2016). The CNMI received ‘only’ about US\$43 million, with at least US\$51 million more needed (2016). This demonstrates not only the environmental contamination but also the enormous cost and amount of work to ‘clean up’ the former military sites. Many of these efforts take years (if ever) to complete, and the methods of the clean up process remain inconsistent and controversial (Bordallo, 2017, January 5). Sites that are classified as ‘hazardous, toxic, and radioactive’ get priority, with more located in the CNMI than Guam. In addition, these are only the sites that the DoD has recognised and agreed to address (Bordallo, 2017, January 18). The US federal government is not obligated to clean-up munitions used during war, and there is no way to know how much is left, and no plan to clean it up (Hofschneider, 2016a). Today, there continues

to be concerned about the toxicity levels on Guam relating to the improper disposal of chemical weapon Agent Orange during the Vietnam War (Andrews, 2017; Dimond, 2013). The veterans who participated and witnessed the disposal are sceptical about the ‘accuracy’ of the testing by the DoD (O’Connor, 2018). Instead, members of the community believe funds used to ‘clean-up’ former military sites could be used for climate change resiliency and adaptation programmes (personal communication, May 6, 2018).

### **Continual militarisation**

Rather than directly addressing and cleaning up toxins from previous wars, the DoD is developing Guam as a ‘strategic hub’ and will transform the island into a ‘forward base’ (US Marine Corps Forces Pacific, 2015). The plan establishes a Global Strike Force on Guam involving 48 F-22 and F-15E fighter jets, six B-1, B-2, and B-52 bombers and adding as many as six nuclear submarines to the three already home-based on Guam. Sixty percent of the Navy’s Pacific Fleet will be based on Guam (Leon Guerrero, Borja, Perez, & Castro, 2006, p. 5). As a highly militarised space, Guam is considered the ‘Tip of the Spear’ and an ‘unsinkable aircraft carrier’ that hosts the US Pacific Air Forces’ continuous bomber presence mission (Pacific Air Force Public Affairs Headquarters, 2016). Within the Asia-Pacific region, ‘all of the Pentagon roadmaps lead to Guam’, and it is the ‘largest refuelling point outside the US for all military forces’ (Insular Empire, 2011; New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade • Manatū Aorere, 2016). This is highly significant, as the DoD is the largest ‘institutional consumer of oil in the world’ (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2016). In 2014 alone, the DoD used over 87 million barrels of fuel, costing nearly US\$14 billion (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, n.d.). Yet, Guam’s military installations are among the five most vulnerable of the US military base network according to a 2012 report by the American Security Project, a think tank in Washington, DC (Foley, 2012). The DoD plans to construct a LFTRC adjacent to the only Wildlife Refuge on the island, Nasion lihing lina’la’ machålik gi halmo tåno’ yan tasi- puntan Litekyan, or Ritidian National Wildlife Refuge (K. L. Camacho, 2008; Frain, 2016; Na’puti & Frain, 2017, pp. 31, note 29; Carson, 2014).

Due to the ‘limited landmass’ of Guam, however, the DoD cannot fulfil the ‘42 joint training deficiencies’ (US Marine Corps Forces Pacific, 2015). Therefore, additional war exercises and weapons testing must take place in the CNMI. The northern two-thirds of the island of Tinian and the entire island of Pagan are ‘needed’ for LFTRCs for the Navy, Air Force, Army, and Marines (Zotomayor, 2015) (Figure 3). In addition to the LFTRCs, the DoD intends to use Tinian and Pagan for ammunition storage and Saipan as a location for troop ‘R&R’ (rest and recuperation, rest and relaxation, or rest and recreation) (Limtiaco, 2012).





