CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY: FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

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Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs

Examining the Office of Insular Affairs' Role in Fostering Prosperity in the Pacific Territories and Addressing External Threats to Peace and Security

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Chairman Hurd, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, thank you for the privilege and honor of being able to testify before you today on this important topic.

The three Pacific territories covered by the Office of Insular Affairs are American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Combined, they have a population of about 250,000. All three are experiencing a rise in external threats to peace and security, primarily due to actions linked to the People's Republic of China (PRC), exacerbated by economic stress.

This testimony details the profound importance of the territories to the rest of the United States (including their defensive role). The testimony also covers the commensurate importance to the PRC in undermining relations between the territories and the U.S. federal government in order to exert corrosive influence in the territories and render them less able to defend themselves, let alone the American mainland.

The testimony then uses a "block and build" framework (*blocking* illegal, coercive, aggressive, and deceptive PRC-linked activity while *building* economic and social resilience) to make recommendations for how to defend against PRC attacks while fostering prosperity and ensuring the American nationals and citizens of the territories can live in peace.

Pacific Territories' Role in National Defense

All three territories (for a map, please see *Annex 1)* became part of the United States as a result of war or strategic concerns (for more, please see *Annex 2*). Since then, they have played an outsized role in the defense of the nation. Guam and CNMI make up the Mariana Islands, a north-south chain that is a core part of the Second Island Chain running from Japan through Micronesia, and form the fallback line of defense should the PRC take Taiwan. To get a sense of how close to Asia they are, the Exclusive Economic Zone of CNMI abuts that of Japan, and Guam is an eight-hour flight west of Honolulu and four hours east of Manila. American Samoa is the only part of the United States in the Southern Hemisphere, and Pago Pago harbor is one of the best ports in the Southern Pacific. It gives the United States a footprint in the heart of the Southern Pacific, a zone of increasing importance as PRC ties to Latin America grow. It is pivotal for keeping this part of the Indo-Pacific free and open.

In the words of Gov. Arnold Palacios of CNMI:[1] "The U.S. territories of the Northern Marianas, Guam, and American Samoa firmly anchor America's position in the Pacific, and together with the Freely Associated States, create a vast corridor of peace and security that spans nearly three million square miles and connects to the seas of other allied nations."

When President Ronald Reagan visited Guam in 1984, he said, "[Guam] may be nearly 9,000 miles from our nation's capital, but it's a real pleasure to know that we're among fellow Americans … In times of crisis, few Americans have been more steadfast in the defense of our

[1] Gov. Arnold I. Palacios, "*Peace Through Strength: The Strategic Importance of the Pacific Islands to U.S.-led Global Security*," *Testimony before the U.S House Committee on Natural Resources*, August 24, 2023. (https://governor.gov.mp/news/oral-testimony-of-governor-arnold-i-palacios-commonwealth-of-the-northern-mariana-islands)

shared values and few have made more sacrifices to preserve them."[2] All three territories, for example, have higher than average enlistment rates in the U.S. military.

Given their locations, they are also highly sensitive to strategic shifts, as they are on America's frontline and at the end of long logistics lines. Currently, **Guam** is home to several key U.S. military installations, including Naval Base Guam, Andersen Air Force Base, and Camp Blaz. Guam Gov. Lourdes A. Leon Guerrero, in her August 24, 2023, congressional testimony, explained the strategic importance of Guam:

> From 1521 to the present day, Guam has been, and continues to be, a linchpin of every Pacific Power. The reasons for this are simple. On the axis that crosses 5,000 miles of the Pacific between Hawai'i and Asia, Guam is the only island with a protected harbor and sufficient land for major airports. Guam is also the largest landfall for communications, shipping, and military installations on the nearly 3,000-mile north axis from Japan to Papua New Guinea and Australia … For these reasons, Guam has played a unique and pivotal role in nearly every major American conflict in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. As a result of American engagement in [Guam and the islands around Guam] and the larger Pacific region, the United States won an unparalleled period of peace, economic trade, and shared prosperity in the Pacific.[3]

The governor was concerned that that period was coming to an end, adding: "[A]s time passed and other priorities drew America's watchful eye away from Pacific Island Countries, China emerged … because Guam can project power throughout the Indo-Pacific region, China is working to project equal power onto Guam and its sister islands."

Congresswoman Uifa'atali Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen, representing **American Samoa**, has underlined the need for more U.S. military engagement in American Samoa, in particular the Coast Guard, saying:

> We need to continue to strengthen the Coast Guard's capabilities including total cutters, and the ability to add deployment of cutters to the Pacific … I continue to urge the strongest possible consideration of stationing fast cutters in American Samoa, one of the vast Pacific's finest harbors. This would be a powerful statement of U.S. commitment to the South Pacific during a time of CCP (Chinese Communist Party) regional efforts and influence, and the Pacific concerns of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing.[4]

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[2] Former U.S. President Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on Arrival at Guam International Airport in Agana," *In response to remarks by Gov. Ricardo J. Bordallo*, April 25, 1984. (https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-arrival-guam-international-airport-agana)

[3] Gov. Lourdes A. Leon Guerrero, "Peace Through Strength: The Strategic Importance of the Pacific Islands to U.S.-led Global Security," *Testimony before the House Committee on Natural Resources*, August 24, 2023. (https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/gov._guerrero_testimony.pdf)

[4] Congresswoman Uifa'atali Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen, Press Release, "Amata Highlights Presidential Order, and Suggests Coast Guard Cutter Stationed at Pago Pago Harbor," January 24, 2024. (https://radewagen.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/amata-highlights-presidential-order-and-suggests-coast-guard-cutter)

CNMI is seeing hundreds of millions of dollars of investments by the U.S. military as World War II sites, such as the North Field on Tinian, are rehabilitated and new training grounds are put in. At the February 2025 Interagency Group on Insular Affairs meeting in Washington, DC, CNMI Gov. Arnold Palacios said:

> Our need to be vigilant as America's front-line state in preserving the peace and freedom we enjoy in the Pacific as part of the American family really hit home with me about a month ago when the media reported that China had launched what was described as the 'world's largest amphibious attack ship:' the Sichuan.
>
> Amphibious vessels are something we on Saipan know something about because it was just 80 years ago last summer that American forces came ashore in amphibious vessels to bring freedom to our islands and some of our older folks who were children at that time still vividly remember the American Flag coming up on the beach. So, the launching of the world's largest amphibious attack ship is something that makes us sit up and pay attention. After all, when I describe CNMI as America's frontline state, I mean that literally. We are the closest American soil to mainland China. I would be exaggerating to say Shanghai is swimming distance from our northern most island but it is just 1,630 miles away and it would not take all that long for a new warship to get there.

