

People of Guam, Hawaii must take charge

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Hawaii and Guam are riding an important wave to become new strategic convergence zones -- leading centers of innovations in global trade, communications and ecological synergies for the Pacific Basin.

This potential will be significant if the trends and money infusions that are currently taking place are recognized and optimized. For Guam, there is the move by the Marine Corps of approximately 17,000 troops and dependents from Okinawa. Additionally there is the Navy plan to convert to 100 percent alternative energy for all functions within the next 10 years.

The opportunity to capitalize on these trends is aligned with the choice of Hawaii as the host of the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in November. The event will bring all of the Pacific Basin nations to our shores. This powerful gathering presents a catalyst to begin a social and economic shift of historic proportions.

The necessity for reconceptualizing Guam and Hawaii as convergence zones is important, because China is fast becoming a major player through the use of social and economic non-military alignments with the countries known as "the first island chain," while positioning itself for action in the "second island chain."

The first island chain consists of the Korean Peninsula, the Kuril Islands of Japan (including the Ryukyu Islands), Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia and Australia. The second island chain includes the U.S. territories of Guam and the Northern Marianas, which are a strategic part of the forward defense arc of the U.S. military in the Pacific.

These two maritime constructs are not simply linear descriptions of the layout of islands, but ones with value-added undertones for American geo-strategists in the Pacific Rim. Because of their critically important geographic positions at the heart of the Pacific, Hawaii and Guam are historically poised to become beneficial centers to the nations of the Western Pacific, the way Singapore serves countries in the first island chain.

In the 19th century, Hawaii was the "gas and go" center of international whalers. In the 20th century, it was the mobilization center for the war in the Pacific. This geographic center for trade, resource mobilization and communications can be recaptured and enhanced with wise action. It requires recognizing the principle that geography trumps politics in dealing with a competing power such as China.

This shift to a new economy and political reality is based on meeting citizen expectations to participate directly in the actions needed to capture, benefit from and give leadership to this Pacific century. Citizen action has shown itself as a critical component in the political transformation sweeping the Middle East.

It is time to change the old world of dominance and control by the few to the participation and freedom of the many. The people and institutions of Guam and Hawaii

will need to take charge of and navigate these historic shifts by bold and creative rethinking and action if beneficial change is to occur.

It is possible for the planned move of a part of the Marine Corps base to take place in a manner that builds Guam into a full social and economic participant in the power realignments, and not remain just a military outpost for repositioning of American forces. Citizen unrest in Guam could sap U.S. military energy and undermine its forward defense security.

Similar innovative thinking can accompany the Navy energy conversion plan toward alternative energy sources. The Navy, with its large bases, ships and air stations, is putting enormous resources into research and production of alternative energy to become free of Middle East oil. This presents an unprecedented opening to leverage the opportunities presented by the Navy's actions for parallel applications in civilian enterprises.

The impending mobilization of Marine and Navy resources offers citizens, governments and private enterprise a new foundation to restructure Guam and Hawaii as innovative commercial, scientific, education and renewable energy centers for stability and security in the Western Pacific.

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