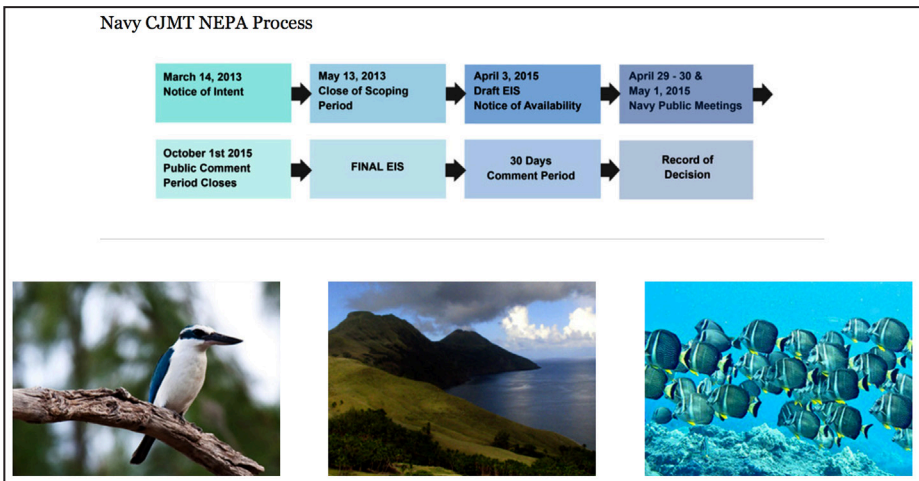
This would give the DoD control over 25 percent of the CNMI landmass and would prevent freedom of navigation between islands (Chamorro.com, 2016).

The 2015 report, *The US Asia-Pacific Rebalance, National Security and Climate Change*, by The Center for Climate and Security suggests that the Asia-Pacific Pivot Strategy ‘is an important reaffirmation that the United States is and will remain a Pacific power’ (Werrell & Femia, 2015, p. 9). While the Indo-Asia-Pacific region is the ‘most disaster-prone area of the world’, with five of the world’s nuclear powers and seven of the ten of the world’s largest standing militaries, the proposed solution is US control of the Marianas Archipelago through increased militarisation (Werrell & Femia, 2015 p. 14). The report ignores the implications of the military projects and the direct amplification of destruction to endangered species habitats, coral reefs, coastal erosion and the contamination of freshwater systems and limestone forests. This oversight is in violation of law 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq., the *National Environmental Policy Act* designed to protect people from harmful environmental actions by federal agencies and to prevent the military from engaging in operations harmful to US civilians (United States Environmental Protection Agency, [1970] 2017). The Indigenous Chamorro and Refaluwasch peoples of the archipelago are US citizens and ‘protectors and defenders’ of their environment who continue to resist expanding US militarisation through alternative media and legal means (Frain, 2017, 2016, March 3; Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2017).

### **The National Environmental Policy Act**

The Department of Defense is required to follow the legal frameworks of the US *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) to evaluate the environmental and related social and economic effects of their proposed actions in the form of Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) documents. The military is also required by NEPA to provide opportunities for public reviews and comments of those documents. However, there is no additional legal framework to directly ensure that the DoD incorporates and considers the communities’ comments (Figure 4).

Since 2006, the DoD has released a ‘series of apparently independent proposals that worked to hide the cumulative impacts from the public and local governments and ignore the cumulative environmental impacts and threats of climate change, (Chamorro.com, 2016). Separate documents reveal plans for Guam and for CNMI. Each EIS document costs an estimated US\$25 million (US Marine Corps Forces Pacific, 2015). Subcategories include the Draft Environmental Impact Statements (DEIS), Overseas Environmental Impact Statements (OEIS), Supplementary Environmental Impact Statements (SEIS), Environmental Assessments (EA) and Overseas Environmental Assessment (OEA). The final document required by NEPA is called the Record of Decision (ROD).



**Figure 4: Outlining the Navy’s Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands Joint Military Training (CJMT) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.**  
 Source: [www.cnmieis.org](http://www.cnmieis.org)

The size and technicality of these documents, coupled with culturally inappropriate public forums with short timeframes and controlled avenues for submitting ‘comments’, highlight the imperial and militarised experiences of the people of the Mariana Islands (Cabrera, Kaipat, Marsh-Taitano, & Perez, 2015). The Aotearoa-based blog, *Non-Plastic Māori*, has addressed this intentional separation as ‘unbundling’ (Ngata, 2016, October 18). When there is a large activity that, when viewed in its entirety, would ‘undoubtedly cause concern, corporations [US Military] will break the activity up and apply for consent applications for each constituent activity... In this way, the actual impacts are shrouded within a more drawn out, convoluted process. Assessors, and the community, are incrementally lulled into accepting a state of affairs that would be absurd if originally assessed in its entirety’ (Ngata, 2016). In addition, these federal funds, local resources and international expertise in preparation and response to the military planning and EIS documents could be used for climate change resiliency planning and adaptation projects, according to local community members.