As mentioned by leaders in American Samoa, Guam, and CNMI, a major concern is the People's Republic of China. CNMI and Guam, along with the relationship between the United States and the Freely Associated States (FAS) (Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and the Republic of the Marshall Islands), ensure that the United States has a "corridor of freedom," including freedom of deployment secured with strategic denial, through the central Pacific to the First and Second Island Chains, including treaty ally the Philippines and American bases in Japan. It functionally pushes the U.S. Pacific defense perimeter off the coast of Asia, guaranteeing the safety of Americans in Guam and CNMI and underpinning free trade for all nations across the central Pacific.

External Threats to Peace and Security

For those who have a different vision of the Pacific, this is a problem. In 2022, details of the PRC comprehensive plan to gain influence, if not control, in as many Pacific Islands as possible was seen in the texts of its proposed *China-Pacific Island Countries Common Development Vision* and *China-Pacific Island Countries Five-Year Action Plan on Common Development (2022- 2026)*.

Elements of the *Vision*[5] and *Plan*[6] included cooperation on law enforcement, customs, inspections, quarantine, network governance, cyber security, laboratory construction used for fingerprint testing, forensic autopsy, drugs, electronic and digital forensics, supporting airlines to operate air routes and flights between China and Pacific Island Countries, the possibility of a China-Pacific Island Countries Free Trade Area, thousands of government scholarships, and

[5] @CleoPaskal, *Twitter*, May 26, 2022. (https://twitter.com/CleoPaskal/status/1529867665992474626)
[6] @CleoPaskal, *Twitter*, May 26, 2022. (https://twitter.com/CleoPaskal/status/1529849187071926273)

establishing a "China-Pacific Island Countries Disaster Management Cooperation Mechanism," including a prepositioned "China-Pacific Island Countries Reserve of Emergency Supplies."

Combined, the *Vision* and *Plan* are a blueprint for extraordinary control in sovereign countries. For example, it would put the PRC in a position to move people and supplies with limited external oversight and to infiltrate investigation and prosecution operations, stymying the rule of law and attempts to counter illegal PRC activities that can lead to bribery, coercion, and military prepositioning. This was clear to then FSM President David Panuelo when he wrote about the *Vision* and *Plan*: "All of this, taken together, is part of how China intends to form a 'new type of international relations' with itself as the hegemonic power and the current rules-based international order as a forgotten relic. That's a direct quote, I should emphasize a 'new type of international relations' — and an explicit goal on behalf of China from the Common Development Vision."[7]

Some elements of the *Vision* and *Plan* are already in place, and they demonstrate how fundamentally different Beijing's vision is for the future of the region — one in which Beijing's rules take precedence rather than the rule of law. The degree to which rights and democracy have been eroded in the Solomon Islands under PRC pressure is a case in point, with those opposed to increased PRC influence in the country being targeted — including one elected member of a provincial legislature having his elected seat taken away for not recognizing China's definition of the One China Policy.[8]

This has been building for a while. In 2008, Adm. Timothy Keating said a senior Chinese official suggested to him: "You take Hawaii east. We'll take Hawaii west. We'll share information, and we'll save you all the trouble of deploying your naval forces west of Hawaii."[9]For the PRC, the key to pushing the United States back to Hawaii is undermining the relationship with the territories and the Freely Associated States (FAS) — much in the same way that the Japanese Mandate (1921-1944) that covered CNMI and what are now the FAS was a problem for American forces trying to dislodge Imperial Japan.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has studied the Pacific War. It's unlikely to be accidental that, when the PRC gains a foothold in a Pacific nation, it tries to secure real estate that was strategic in World War II, for example, Tulagi in the Solomon Islands.[10] According to Dr. Toshi Yoshihara's *Chinese Lesson from the Pacific War: Implications for PLA Warfighting*: "The Pacific War covered a geographic expanse that roughly overlaps with areas where the PLA would likely fight in the coming years. China's Rocket Force now boasts long-range missiles that can

[7] Former President of Micronesia David W. Panuelo, "To FSM leaders," *Letter to the 22nd FSM Congress, FSM Governors, and leadership of FSM state legislatures*, March 9, 2023. (https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/President-Panuelo-Letter-9-March-2023-to-FSM-leaders-on-PRC-political-warfare.pdf)
[8] Cleo Paskal, "Daniel Suidani's arrest in the Solomons proves CCP is scared," *The Sunday Guardian* (India), October 13, 2024. (https://sundayguardianlive.com/investigation/daniel-suidanis-arrest-in-the-solomons-proves-ccp-is-scared)
[9] Donna Miles, "China Requires Close Eye as It Expands Influence, Capability," *American Forces Press Service*, March 12, 2008. (https://www.dvidshub.net/news/17315/china-requires-close-eye-expands-influence-capability)
[10] Damien Cave, "Chinese Lease of Entire Island Is Deemed Illegal in Solomons," *The New York Times*, October 24, 2019. (https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/24/world/australia/solomon-islands-china-tulagi.html)

reach Guam, while its diplomats are attempting to secure access across the Pacific Islands, the bloody battlegrounds of the Pacific War."

