

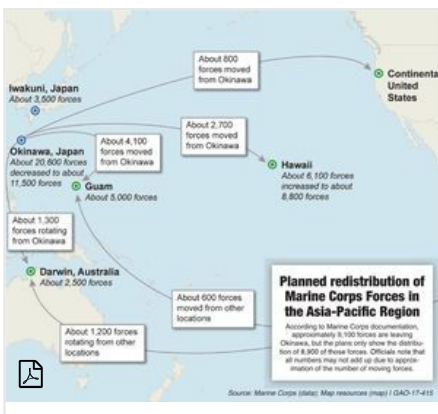
https://www.postguam.com/news/local/h--b-workers-needed-for-buildup/article_fd93ffac-1b86-11e7-bb3b-0b82e09988fd.html

2,800 H-2B workers needed for buildup

Gaynor D. Daleno | The Guam Daily Post 7 hrs ago



INFRASTRUCTURE: A utilities project on Andersen Air Force Base's North Ramp, to support the Marines' relocation, is shown in Sep last year. This project provides utilities infrastructure consisting of electrical, water, wastewater, communications, roads, security, fence improvements, and earthwork. Photo courtesy U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Jacob Snouffer



The Department of Defense has acknowledged that projects for the construction of a Marine Corps base and related facilities on Guam would strain the island's labor force, but the Pentagon continues to work with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to help Guam out, according to a recent federal report.

Guam's nearly depleted pool of skilled foreign construction workers on H-2B visas has now numbered about 170, down from

Planned redistribution of Marine Corps Forces in the Asia/Pacific region
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about 1,300 a year ago, said Guam Gov. Eddie Calvo on Thursday, who said he's withdrawing support for the military buildup in Guam until the labor issue is resolved.

Calvo said with the worker shortage, most of the remaining skilled labor in Guam would work on the military base projects, leaving the civilian community with a shrunken labor pool. This would delay civilian projects and make them costly, compromising the local economy, according to the governor.

The Defense Department, in a response included in an April 5 U.S. Government Accountability report on the military buildup, said it recognizes the labor problem and continues to work on a solution.

"The Navy expects that construction contractors will need to supplement their labor workforce with 2,800 foreign laborers to meet the demand for labor during the peak of construction," according to the GAO report.

"In its response, DoD cited actions it has previously taken and plans to mitigate risks for infrastructure construction and sustainment, such as coordinating with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to address foreign-worker visas," according to the GAO report.

In addition to the labor shortage issue, the GAO report identified other challenges that could lead to higher costs and construction delays involving the construction of a Marine Corps base on Guam and its support facilities.

Challenges to cost, schedule

Explosive ordnance detection, cultural artifact discovery and preservation, and endangered-species protection have been identified as additional challenges which can affect the cost or th

schedule for each of the various individual projects on the island

In one instance, Navy officials stated that they had to modify the initial contract for a utilities project to include a \$4.9 million cost increase and a 10-month schedule delay because the contractor detected more anomalies that DoD had to address, according to the GAO report.

In May 2016, the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations issued an exemption to aspects of the Navy's guidance on the detection of explosive ordnance in an attempt to ease standards that resulted in cost overruns and schedule delays in Guam, the report states.

Under the exemption, civilian construction labor does not need to evacuate a site during the detection process for explosive ordnance in certain circumstances, when follow-up analysis shows they're not explosive ordnance after all.

"DoD officials stated that the exemption reduced some of the cost and schedule risks related to detecting explosive ordnance, but the current process for the detection of explosive ordnance may still affect the cost and schedule for a project," according to the GAO.

According to the Navy, DoD has experienced schedule delays as it has waited for the Fish and Wildlife Service to complete biological opinions that outline protection strategies for endangered species in construction areas.

For example, DoD experienced delays with two construction projects due to the discovery of endangered orchid and butterfly species on site, which, according to the Navy, has caused delays in awarding the contracts for both construction projects, the report states.

Japan-US agreement

The proposed Marine Corps base on Guam has a budget of \$8.7 billion, and of that amount, \$3.1 billion would be paid for by the Japanese government, which wants to reduce the presence of Marines in Okinawa.

Okinawa's U.S. bases house approximately 29,000 military personnel, including about 18,000 Marine Corps personnel on a given day, according to the report.

In April 2012, the U.S. and Japan governments adjusted the realignment plans.

“In an effort to reach this balance and re-align its presence in the Asia-Pacific region, the Marine Corps plans to consolidate bases in southern Okinawa and relocate 4,100 Marines to Guam, 2,700 to Hawaii, 800 to the continental United States, and 1,300 on a rotational basis to Australia,” according to the report.

The proposed relocation to Guam has been estimated to start around the 2021 or 2022 time frame.

The report is a public version of a sensitive report the GAO issued.

The report was submitted to Sen. John McCain, chairman of Armed Services in the U.S. Senate, and Sen. Jack Reed, ranking member of the committee on Armed Services, and other Senate members who deal with military and appropriations issues.