The six highly technical and often contradictory EIS documents describe the impacts of the proposed construction, training, and testing that often violate or disregard NEPA. Additional relevant protection US federal protection laws include the *Endangered Species Act*, the *Migratory Bird Act* and the *Marine Mammal Protection Act* (Na‘puti & Bevacqua, 2015, p. 850). The EIS documents underestimate and omit impacts on local communities, particularly surrounding environmental justice, including protection of coral reefs, marshlands, and limestone forests—important natural structures which can mitigate climate change,

and instead threaten freshwater supplies, already vulnerable due to climate change, with munition pollution.

The 2009 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Guam and Mariana Islands Military Relocation: Relocating Marines from Okinawa, Japan to Guam is 11,000 pages. It includes nine volumes and 22 chapters. It took more than five years to create and is the longest in US history. Local government officials working on the draft had to sign non-disclosure agreements 'punishable by federal penalties' if violated (L. T. Camacho, 2013a; 2013b, p. 185). The public and local agencies were only given 45 days to comment. The community expressed their outrage and opposed the project verbally at the 'public hearings' administered by the DoD and through over 10,000 written comments, second only to the 30,000 produced by residents in the CNMI in 2015 (Na'puti & Bevacqua, 2015, p. 846). In February 2010, the US Environmental Protection Agency conducted a mandatory review of the DEIS, giving the document the lowest possible rating: 'Unsatisfactory: Inadequate information (EU3)' (Alexander, 2015, p. 5). Despite the communities' negative response, the 'dominant media discourse would have us believe that the majority of residents in Guam were in support of the military buildup' (Viernes, 2007, p. 111).

In April 2015, an additional 1,400-paged EIS document titled the *Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Joint Military Training* (CJMT) was released. This proposes the creation of Live-Fire Training Range Complexes (LFTRCs) or bombing ranges on the islands of Guam, Pagan and Tinian, and the use of the beaches for amphibious landings and the sea around the islands for war exercises and sonar testing.

The 2015 CJMT document outlines the Navy plans for Tinian for 20 weeks of live-fire training and 22 weeks a year of non-live activity, including munitions storage, danger zones and airspace and sea space restrictions. The military wants to employ the entire island of Pagan as a high-level bombing range for exercises from the land, air, and sea, including 'guns-blazing war games' for at least 16 weeks a year (Cloud, 2015). However, the document includes the possibility of such activity 40 weeks per year on Pagan and 45 weeks on Tinian (Hofschneider, 2016c). Similarly, as for the EIS for Guam in 2010, the 2015 US Environmental Protection Agency review of the document expressed concern over the 'significant impacts to environmental justice for the population', specifically drinking water systems, munitions contamination and degradation of coral resources and wetlands (Johnson, 2015).

After the release of this large and highly technical CJMT document, and as required by NEPA, the US military provided only 30 days for the public to submit written or verbal comments from elected officials, governmental agencies, the private-sector, businesses, community organisations and the general public. However, Super Typhoon Soudelor, considered the 'world's powerful storm in 2015', devastated the island of Saipan during the 'comment period' of the EIS

(ABC News, 2015). The DoD extended the deadline for comments from 30 to 90 days for the community to respond, as the island was without power, internet and fresh water supplies were problematic (Pinaroc, 2015a). This event demonstrates the diversion from focusing on climate change the immediate impacts and forces the community to instead use resources and energies to challenge US militarisation.

During this period, the DoD held (and controlled) culturally inappropriate open-house style public meetings at schools on Saipan and Tinian. In order to speak at the meeting, local residents had to register in advance and verbal comments were limited to ‘only three-minutes’ (Pinaroc, 2015b). Four Chamorro and Refaluwasch scholars and residents outlined how the EIS ‘public meeting’ forum is culturally incompatible with Chamorro and Refaluwasch methods of gathering community input and feedback (Cabrera et al, 2015). They discuss how reciprocal culture creates generous hosts, but there are ‘obligations and proper etiquette for the guests’ [e.g. a US government agency like the military] (Cabrera et al, 2015). Within the framework of being a ‘good guest’, the authors discuss how to properly and respectfully gather input from the community and the importance of oral culture—contradictory to the NEPA process.