It's not just PRC diplomats. The CCP and its proxies use a range of methods, including public and private loans, bribery, blackmail, coercion, investment, and influence, to advance their interests. This has included outright attempts at the destruction of a country if breaking it into pieces is seen as advantageous. (This is consistent with PRC unrestricted and "disintegration" warfare.[11]) According to President Panuelo, the PRC has been involved in backing separatist movements in the FSM: "It is not a coincidence that the common thread behind the Chuuk State secession movement, the Pohnpei Political Status Commission and, a to lesser extent, the Yap independence movement, include money from the PRC and whispers of PRC support."[12]

Often an approach is "braided," with three mutually reinforcing strands: commercial, strategic, and criminal elements.[13] Chinese organized crime is often a part of PRC operations in the Pacific islands. They bribe, enforce, smuggle, blackmail, and more. While largely free to make their own money and develop their own networks, Chinese criminals do so with the understanding that they must be useful to Beijing when required.[14] As per China's 2017 National Intelligence Law, every Chinese citizen and organization is legally obligated to support the government's intelligence operations.[15]

The U.S. territories (in particular CNMI and Guam) and the FAS have been targets of multi-year, broad-spectrum political warfare attacks that seek to overwhelm them and open the path for conditions more friendly to the PRC.[16] As President Panuelo put it, one of the tactics is bribery: "we are bribed to be complicit, and bribed to be silent … The practical impact of this is that some senior officials and elected officials take actions that are contrary to the FSM's national interest, but are consistent with the PRC's national interest."[17]

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[11] U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, Majority Staff, "CCP Political Warfare: Federal Agencies Urgently Need a Government-Wide Strategy," October 24, 2024. (https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CCP-Report-10.24.24.pdf)

[12] Former President of Micronesia David W. Panuelo, "To FSM leaders," *Letter to the 22nd FSM Congress, FSM Governors, and leadership of FSM state legislatures*, March 9, 2023. (https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/President-Panuelo-Letter-9-March-2023-to-FSM-leaders-on-PRC-political-warfare.pdf)

[13] Cleo Paskal, "How the Compacts of Free Association Support U.S. Interests and Counter the PRC's Influence," *Testimony before the House Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs*, June 14, 2023. (https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/testimony_paskal.pdf)

[14] Bernadette Carreon, Aubrey Belford, and Martin Young, "Pacific Gambit: Inside the Chinese Communist Party and Triad Push into Palau," *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project*, December 12, 2022. (https://www.occrp.org/en/investigation/pacific-gambit-inside-the-chinese-communist-party-and-triad-push-into-palau)

[15] PRC National Intelligence Law (as amended in 2018), trans. China Law Translate, June 27, 2017. (https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/national-intelligence-law-of-the-p-r-c-2017)

[16] Cleo Paskal, "How the Compacts of Free Association Support U.S. Interests and Counter the PRC's Influence," *Testimony before U.S. House Natural Resources Committee, Indo-Pacific Task Force*, June 14, 2023. (https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/testimony_paskal.pdf)

[17] Former President of Micronesia David W. Panuelo, "To FSM leaders," *Letter to the 22nd FSM Congress, FSM Governors, and leadership of FSM state legislatures*, March 9, 2023. (https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/President-Panuelo-Letter-9-March-2023-to-FSM-leaders-on-PRC-political-warfare.pdf)

One of those interests, Panuelo writes, is: "China is seeking to ensure that, in the event of a war in our Blue Pacific Continent between themselves and Taiwan, that the FSM is, at best, aligned with the PRC (China) instead of the United States, and, at worst, that the FSM chooses to 'abstain' altogether."[18]

In Guam or CNMI, a goal along those lines might be to make U.S. forces unwelcome or to push for independence.[19] This is not to say there aren't legitimate concerns about U.S. military activity or the relationship with the federal government but that those concerns can be exploited and distorted by outside actors who don't have the best interest of locals at heart.

PRC-Linked Activity in CNMI

In CNMI, from 2009, PRC nationals have been allowed to enter CNMI without visas as required in the rest of the United States. [20] According to CNMI Gov. Arnold Palacios' August 2023 congressional testimony,[21] due to the need for economic development: "We turned to Chinese gambling, legalizing casino gaming on Saipan even after the venture previously failed on Tinian. An exclusive license was nevertheless awarded to a Chinese casino operation that has been mired in litigation and criminal investigation practically from the start … The Chinese casino on Saipan at its peak raked in billions of US dollars in monthly rolling chip volumes from just 16 VIP tables, outdoing even the glitziest casinos in Macau."

This boosted the economy but also, according to Palacios, "was fraught with controversy — from human trafficking to birth tourism, labour abuse, money laundering, and public corruption." Chinese have been found traveling illegally to Guam by boat (and roaming on military installations), using the U.S. postal service to distribute illegal drugs, selling illegal drugs, and buying U.S. driver's licenses.[22] There is no similar link to such extensive criminal activity with any other single nationality in CNMI.

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Glen Hunter, "LETTER: The subtle art of influence- China's strategic engagement in the CNMI," *Pacific Daily News*, May 24, 2024. (https://www.guampdn.com/opinion/letter-the-subtle-art-of-influence-chinas-strategic-engagement-in-the-cnmi/article_27226356-1894-11ef-ba26-9b67999cc1b5.html)
[20] Cleo Paskal, "Northern Marianas: Time to close China's backdoor into the US," *Pacific Island Times*, September 3, 2023. (https://www.pacificislandtimes.com/post/northern-marianas-time-to-close-china-s-backdoor-into-the-us)
[21] Governor Arnold I. Palacios, "Oral Testimony of Governor Arnold I. Palacios Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands," *Oversight Hearing of the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources*, August 24, 2023. (https://governor.gov.mp/news/oral-testimony-of-governor-arnold-i-palacios-commonwealth-of-the-northern-mariana-islands)
[22] Alex Wilson, "Chinese citizens use Northern Marianas as illegal pathway to Guam, authorities say," *Stars and Stripes*, February 27, 2024. (https://www.stripes.com/theaters/asia_pacific/2024-02-26/guam-china-illegal-entry-northern-marianas-13130497.html); "CNMI Customs confiscate $700K 'ice' at post office," *Islands Business* (Fiji), March 23, 2022. (https://islandsbusiness.com/news-break/cnmi-largest-drug-haul-in-five-years); U.S. Attorney's Office, Districts of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, News Release, "Chinese Illegals: CNMI DMV Chief

