

Guam – Tip of the US Military Spear Pointing at China

'We are not Americans. We are Chamorus. We are heirs to a matrilineal, indigenous civilization born two thousand years before Jesus. And we are being disappeared. Off your radar' [Julian Aguon, Chamoru academic, lawyer and activist]

"There are times when one tragedy, one crime tells us how a whole system works behind its democratic facade and helps us to understand how much of the world is run for the benefit of the powerful and how governments lie" [John Pilger, journalist]

The Chamoru people are desperate. They have lost their land. They have lost their right to govern themselves. They have lost many of their own people to cancers due to the high contamination of the land. They feel abandoned by the United Nations which has not upheld its own protocols and conventions. They have lost their resources [such as water] and public utilities [schools, power, telecommunications, and now the only commercial port] to privatisation. This indigenous culture will die rapidly without action. The death of culture and the increasing death rate of the people due to poverty and sickness amount to 'ethnic cleansing'.

As the British in a shameful act, through subterfuge and force, depopulated the Chagos Island [including Diego Garcia] in the Indian Ocean in order to hand over Diego Garcia to the United States to use as a military base, the United Nations has effectively by its inaction handed over the people of Guam to the United States. Whereas the Chagossians have been fighting to right this dreadful wrong and return home, the Chamoru – the indigenous people of Guam – struggle to survive as a people.

US Military

The military takes a great toll on the lives of people and on an already damaged planet and depleted earth. Guam is a microcosm of this militaristic thrust. It is seen as the US military spear pointing at China. This explains the importance of Guam for the US military establishment. The US presence with its massive ecological and military footprint threatens the people of Guam in a number of ways: their culture, their language, their health, their livelihood and indeed their very existence. Being where they are, the people of this tiny island are directly threatened in the event of a military strike in the region.

Guam

Guam [known as Guahan by the indigenous people] is a largely unknown and often neglected island in the Pacific, is a protectorate of the United States. It is southernmost island of the Marianas Island Chain in Micronesia. The story of the indigenous people is part of the tragic tale of many indigenous people – and the tragedy continues. But is also a story of resistance and pride.

Since World War II, this 503 square kilometre island has been vital in securing American military and economic interests throughout the Pacific and Asia. Since the early 16th century the indigenous people of Guam, called the Chamoru, have known little freedom. It continues to be one of the few remaining colonies of the world. It was colonised by Spain for over 300 years and over a century by the USA, except for a bloody interlude of Japanese occupation during World War II. Proclaimed a Spanish possession in 1565, Guam was not really settled by the Spanish for another hundred years later, when the missionary Padre Diego Luis de San Vittores decided to establish a mission on Guam. His

assassination in 1672 triggered vicious retaliation by the Spanish resulting in a war that lasted until the end of the 17th Century. This war, as well as European diseases to which the Chamoru people had no resistance, almost annihilated them. The Chamoru population fell from about 40,000 before the wars to less than 4,000 at the beginning of the 18th Century.

Resistance

Survivors were rounded up by the Spanish and forbidden to go near the sea for fear that they would attempt to escape and further reduce the slave population. Though open warfare ended, resistance continued in the form of prevention and termination of pregnancies. They did not want to bring into the world children who would suffer the horrors they were suffering.ⁱ

Endangered and Disenfranchised

Guam is one of the few remaining non-self-governing territories (colonies) of the world, and is subject to administration by the Office of Insular Affairs in the US Department of Interior. Though the people are American citizens, they cannot vote for the President of the USA. They have not active representation in Congress. Guam exists in political limbo as an unincorporated territory of the USA. To the present, it has been living as a colony for nearly 500 years.

The indigenous people are an endangered people. Their language and culture are threatened as they brace themselves for an increase in US militarisation which will have irreversible consequences for them. This build-up will complement the existing military that already occupies a third of the island with devastating consequences. Imagine the effects on the Chamoru people with a population of nearly 63,000 [37% of the total population of 170,000]. There have been no public education or impact studies regarding the social, cultural and political consequences of this exaggerated militarisation. Despite resistance, dissent and lack of consultation with the Chamoru people, the US plans to flood the island with a further 50,000 people. This includes 8,000 military personnel, and their 9,000 dependents, after having been ousted from Okinawa. A further 20,000 people are expected as contract workers.

Continued expansion by the military threatens the right of the people to self-determination – something continually denied the people by the USA. The decision to further militarise Guam is another obstacle to this self determination.

'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere' Martin Luther King Jnr.

Rarely does an empire or superpower come to see that it is overshooting and decide to shrink the empire, to reduce consumption, to cooperate with the international community, to adhere to United Nations conventions, to bring its lifestyle back into balance and to severely cut military spending. In Guam, the United States, like many powers in the past, continues to spread its military weight around to protect its vital interests and keep control of unruly humanity.

Betrayal and Neglect

There is also a sense of betrayal by the United Nations. No UN mission has visited Guam. The betrayal is evident, as international obligations under the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN General Assembly Resolution 1514, are not adhered to.

Despite more than \$10 billion dollars agreed upon by the USA and Japan for the transfer of US military personnel from Okinawa to Guam, there is little hope that any of this money will be used to improve the failing infrastructure of Guam. During a recent joint military exercise – the largest in recent history – 22,000 US military personnel, 30 ships, and 280 aircraft took part in ‘Valiant Shield’. During that exercise, water was cut off to a number of villages which went for thirty days without running water, whilst the water flows freely for the US military population. There are two societies here: one, affluent and well serviced on the bases and the other, poor and inadequately serviced for the local population. It has been suggested that Guam will meet the costs of re-occupation, yet little is spent on civilian projects. The only development occurs on the military bases. Adequate money for education is allocated for schooling of US military personnel’s children and the education of Chamoru children is underfunded, e.g., teachers are often not paid and children have to bring their own toilet paper.

The indigenous Chamoru suffer extraordinarily high rates of cancer and dementia-related illness due to widespread toxic contamination of Guam by the USA. For example, Chamorus suffer from nasopharynx cancer at a rate 1,999% higher than the U.S. average (per 100,000). So far, there has been no suggestion of cleaning up radioactive contamination from World War II and the intense nuclear bomb tests over the Marshall Islands 1,900 kms [1200 miles] from Guam.

Where to?

Indigenous Chamoru grassroots activists have at great personal and financial cost and without financial, institutional or strategic support endeavoured to stave off this advance of militarisation and the loss of their homeland. There is no independent media that represents the concerns and interests of the indigenous people. The USA continues to abstain from or vote against UN resolutions affecting Guam and specifically the question of decolonisation. This behaviour leaves the USA practically the only colonial power left in the world thereby stifling the inalienable and still unrealised human right to self determination of the Chamoru people.

What can we do?

Write a letter to Mr Duncan Kerr, the Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs. A sample letter and a petition can be found at www.anti-bases.org.

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Footnotes:

¹see Pedro C. Sanchez *Guaahan, Guam, the History of Our Island* , or Robert Rogers [Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam](#).