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The military takeover of the Marianas

25 Sep 2015

By Peter J. Perez



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THE day will come when we will look back on these post-Soudelor days and nights with a mixture of nostalgia and sadness.

We will remember the damage to our homes and possessions and the hard work cleaning and clearing debris, the hot sleepless nights, the mosquitoes, the shortages, the lines and the worry. We will remember how we helped and were helped, how we consoled and were comforted, and how, together, with help from many, we endured, we rebuilt, and we resumed our lives.

And from the vantage point of years from now, we will also remember that while we were distracted, the U.S. Navy moved closer to its goal of militarizing our islands and using them for bombing ranges.

Even before the Navy began its move, the U.S. military already had extensive areas of the Marianas under their control. They occupied fully half of the northern third of Guam along with huge areas in the south, including the island's only lake. They had most of the land around Apra Harbor, and numerous other large areas of Guam that, together, make up a third of Guam's entire land mass. Here in the CNMI, they had a long-term lease on two thirds of Tinian, land around Tanapag Harbour and the entire island of Farallon De Medinilla. They had also managed to convince our leaders to allow them to anchor supply ships off our tourist beaches.

Most of the Navy and the Air Force presence up to that point involved active or potential military bases. Military bases, although always controversial, are busy active places. They bring jobs and opportunities to the communities that host them. But starting in 2010, the Navy began to look at our islands for something altogether different — live-fire training ranges.

The year 2010 marks the beginning of the Navy's series of proposals to turn the Marianas into the world's largest bombing range. That is the year the Mariana Islands Range Complex or MIRC proposal was approved. The MIRC created a half-billion-square nautical mile live-fire training range that surrounds Guam, Rota, Tinian, Saipan and all but the furthest islands to the north. The MIRC authorized live-fire on and in the land, air and sea throughout the training range.

Soudelor winds began to blow on Aug. 1st, the day after the Navy announced its Record of Decision for another proposal – the Mariana Islands Training and Testing or MITT Area. The MITT doubled the area of the MIRC to nearly a billion square nautical miles. It also greatly increased the level of the Navy's deadly sonar and live-fire ordnance testing and

training in CNMI waters. The MITT plan allows the Navy to damage or kill over 6 square miles of endangered coral reefs plus an additional 20 square miles of coral reef around FDM through the use of highly explosive bombs. It ups the rate of explosive bombing from 2,150 bombs per year to over 6,000 bombs per year, increasing the Navy's bombing of FDM by roughly 300 percent.

On Sept. 2, 2015, while most of us were busy trying to get water and file FEMA claims, the Navy signed the Record of Decision for another proposal, the Guam and CNMI Military Relocation proposal, approving a new Marine Base on Guam, a new Live-Fire Training Range Complex or LFTRC and a separate hand-grenade range.

Next in the Navy's step-wise move on the Marianas is the CNMI Joint Military Training or CJMT proposal. The CJMT would allow them to use two-thirds of Tinian for their second highest level of live-fire training range and to take the entire island of Pagan and use it for their highest level of live-fire training.

Unlike the LFTRC, the MIRC and the MITT that seemed far away, the CJMT proposed activities are entirely in CNMI. It completes the Navy's live-fire training plans, surrounding us with live-fire ranges; on Guam to the south; Tinian in the west, FDM and Pagan to the north, and all around us on and in the ocean.

The CJMT will have wide-spread negative consequences on virtually every aspect of life in the CNMI; health, environment, natural resources, economics, culture, historic preservation, social justice, infrastructure, public safety and freedom of movement. The military will have over 24 percent of our total land mass and will dominate and control our airspace and maritime waters, restricting our movement and activities from Guam to Maug. With the CJMT, our local representative government becomes subjugated and subordinate to the Navy.

The Oct. 1 (CNMI date) deadline for public comments on the CJMT Draft Environmental Impact Statement or EIS is nearly upon us. It is our last chance to voice our concerns before the Navy publishes its Final EIS and makes its Record of Decision.

Public EIS comments are extremely important because the Navy only has to respond to the concerns about impacts to our lands, our waters and our people that are raised in the comments. They don't have to try to avoid, minimize, mitigate or even consider any adverse impacts that didn't make the deadline. Also, subsequent legal action cannot be taken on impact issues that don't make the deadline. Not getting an issue into the EIS amounts to a free pass for the Navy on that issue.

Through your EIS comments, you can demand that the Navy thoroughly investigate and disclose all the adverse impacts of their planned activities on our environment and our historic resources — not just those they choose to consider, but the ones you bring up. For example, you can demand a thorough scientific study of the potential impact of years of explosive ordnance contamination of the soil to Tinian's underground fresh water supply. You can also call out their failure to consider reasonable alternatives. For example, you can demand that they thoroughly investigate and consider alternatives to training that do not involve our islands and our waters.

It is not likely that you'll have read all of the Navy's 1500-page Draft EIS and the many hundreds of pages of highly technical appendices. But that should not stop you from asking about any issue that is important to you. If the Navy addressed the issue, they can say so. But if they did not, your asking can force them to address it.

It is easy to submit comments. Just visit <http://www.cnmieis.org/submit-comments.html>. The website makes it fast and easy. It also provides excellent and easy to understand information on the Navy's proposals and the shortcomings and omissions of the Navy's Draft EIS.

Time is of the essence; act now and submit your comments before Oct. 1.

The author is co-founder of PaganWatch and member of the Alternative Zero Coalition.

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Marianas Variety

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pattepareihu · 12 hours ago

Soudelor is nothing compared to what the U.S. military has done and will do to poison our waters, land and air, in effect the environment we live in, and in essence, poison us and our children. I also have a bone to pick with those "leaders" who allowed those ships to park out there forever. We are encouraged to promote tourism but are forced to look at these huge blights on our Beach Road horizon.

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