There has also been the appearance of PRC-linked businesses in strategic locations where there is little commercial justification. For example, a Chinese-linked casino opened on Tinian's dual-use harbor. Tinian has a population of around 2,000 and relatively little tourism. Unlike the previous casino on Tinian, it wasn't part of a hotel, was open irregular hours, and visibly didn't prosper. However, it opened at a time when the U.S. military was spending hundreds of millions resurrecting old airfields on the island, with at least some of that activity passing in front of the casino. It shut down in December 2024.[23]

Regardless, there is continuous pressure for more access from China into CNMI, including attempts to get the Department of Transportation to lift the cap on direct flights from China to CNMI.[24] The argument is that the CNMI needs more tourists, specifically Chinese ones. There is a conspicuous lack of alternatives offered — for example, offering similar EVS-TAP[25] entry conditions to Indian tourists and business people or pushing for changes to cabotage to make things easier for the Japanese market.[26] The default is always China, China, China. And those who question it are attacked in the media and online,[27] in addition to real-world intimidation such as the slashing of car tires.

The narrative warfare is pervasive. Glen Hunter, CNMI special assistant for broadband policy development, wrote:

> [G]roups and influencers in the CNMI have transitioned over the past decade to oppose military development due to concerns about environmental damage and cultural loss. However, these same influencers have readily embraced large-scale investments backed by the CCP, such as garment factories and casinos, without expressing similar concerns about potential societal, environmental, and cultural impacts on the islands. This double standard highlights a paradoxical stance where resistance is shown against U.S. military presence due to perceived

Convicted of License Fraud," December 18, 2023. (https://www.justice.gov/usao-gu/pr/bureau-motor-vehicle-chief-and-prc-citizen-sentenced-federal-prison-cnmi-drivers-license)

[23] Emmanuel T. Erediano, "UPDATED (2): Tinian Diamond shuts down," *Marianas Variety*, December 30, 2024. (https://www.mvariety.com/news/local/updated-2-tinian-diamond-shuts-down/article_5833d830-c343-11ef-b978-1bbadaee7467.html)

[24] Rep. Kimberlyn King-Hinds, Press Release, "Congresswoman King-Hinds Urges Department of Transportation to Reinstate Annex VI of U.S.-China Air Transport Agreement," February 9, 2025. (https://king-hinds.house.gov/media/press-releases/congresswoman-king-hinds-urges-department-transportation-reinstate-annex-vi-us)

[25] Implementation of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Economic Vitality & Security Travel Authorization Program (EVS-TAP), Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protections Agency, 90 Federal Register 658, January 6, 2025. (https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/06/2024-31326/implementation-of-the-commonwealth-of-the-northern-mariana-islands-cnmi-economic-vitality-and)

[26] Glen Hunter, "LETTER: The subtle art of influence- China's strategic engagement in the CNMI," *Pacific Daily News*, May 24, 2024. (https://www.guampdn.com/opinion/letter-the-subtle-art-of-influence-chinas-strategic-engagement-in-the-cnmi/article_27226356-1894-11ef-ba26-9b67999cc1b5.html)

[27] Zaldy Dandan, "Rock, meet hard place," *Marianas Variety,* February 28, 2025. (https://www.mvariety.com/views/editorials/rock-meet-hard-place/article_e969a34c-f4fe-11ef-bf89-130172796653.html)

> negative consequences while simultaneously endorsing extensive Chinese enterprise development without similar scrutiny.[28]

This dominance by PRC-linked pressure groups is also rumored to be a factor in dissuading investors from other countries from entering CNMI. Officials and locals have repeatedly raised concerns about PRC-linked practices destabilizing the local economy and placing undue pressure on CNMI's social cohesion.[29] Hunter also wrote:

> "The governor's commitment to this pivot [away from Chinese tourists] is a significant setback for the CCP, limiting their ability to use the CNMI as a stepping stone to expand their influence throughout Pacific Island nations. In response, China has predictably increased its efforts to destabilize our economy, hoping to force a change in our administration's stance or if unsuccessful a change in the administration itself."[30]

PRC-linked Activity in Guam

Guam has seen many of the activities described above, with the addition of being the target of PRC-linked cyberattacks on its critical infrastructure, a serious security concern given the role of the American bases in defending the region.[31]

It is also the target of information warfare, with a constant stream of messaging designed to create insecurity in the population that could lead to breaks with the federal government. For example, PRC media has called China's DF-26 ballistic missile the "Guam Killer,"[32] feeding the narrative of those who ask why should Guam put itself at risk for the rest of the United States — especially given dissatisfaction with the nature of the relationship.

According to Guam Gov. Leon Guerrero, the counter is: "Some say that by allowing the U.S. military to base in Guam, we are making ourselves a target. That's nonsense. We are a target because of geography. And I'd much prefer the U.S. military be here than the Chinese military."[33]

Debate is healthy — and American. So is transparency and more openness about funding sources for narratives in order to be helpful for an informed electorate.

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[28] Glen Hunter, "LETTER: The subtle art of influence- China's strategic engagement in the CNMI," *Pacific Daily News*, May 24, 2024. (https://www.guampdn.com/opinion/letter-the-subtle-art-of-influence-chinas-strategic-engagement-in-the-cnmi/article_27226356-1894-11ef-ba26-9b67999cc1b5.html)
[29] Ibid.
[30] Glen Hunter, "Defending American Interests: Continuing to Safeguard Our Nation from Subtle Influences by the PRC," *Kandit News Group*, March 1, 2025. (https://kanditnews.com/defending-american-interests-continuing-to-safeguard-our-nation-from-subtle-influences-by-the-prc)
[31] Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, Press Release, "PRC State-Sponsored Actors Compromise and Maintain Persistent Access to U.S. Critical Infrastructure," February 7, 2024. (https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/cybersecurity-advisories/aa24-038a)
[32] Bill Gertz, "China's 'Guam killer' missile force expands quickly," *The Washington Times*, April 14, 2021. (https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/apr/14/chinas-guam-killer-missile-force-expands-quickly)
[33] Cleo Paskal, "War flashbacks in Guam as China projects power in the Pacific," *The Sunday Guardian* (India), September 17, 2023. (https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/09/17/war-flashbacks-in-guam-as-china-projects-power-in-the-pacific)