Numerous residents are also US Armed Forces veterans and they spoke of their experience of ‘protecting and defending’ US interests abroad, and now they are resisting the destruction of their homeland. At the EIS meetings, women highlighted protecting and defending, while honouring the ancestors and the genealogy of resistance to keep the islands, language and culture safe (Frain, 2017).

Despite the recurring release of numerous ‘lengthy, technical, complex American English-language documents that refer to one another, which have been 11,000, 4,000, and 1,500 pages long’, CNMI residents, including politicians, and even US federal agencies, have expressed strong opposition to the expanding militarisation (Cabrera et al., 2015). A record number of nearly 30,000 comments opposing the project were submitted in response to the 2015 CJMT document (Hofschneider, 2016a, 2016b, 2016d).

### **Dentons Environmental Science Associates**

In addition to the public hearings and a record number of comments submitted, politicians of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) collectively oppose the further militarisation of the archipelago (Kedi & Scaliem, 2015). In April 2015, shortly after the release of the CJMT proposal, the Federal and Foreign Affairs Committee in the Marianas House voted 19-0 in favour of a resolution introduced by the late CNMI Governor Inos to ‘oppose any and all proposed military use of Pagan’ (Cloud, 2015). The House Committee on Federal and Foreign Affairs Chair, Representative Angel Demapan, referred to Guam’s experience with the DoD, stating:

The military used the same tactics with the people of Guam when they tried to build a base in a Chamorro village which the people of Guam opposed. You would think after the military's experience with Guam that they would learn, but it appears that they didn't learn and they are treating us the same way and with the same tactics that they imposed on the people of Guam. But we will remain vigilant and we will fight for our position. (as reported by Villahermosa, 2016)

In support of this stance, the CNMI administration hired a team of legal experts, Dentons Environmental Science Associates (hereafter Dentons), to review the 'legal adequacy' of the CJMT document and proposal on behalf of the CNMI government. They found it 'fails to meet even the most basic requirements... and the limited evidence presented in the document suggests that the CJMT would violate both federal and CNMI law' (Dentons US LLP Environmental Science Associates, 2015). Attorney Matthew Adams, added that the DEIS lacks 'alternatives, impact analysis, mitigation, and public input' and concluded, based on these initial findings, that the CJMT is 'non-compliant with the basic principles of the NEPA' (Kedi & Scaliem, 2015). Adams also said that the CNMI is 'one of the poorest, most isolated and least well-represented entities in the US'. Brian Turner, an attorney at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, says the EIS proposal demonstrates 'environmental injustice' and 'if this sort of thing were purposed in North Carolina [the continental US], it just would never happen' (as quoted in Hofschneider, 2016a).

Non-voting US Congressman for the CNMI, Gregorio 'Kilili' S. Sablan, supports the 'right of concerned citizens and community groups in the Marianas to raise grievances' through the NEPA process (Dumat-ol Daleno, 2016). Similar to the non-voting US Congresswoman for Guam, he recognises that the islands play an important role for 'national defence' of the US and that is 'why two-thirds of Tinian, major portions of land on Saipan, and the entire island of Farallon de Medinilla (FDM) have [already] been leased to the federal government for military purposes' (ibid, 2016). The Marianas community, supported by CNMI elected officials, including the Mayor of Tinian, the Governor of the CNMI, filed a lawsuit against the DoD and the Department of the Navy to ensure that the NEPA federal law is followed (L. J. Perez, 2016). Instead, the local government would rather focus and build upon the 2012 report, Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment for the Island of Saipan, which outlines the most vulnerable areas of Saipan to climate change (Green & Skeele, 2014).

### **Current lawsuit**

While the US citizens of the Marianas Archipelago with their non-voting US Congress representatives do not have power over how federal funds are spent

and are excluded from Pacific-American Climate Fund, they are instead tasked with holding the DoD accountable to the NEPA process. Rather than federal funding and local energy going towards climate change adaptation and resiliency, the community continues to resist the militarisation of their archipelago. The currently filed lawsuit against the US Navy and DoD is specifically related to the past ten years of Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) documents released since the 2006 Roadmap announcement, culminating in the CJMT document of 2015.

