

RELOCATING THE MARINE CORPS

A population surge would overwhelm any environment. Can chaos be avoided?



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An estimated 10,500 Marines are already in the process of permanently relocating from Okinawa Island in Japan to Guam. They will be accompanied by 14,000 other military personnel, civilian workers and their dependents in this relocation. It is planned that all of these 24,500 new residents will be in place by 2015. In addition to this permanent population, a temporary construction work force and their dependents will be needed—peaking at an additional 23,000 in 2014—for a total of 47,500 people from the direct impact that year.

Then there's the indirect and induced impacts. These are estimated at an additional 33,000 people in the peak year of 2014, and leveling off to less than 9,000 additional permanent people by 2017 from this segment.

Although the new permanent population has been estimated to be about 34,000 by 2017, the peak population is more than double that. As shown in Figure 2, roughly 79,000 people will be impacting Guam's population base of approximately 178,000, and this will occur three years earlier. This is not your average relocation.

It's no surprise that Guam will be impacted physically, biologically, socially and economically by this relocation. The impact from this level of accelerated growth, unless consciously and deliberately managed, would overwhelm any environment. The challenge is finding a way to create an atmosphere of harmony and respect so that everyone affected can be prepared for the inevitable change that's coming. Without it, chaos would be certain to follow.

BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

The sheer magnitude of the Marine Corps move has the potential to create a “future forgone,” which occurs when people lose their ability to participate in and predict what will happen to their communities when major events are announced. Without predictability about events to come, feelings of anxiety and loss of control arise. In these situations, people are likely to rise up and attempt to take back their decision-making authority for their own villages, communities and environment.

To prevent a massive disruption, the Marine leadership will need to focus on a culturally-based process of stabilization. Mitigating potential impacts is essential, but without knowing what the specific impacts will be, it's like working in the dark. Therefore, on-the-ground work must be done within each community. That means going from village to village to get an insider's view. Without that, it would be impossible to know what's needed to stabilize each geographic community.

Where U.S. forces are engaged around the world, Defense Secretary Robert Gates is known for using an emerging doctrine known as a bottom-up process. Rather than trying to impose a pre-designed solution from the top down, this approach empowers citizens and governments to build a society that works specifically within the impacted cultures. This shift was set in motion by National Security Presidential Directive 44, which laid out a framework for reconstruction and stabilization.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

In an ideal world, a stabilization program would have started at the beginning of the planned transfer of base operations from Okinawa to Guam. Unfortunately, it did not. Had the Marine Corps been following a bottom-up, community-building approach, the EIS draft that was released in November 2009 should have contained a social component. This would have included a situational assessment, one that identified the social impacts and all of the anticipated issues that would follow, as well as a social impact mitigation program with a task sequence, timelines and budgets for implementation.

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The policy intent of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as stated in Section 101, is to foster productive harmony and a balance between people and nature. Congress directed that the social, economic, and ecological aspects of decision-making be integrated in order to create that balance. This goal of productive harmony has not been noted, nor planned for in the final EIS. That shortcoming will need to be addressed as the Record of Decision is implemented.

PROACTIVE RESOLUTIONS

It is impossible to achieve sustainability until the disruptive uncertainty is alleviated. Without first obtaining that stable base, there is no foundation upon which to build a sustainable future. This is done by resolving outstanding physical, biological, social and cultural issues already in the system before the move.

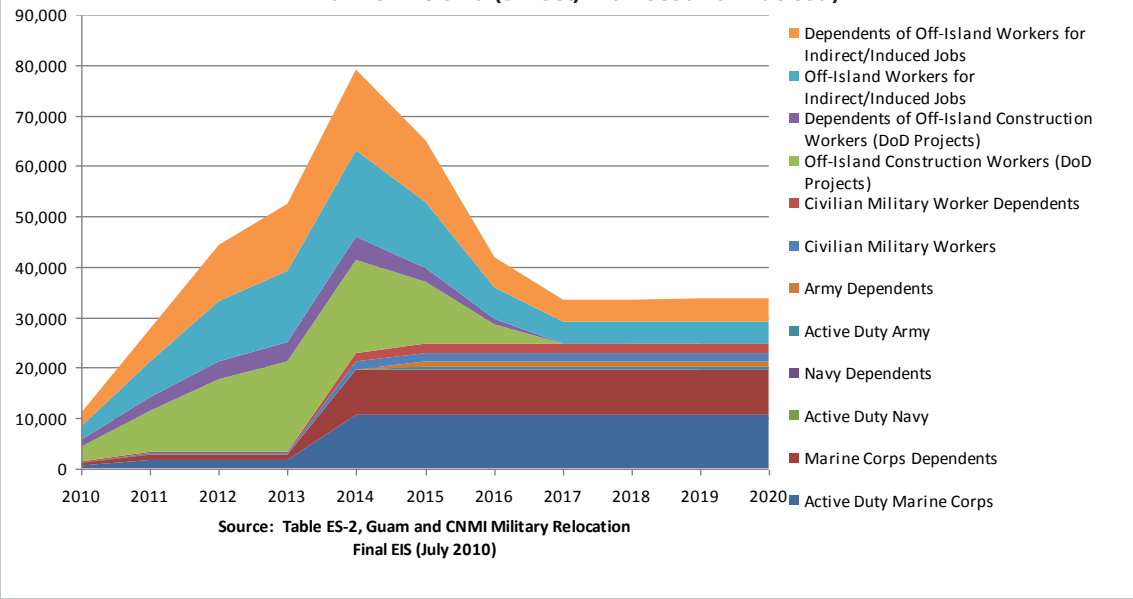
The incoming Marine Corps units represent an instrument of major change during one of the most vulnerable times for the people, institutions and government of Guam. As such, any unresolved issues by their past presence should be identified in advance. If they are not resolved proactively, then those pre-existing issues will be loaded into whatever new problems arise from the impending move. Ultimately, these added burdens only work to slow down the process and increase the costs.