PRC-linked Activity in American Samoa

At a February 13, 2025, House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing, Congresswoman Radewagen said: "In the past two weeks, independent Samoa and the Cook Islands have signed deals with the PRC. With Kiribati to the north, independent Samoa to the east, and Cook Islands to our east, my home district of American Samoa is now surrounded on three sides by China-friendly nations."[34]

Among the specific new concerns for American Samoa is the signing of a visa waiver agreement between independent Samoa and China that will allow for an increase in unvetted arrivals next door.[35] Already, there is substantial PRC citizen-related crime in independent Samoa. One recent letter to the editor of the *Samoa Observer* captured a common sentiment:

> [T]here are growing concerns about the hidden operations of Chinese nationals in various sectors. Some are allegedly secretly operating rentals, serving as agents for customs and immigration, and even acting as tax agents. There have also been rumours of Chinese nationals establishing a political presence in Samoa … it is becoming evident that some Chinese nationals may be arming themselves with weapons for protection. This raises concerns about the potential for further violence, and I fear that Samoa is becoming a breeding ground for criminal activity, influenced by external actors who do not have our best interests at heart.[36]

American Samoa additionally has issues with illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing that, given the economic potential of the fisheries, is a major concern.[37]

What To Do? Block and Build.

The basic framework is a "Block and Build"[38] approach in which Chinese behavior that is illegal, coercive, aggressive, and deceptive (ICAD — as Philippines General Romeo Brawner calls it[39]) is blocked while simultaneously building domestic, economic, and legal security. Given the

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[34] House Foreign Affairs Committee Republicans, "The USAID Betrayal," *YouTube*, February 13, 2025. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5Rsw0n30sk&t=1s)
[35] The Government of Samoa and Government of the People's Republic of China, Press Release, "Agreement between the Government of Samoa and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Mutual Visa Exemption," January 23, 2025. (https://www.samoagovt.ws/2025/01/joint-press-release-agreement-between-the-government-of-samoa-and-the-government-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-on-mutual-visa-exemption)
[36] Savrusa P. L. Sopoaga, "Concern over immigration and border security," *Samoa Observer*, accessed March 3, 2025. (https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/letters/112884)
[37] CDR Arthur M. Dehnz, "Securing the Seas: Fishery Security Is Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific Command Area of Responsibility," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, March 12, 2024. (https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3703818/securing-the-seas-fishery-security-is-maritime-security-in-the-indo-pacific-com)
[38] Cleo Paskal, "Island-Hopping with Chinese Characteristics—What the PRC Is Doing in the Pacific Islands, Why It Matters, and Why the Time Has Come to 'Block and Build,'" *Naval War College Review*, 2023. (https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=8381&context=nwc-review)
[39] Joyce Ann L. Rocamora, "US Indopacom chief: Be ready vs. Chinese grey-zone operations," *Philippine News Agency* (Philippines), May 4, 2024. (https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1224037)

advanced state of PRC ICAD activity, especially in Guam and CNMI, one must assume that any major projects designed to provide economic, political, or security independence (build), especially ones that make them less reliant on China, will be targeted by PRC agents and slowed down through a range of tactics. Unless that targeting is blocked, it will be hard to build. Given the goals of the PRC, its ICAD activity should be countered and attacked with the same focus and vigor that is directed toward preparing for future kinetic warfare. The PRC has made its trajectory clear. Failing to address Chinese aggression in America's Pacific homeland now will make the likely eventual confrontation with the PRC more difficult and more costly.

This is a whole-of-government effort. However, the U.S. Department of the Interior's mandate regarding the territories and the FAS gives it a leadership position. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum has a seat on the National Security Council (NSC) due to his position as head of the National Energy Council.[40] Perhaps, this NSC role could be expanded to oversee and coordinate the defense and reinforcement of the Pacific territories and the FAS — America's Western border — as part of the hemispheric defense approach being adopted by the Trump administration.

That approach could function to focus and reinforce efforts of the Office of Insular Affairs (OIA). For example, OIA has a field agent in each territory; however, their role is vague. Instead, OIA field agents could play a greater block and build role by coordinating locally with other departments and with Washington — including the interagency — and informing, via Secretary Burgum's office, the NSC. Historically, OIA has been "low key"— at best, reactive in times of crises. With more coordination and information flows, and direction from Secretary Burgum, the chances of getting ahead of issues improve. Some suggestions on how to do that at a more tactical level are below.

Block

A key entry point for PRC ICAD is corruption. The territories (and the FAS) are not equipped to investigate and counter this scale and complexity of penetration on their own. The U.S. territories (and the FAS) urgently need assistance to investigate and prosecute illegal activities, in particular, strategic corruption. Currently, there is little downside to selling out to the PRC and significant economic and social downsides for those who take a stand. There is a pervasive atmosphere of fear in these tight-knit societies, so investigators and prosecutors would ideally come in from outside the region. At this point, a few good investigators and aggressive lawyers might provide the territories (and the FAS) with more security than any number of F-35s.

OIA could focus on technical assistance programs designed to counter corruption, waste, fraud, and abuse. It could also coordinate with other relevant government departments. There is a lot to work with. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has an enormous amount of data taken from the Saipan offices of the Hong Kong-based casino operator Imperial Pacific

[40] Chris Megerian and Matthew Daly, "Trump names Interior-designee Doug Burgum to head new White House council on energy," *Associated Press*, November 15, 2024. (https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-transition-white-house-cheung-gor-f3e02df04ffece1b07a44062ee723d71)

International during their searches in relation to illegal activities.[41] It is perplexing why no major changes have been made.

Other departments have a role to play as well, ideally, in coordination with Interior. For example, Interior and the Department of Defense could develop a clear reporting mechanism for ICAD activity. Once the scope is determined, others could be included through the interagency process to counter, including in the FAS.