On 27 July 2015, the Law Office of Kimberlyn King-Hinds (F0495) of San Jose Village, Tinian, supported by David Henkin of environmental law organisation Earthjustice, filed Civil No. 16-00022, in the United States District Court for the CNMI on Saipan on behalf of the local organisations: the Tinian Women's Association; Guardians of Gani'; PaganWatch; and the Center for Biological Diversity. The lawsuit accuses the US Navy and the DoD of failing to produce one concise EIS to evaluate the 'connected actions' and the environmental effects of 'the build-up' including the permanent stationing of thousands of US Marines on Guam and the military tests, Live Fire Training Range Complexes (LFTRCs) for those Marines on the islands of Tinian and Pagan in the CNMI (King-Hinds, 2015). The attorneys reminded the local media that the 'Navy has made a decision to move 5,000 Marines and their families to Guam without considering all the alternatives or whether Guam can absorb that many people in such a short time' (Pang, 2016). In addition to the lawsuit, members of the community create online petitions and alternative media to share across digital platforms to ensure that the community stays informed and updated (Frain, 2018, p. 113).

### **Alternative Zero Coalition**

On 5 December 2016, the DoD and the Department of the Navy, through the US Department of Justice, filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit claiming the 'court lacks subject-matter jurisdiction and the lawsuit presents a political question because the executive branch decided to relocate the Marines as part of a treaty negotiated with Japan' (Manabat, 2016). This motion displays how the US DoD continues to deny the US citizens of the Marianas Archipelago sovereignty while promoting the narrative through the media that considers the Asia-Pacific Pivot plans as a 'political question' between the US and Japan. It is this treatment of the archipelago as possessions used for US security purposes which divert finances for climate change resiliency and adaptation projects, and instead prioritises funding for military projects.

### **Conclusion**

This article highlighted how the 2018 *Make America Secure Appropriations Act* is the most recent US federal policy which prioritises funds for defence projects at the



**Figure 5: An aerial shot of Pagan, a beach the DoD intends to use as a Live-Fire Training Range from the land, sea, and air.**

expense of climate change adaptation planning in the Marianas Archipelago. The US federal government and the DoD continue to treat the archipelago as ‘garrison islands’ (Camacho, 2013 p. 176). While the DoD acknowledges the threat and risks of climate change, it continues to invest billions of dollars into the construction of installations in high-risk zones and creates EIS documents which systematically violate the *National Environmental Policy Act* (Cabrera et al., 2015). While the Marianas community was told in 2016 to expect a Supplemental EIS to be released in ‘early 2017 and a ROD by 2018’, the website now reads, ‘late 2018 or early 2019’ (CNMI Joint Military Training EIS/OEIS, 2018).

Expanding militarisation of the archipelago is supported by US-owned media through the narrative of pro-American ideologies which frame any resistance as unpatriotic. However, both non-voting US Congress representatives for Guam



and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) express concerns with how federal funds are prioritised for military projects instead of climate change adaptation. Further, Indigenous Chamorro and Refaluwasch peoples of the Marianas continue to resist by creating content on alternative digital media platforms and through lawsuits. This article illustrates how remaining Political possessions of the US directly dictates the lack of sovereignty the people of the Marianas have in planning for climate change and how they are excluded from US climate change funds. Climate change is already occurring and the local government and community wish to focus and prepare for these serious impacts. Instead, the archipelago and the community are tasked with the lengthy and disruptive process of NEPA and ongoing toxic legacy of US militarisation.

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*The author would like to express support for the local organisations in their lawsuit against the United States Department of Defense. To support the environmental justice efforts by the Indigenous Chamorro and Refaluwasch 'protectors and defenders' of their environment follow the Facebook pages:*

*Alternative Zero Coalition [www.facebook.com/AlternativeZeroMarianas/OceaniaResistance](http://www.facebook.com/AlternativeZeroMarianas/OceaniaResistance): [www.facebook.com/OceaniaResistance/](http://www.facebook.com/OceaniaResistance/)*

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