To the extent that Guam's informal cultural systems and formal institutions can be mobilized to absorb and benefit from the change that the Marine Corps will be creating, that is the degree to which the Marines will experience unparalleled success in their future relations with the people of Guam.

Figure 1: The Path to Sustainability



Figure 2: Growth Rate Chart for Off-Island Populations
Estimated Total Population Increase on Guam
From Off-Island (Direct, Indirect and Induced)



ABSORBING THE GROWTH

As sociologists who have worked with addressing change in local cultures throughout the Pacific Rim, we know there are certain formulas that can be used to design management practices to address population change. It is important to recognize that:

- A population can absorb a natural growth rate of about 1.4% a year without disrupting the receiving society. According to a U.S. Census publication titled “Guam’s Demographic Profile 2010,” their annual growth rate was 1.365% in 2009.
- A 3% population growth rate is the upper limit for effectively managing an intrusion by a force such as this. To absorb 3%, the receiving society must mobilize and operate with design.
- Beyond the 3% annual growth, it will take extraordinary efforts to absorb the numbers in the timeframe planned. By the peak year 2014, the additional population growth (permanent and temporary) attributable to the Marine Corps move is estimated to be 79,000. After 2014, the population surge caused by the Marine relocation begins to decline and gradually stabilizes at about 34,000 additional people by 2019.

In Figure 2, a population growth chart reflects the estimated total population increase on Guam from off-

island sources (direct, indirect and induced), as opposed to natural growth.

In the first five years, the compounded, annual population growth rate attributable to the relocation is estimated to be 7.6%. The year before, it will be 6.7% according to the final EIS. Thus, this five-year period of 2010-2014 has the potential for great disruption. The largest single-year population growth is expected between years 2013 and 2014—a growth of 26,000 in one year alone. This means that there are less than two years to prepare for addressing how the anticipated impacts will be absorbed.

FIVE ACTION STEPS

Change initiatives which foster sustainability require that certain functions be in place. Five key action steps offer a realistic and effective mitigation effort, creating an environment that is accessible so that all sectors can participate and benefit from the change.

1. Establish a Social Impact Management Team

Local citizens need a safe venue to articulate and discuss how the move will affect them and have their issues addressed. The EIS process must go beyond the physical environmental issues and identify and address issues related to social impacts, such as how the buildup will affect daily life relative to traffic, congestion, housing costs, access to services, educational opportunities, job prospects and business growth.

2. Obtain Participation Before Construction Begins

Success depends on early, direct contact between individual citizens and Marine staff using a collaborative approach. Many agencies are adept at interacting with interest groups on a formal basis, however most are not experienced with informal, place-based collaboration. Oftentimes, specialists are needed to identify the informal networks and make it easier for citizens to resolve their own issues.

3. Be Issue-Oriented in Early Months

Citizen issues must be identified and responded to at the emerging stage of development, with the goal of preventing emerging issues from reaching the existing or disruptive stages. The more the Corps can be strategic about addressing issues related to community life, the more positive the effects of the Marines' presence will be.

4. Engage with Institutions Gradually as Issues are Defined

To the degree that the Marines can strengthen the institutional framework of Guam by sound understanding of citizen issues and a commitment to assist in resolving them, the less dependent the population will be on Marine and local government resources. The long-term effect is efficient and effective governance. As the Marines become grounded in everyday cultural life on Guam, the direct relationships they develop will blunt unwarranted control from vested interests seeking to gain advantage concerning the results of decisions.

5. Create Indicators to Measure Progress

As the program advances, it will be essential to develop indicators for social, economic and ecological health that are relevant to Guam in promoting sustainability. These indicators can be monitored for progress on each of the dimensions, adding transparency and accountability to an island-wide collaborative program.

CONCLUSIONS

The Guam relocation presents an opportunity for the Marines to create a value-added sustainable environment, one of increased community and ecological benefits for the citizens and the institutions. It will create a learning experience for the Marines with a bottom-up approach in a non-war zone that will be successful and can be used in other Marine/Navy environments to create zones of opportunity .

However, the impacts from this growth, unless consciously and deliberately managed, can overwhelm the very environments that have made Guam a unique bio-social ecosystem. If that occurs, it will also significantly diminish the Marines' ability to function effectively in this critically important forward defense area. An environment of trust and respect must be created so that all sectors can participate in, and benefit from, the change that is coming.

References

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Table ES2 Estimated Total Population Increase on Guam from Off-Island (Direct, Indirect and Induced) Guam and CNMI Military Relocation Final EIS (July 2010) Executive Summary, page ES-8

Source: U.S. Census Records, Guam Demographic Profile 2010 (2009 estimate).

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