Regardless, for any defense plan to be accurate, the Department of Defense would need to include countering ICAD in its plans for assessing and countering threats in the territories (and the FAS). Counters could include the Department of Defense substantially increasing the appropriate U.S. military presence in the territories — including deploying reservists who can help with combating strategic corruption — and, in particular, establish a permanent Coast Guard presence in American Samoa. This isn't about numbers; this is about the right people for the job at hand.

Other sample blocking actions that could be encouraged and/or coordinated through Interior:

- The Department of Homeland Security should require all tourists entering CNMI to have the same visas as tourists entering the rest of the United States.
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement could publish records showing the numbers of foreigners entering CNMI and Guam without exiting when their visas expire.
- The State Department could raise concerns with Samoa about the visa waivers for PRC nationals affecting American Samoa.
- As recommended by Gov. Leon Guerrero,[42] the territories could be supported in setting up national security coordinators/councils — and perhaps a regional council — to better advise and coordinate, including on countering ICAD threats. There are examples of PRC criminals who enter Palau using CNMI IDs. Fragmentation of the security environment benefits this sort of transnational criminality.
- In keeping with the America First Investment Policy[43] and as proposed by Alexander Gray: "Departments of Commerce, Treasury, Labor and appropriate regulatory bodies must pay particular attention to proposed projects and investments from foreign entities in U.S. Pacific territories." Also: "Given the scale of PRC operations in the Western Pacific, an additional [FBI] field office on Guam and satellite offices, appropriately manned, in CNMI and American Samoa would support both defensive efforts but also assist in wider-regional intelligence and counterintelligence operations with Pacific Islands partners."[44] The FAS could also coordinate with that office.

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[41] Alice Woodhouse, "Saipan casino operator drops on FBI visit reports," *The Financial Times* (UK), March 31, 2017. (https://www.ft.com/content/12933764-130e-31ed-b690-8a97b1f4dbda)
[42] Cleo Paskal, "War flashbacks in Guam as China projects power in the Pacific," *The Sunday Guardian* (India), September 17, 2023. (https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/09/17/war-flashbacks-in-guam-as-china-projects-power-in-the-pacific)
[43] The White House, Press Release, "America First Investment Policy," February 21, 2025. (https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/america-first-investment-policy)
[44] Alexander B. Gray, "Preserving U.S. Interests in the Indo-Pacific: Examining How U.S. Engagement Helps Deter Chinese Influence," *Testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs*, May 16, 2023. (https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/testimony_gray.pdf)

Build

At the same time, proper attention should be paid to finding ways to keep the territories economically and socially healthy. This requires ground-level assessments, which perhaps could be facilitated by OIA field agents.

One example of a 'small' thing that would make a big build difference is a waiver from cabotage.[45] Currently, only American carriers can fly between U.S. destinations. That has resulted in United having an effective monopoly on the Saipan to Guam route, and resulting airfares are some of the highest per mile in the world — with a 40-minute round trip flight costing around $580. This has put severe constraints on CNMI's ability to diversify tourism and develop alternative business, and it raises healthcare and education costs. Waiving cabotage would mean, for example, that a Japanese carrier could fly Tokyo-Saipan-Guam, lowering costs and opening up new markets. Indeed, United's role in the region as a whole deserves serious attention.

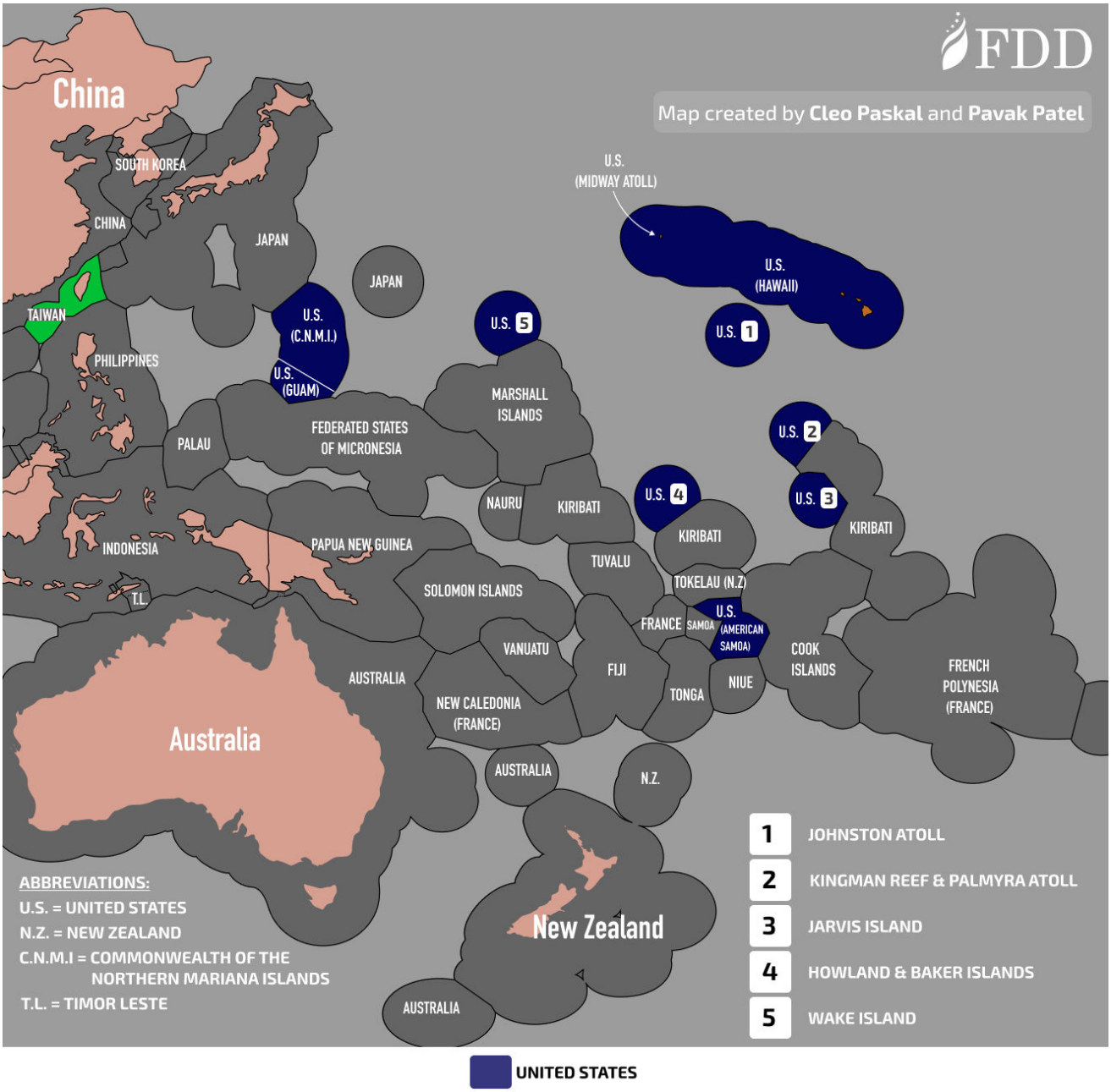
Other sample build actions:

- Removing bureaucratic barriers to accelerate federally funded programs (including around FEMA support post-disasters) and implementing centralized tracking and oversight of these programs.
- Establishing a center, possibly at the Northern Marianas College, that works with the elders and local practitioners to research and educate on the political evolution of the region, including the Japanese era through the Trust Territory and onto the establishment of CNMI and the FAS. This is necessary so that narratives aren't hijacked by malign external actors, the region rebuilds its bonds, and those from Interior, State, Defense, and others who work in the area get an understanding of the unique nature of the region.
- Working to unlock the potential of the American Samoan fisheries. Along with the economic growth that fisheries can offer the people of American Samoa, it would bring friendly fleets into Samoan waters, putting it in a better position to observe and defend against those in Samoan waters with ill intent.
- Prioritizing the establishment of a fast ferry service between Guam and Rota to bring in military tourists and improve connectivity. This can offer travel options and growth to the people of Rota while forestalling the allure of PRC investment in a location so close to Guam.

Fundamentally, the goal of all of this is to ensure that the cost/benefit analysis of taking Chinese money to sell out your country changes and that the people of the American territories are given a way to prosper without ever-present illegal, coercive, aggressive, and deceptive activity by the PRC destroying their communities, dividing their families, and making them live in fear. As American nationals and citizens, it's the least they deserve.

[45] U.S. Department of Transportation, "Cabotage definition and standards for emergency exemption," February 24, 2011. (https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/20-AviationCabotageDOT.pdf)

ANNEX 1: Map of the Pacific Territories



ANNEX 2: A Brief Look at How American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands and Guam Came to Be Part of the United States

While there are cultural and familial links across the Pacific territories, they have different modern histories and different legal relationships with the federal government. A basic understanding of these differences is an essential starting point not only to provide acceptable and effective outcomes but also because these differences can be exploited by powers keen to sow discord within the American family, for example, over the status of Guam.

Selected Timeline of U.S. Relations With American Samoa

1872	Commander Richard W. Meade, United States Navy, agrees to a treaty with the leadership on Tutuila Island giving the United States exclusive rights to develop a naval station at Pago Pago harbor. The U.S. Senate, in an isolationist phase, refuses to ratify. The islanders consider it binding.[46]
1878	Following a visit by Ambassador Chief Mamea to the United States, the Senate ratifies the Treaty for a Naval Station in Pago Pago but passes on annexing the islands.[47]
1899	Tensions between Britain, Germany, and to a degree the United States and the Kingdom of Hawaii[48] contribute to Samoan civil wars. Britain, Germany, and the United States sign the Tripartite Convention giving Samoan islands east of the 171st meridian (including Tutuila) to the United States and the ones to the west to Germany.[49]
1900	Presidential Executive Order 125-A places American Samoa under U.S. Navy jurisdiction. Formal deeds of cession of Tutuila to the United States are signed by the Matai (Chiefs), obligating the United States to preserve local cultural traditions.[50]
1904	Tui Manu'a signs a deed of cession of Manu'a to the United States.[51]
1925	Swain Island is added by Congress to the boundaries of American Samoa.[52]

[46] U.S. National Park Service, "National Park of American Samoa: World War II," April 23, 2020. (https://www.nps.gov/articles/samoawwii.htm)
[47] Captain (Ret.) Edwin T. Pollock, "American Samoa," *U.S. Naval Institute*, September 1927. (https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1927/september/american-samoa)
[48] Treaty Between the Kingdom of Samoa and the Kingdom of the Hawaiian Islands, Honolulu, HI, February 17, 1887. (https://www.hawaiiankingdom.org/treaty_samoa.shtml)
[49] Convention of 1899, American Samoa, December 2, 1899. (https://asbar.org/convention-of-1899)
[50] U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Insular Affairs, "Departmental Manual," April 27, 1989. (https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/elips/documents/575-dm-1.pdf)
[51] Treaty of Cession of Manu'a, Tutuila, Tau, July 16, 1904. (https://asbar.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/cession2.pdf)
[52] Joint Resolution Extending the sovereignty of the United States over Swains Island and making the island a part of American Samoa, Resolution 294, 68th Congress (1926), page 119. (https://maint.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/68th-congress/session-2/c68s2ch563.pdf)

1929	The United States formally ratifies deeds of cession, authorizing the president to administer relations consistent with cultural autonomy in local affairs.[53]
1951	Authority of the president for relations with American Samoa is delegated to the secretary of the interior by executive order.[54]
1956	Secretary of the Department of the Interior appoints American Samoa-born Peter Tali Coleman as the territory's first Samoa governor of Samoan descent. He later also serves as the first locally elected governor.[55]

With approvals by the secretary of the interior, the 1960 locally adopted constitution was revised in 1967 and 2025 based on local self-determination.

Today, American Samoa's political status is that of an unincorporated territory of the United States, uniquely governed as authorized by congressional ratification of the deeds of cession, delegating federal authority to the president, delegated in turn to the secretary of the interior. This status is defined by a unique history in which American Samoa was never conquered, annexed, or sold by the legal mandate of colonial powers.

Instead, the islands retain a legacy of sovereign-to-sovereign mutual agreement devolving to the United States sovereignty at a national level and federal relations-based preservation of cultural autonomy and self-determination as to local affairs. Accordingly, American Samoans choose to preserve statutory 'national but not citizen' status for purposes of international travel and migration to the U.S. mainland and the option of reclassification as statutory "citizens" by individual choice. American Samoa also has petitioned the United Nations to remove it from the UN Charter Article 73 list of colonial areas.

While this status means Samoans can't, for example, vote for president, the status is generally seen favorably, as it affords them other benefits, such as protection for their own system of land management.[56] It sends an elected representative to Congress who serves, votes, and holds leadership position in the U.S. House of Representatives and committees thereof.

[53] U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Insular Affairs, "Departmental Manual," April 27, 1989. (https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/elips/documents/575-dm-1.pdf)
[54] Executive Order 10264, "Transfer of the administration of American Samoa from the Secretary of the Navy to the Secretary of the Interior," June 29, 1951. (https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/10264.html)
[55] "About," *Congresswoman Uifa'atali Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen*, accessed February 28, 2025 (https://radewagen.house.gov/about)
[56] Michelle Broder Van Dyke, "Why some American Samoans don't want U.S. citizenship," *NBC News*, December 17, 2019. (https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/why-some-american-samoans-don-t-want-u-s-citizenship-n1103256)

Selected Timeline of U.S. Relations With Guam

June 20-21, 1898	Guam had been part of the Spanish colonial empire since the 17th Century. The United States captures Guam as part of the Spanish-American War.[57]
December 10, 1898	The Treaty of Paris ends the Spanish-American War. Spain cedes Guam, along with the Philippines and Puerto Rico, to the United States.[58]
December 8-10, 1941	Within hours of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Imperial Japanese forces attacked Guam, taking it shortly after and occupying it until 1944.
July 21 to August 10, 1944	Liberation of Guam by U.S. forces.
August 1, 1950	For most of its time under the United States, Guam was administered by the U.S. Navy. On this day, President Harry Truman signs the Organic Act of Guam, designating it an unincorporated organized territory of the United States, granting statutory U.S. citizenship to its inhabitants, establishing a civilian government with a legislature and governor, and transferring federal jurisdiction to the Department of the Interior.[59]
1969	Voters in Guam reject unification with Northern Mariana Islands.[60]
1976-8	Guam is authorized to establish its own constitution.[61] A constitutional convention is held, and a draft Constitution is written.
1979	In a referendum, 82 percent of Guamanian voters reject the proposed constitution, and the territory remains subject to the 1950 Organic Act.[62]

Guam is an organized, unincorporated territory. Its residents are U.S. citizens but cannot vote in presidential elections. It also sends an elected representative to Congress.

[57] "War in the Pacific," *U.S. National Park Service*, accessed February 28, 2025. (https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/npswapa/extcontent/wapa/reed/sectiona-4.htm)
[58] "World of 1898: International Perspectives on the Spanish American War," *Library of Congress*, accessed February 28, 2025. (https://guides.loc.gov/world-of-1898/introduction)
[59] The Organic Act of Guam, 48 U.S.C. §1421. (https://www.guamcourts.org/CompilerofLaws/GCA/OrganicAct/Organic%20Act.pdf)
[60] Northern Mariana Islands Delegate Act, H.R. 4067, 104th Congress (1995-1996), Accompanying report. (https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/104th-congress/house-report/856/1?outputFormat=pdf)
[61] An Act to provide for the establishment of constitutions for the Virgin Islands and Guam, Pub. L. 94-584, 90 Stat. 2899. (https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/94/584.pdf)
[62] Joshua F. Tenorio and Dr. James Perez Viernes, "Guam Constitutional Conventions (ConCon)," *Guampedia*, June 29, 2024. (https://www.guampedia.com/guam-constitutional-conventions-concon)

Selected Timeline of U.S. relations With Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands

1944	U.S. forces take Saipan and Tinian, expelling Imperial Japanese forces from the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI).
1947	United Nations Security Council establishes the "strategic" Trust Territory (which includes NMI and what are now Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands) and it is given to the United States to administer.[63]
1951	Administration of the Trust Territory (including NMI) is transferred by President Harry Truman through an executive order from the Navy to Interior.[64]
1965	Convening of the Congress of Micronesia in Saipan.[65]
1975	Referendum votes in favor of becoming a U.S. territory in political union with the United States.[66]
1976	The current "Commonwealth Covenant" is signed into law by President Gerald Ford.[67]
1986	The United States terminates the Trust Territory agreement, and CNMI residents become U.S. citizens.[68]

CNMI is an organized, unincorporated territory with commonwealth status. Its residents are U.S. citizens but cannot vote in presidential elections. It too sends an elected representative to Congress.

[63] United Nations Security Council, "Trusteeship of Strategic Areas," March 12, 1947, pages 16-21. (https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/21(1947))
[64] Executive Order 10265, "Transfer of The Administration of The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands from the Secretary of the Navy to the Secretary of the Interior," June 29, 1951. (https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/executive-orders/10265/executive-order-10265)
[65] Norman Meller, *The Congress of Micronesia: Development of the Legislative Process in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands* (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1969). (https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvp2n5bt)
[66] Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, "A Proclamation" *Proclamation 4534 — Constitution of the Northern Mariana Island*, October 24, 1977. (https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-4534-constitution-the-northern-mariana-islands)
[67] Covenant To Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America, Pub. L. 94-241, 48 U.S.C. §1801. (https://cnmilaw.org/cov.php#gsc.tab=0)
[68] Former U.S. President Ronald Reagan, "A Proclamation," *Proclamation 5564 — United States Relations With the Northern Mariana Islands, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands*, November 3, 1986. (https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/proclamation-5564-united-states-relations-northern-mariana-islands-micronesia-and)