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Governor supports buildup due to China, NKorea risks

JOHN O'CONNOR | THE GUAM DAILY POST

13 HRS AGO



ADELUP: Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero offers her perspective to local cultural and environmental groups during a meeting Tuesday. Tense moments in the meeting when activists called out the governor for not calling for a total pause on the Live-Fire Training Force Base. David Castro/The Guam Daily Post

"I don't support it for the economic reasons. I support it for the national security reasons." – Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero

Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero's declaration of support for the military buildup drew criticism and some outrage from a room full of cultural and environmental activists who met with her Tuesday in the governor's conference room to discuss the disruption of cultural sites as a result of the military construction of the Live-Fire Training Range Complex.

"I do support the military buildup. I don't support it for the economic reasons. I support it for the national security reasons," Leon Guerrero said through interspersed "No's" and concerned faces among members of an audience that had just spent the last two hours articulating their reasons for opposing military buildup activity.

"When I go to these military briefings, I can see the possible outside invasion to us. And why is that? Because we are in a geographic position where the military sees us as a place where we are the first line of defense."

'Carpetbaggers'

Leon Guerrero said she did not believe the economics and job creation narrative behind the buildup was "that great" - characterizing the off-island companies that take advantage of military contracts as "carpetbaggers."

"They come in and they try to get the contracts and they do benefit. Not so much with us. We see this, they don't register their business with us. We don't collect the taxes because we don't know," the governor said.

But beyond that, Leon Guerrero said, she feels there is potential for outside invasion, citing countries such as China and North Korea.

"And I really fear for the security of our people," she added.

The compelling interest falls on the community, culture and saving and preserving Guam history, Leon Guerrero said, and the island needs to think strategically about how to do that. Initiatives need to balance security with cultural preservation, she added.

Political status needed

"Every time those bulldozers move them, we lose all the information around it and we don't know what we could have learned." – Victoria-Lola Leon Guerrero, of Independent Guåhan

The reality is Guam is a colony, a U.S. territory, and is in a geographic position that the military sees as a prime position for defense in the Pacific, the governor said. To work around this reality, Guam needs to get its political status in order so it can have more control over its destiny and be at the table when these issues are being negotiated, Leon Guerrero said.

The most that can probably be done at this point is to review the Programmatic Agreement, she added.

Meanwhile, Leon Guerrero has committed to asking for a pause on military construction where historic sites and a rare tree have been located. The military has stated it has partially halted construction at those sites.

Activists and some senators have called for a complete pause on the construction at the firing range project, which is a key part of relocating nearly 5,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam.

A total pause is needed because, as it is now, the historical and ancient sites are discovered as a result of military construction, which destroys the context of the sites – even if construction is halted afterward, according to the local groups. There needs to be careful preservation of the sites, they stated.

"Every time those bulldozers move them, we lose all the information around it and we don't know what we could have learned," said Victoria-Lola Leon Guerrero of Independent Guåhan.

But with Guam's current political status, any calls for pause still can be ignored, the governor said.

"They can totally ignore us and we have no legal recourse. We can maybe go to our Congress, maybe to the White House. But I'll tell you, they are just as concerned about China and North Korea around this area," the governor said.

Victoria-Lola Leon Guerrero said those national security issues are relevant to the continental United States and as long as the island remains linked to the United States, Guam remains at risk.

"I know what you're saying, that it's difficult because of our political status to be able to make the demands being asked of you in this room, and I absolutely concur that we immediately need to self-determine as a people," Victoria-Lola Leon Guerrero said. "But as our maga'haga we're saying it is not your responsibility to think of their security, it is your responsibility to think of ours."

Gov. Leon Guerrero did not disagree but maintained that the reality is Guam currently falls under the arm of the United States, and therefore, the security issues that affect the continental U.S. also affect Guam.

"That's why I'm thinking, is it such that one is exclusive of the other? Or is there a way to work and live with that until we get to the level where we can voice ourselves and have more control and power to do something else?" the governor said.

Tuesday's meeting is likely not the last, the governor said. Meanwhile, groups including Prutehi Litekyan continue to urge her to stop construction at all sites and establish a team of experts to review the various military impact statements.

Moreover, a [petition](#) to "save Ritidian and oppose the degradation and militarization of native lands" on [Change.org](#) has gathered nearly 13,000 signatures, 2,000 shy of its goal.

TAGS

VICTORIA-LOLA LEON GUERRERO

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BUILDUP

MILITARY	STATUS	LAW	BUILDING INDUSTRY	ECONOMICS	CONSTRUCTION	SENATOR	HISTORY
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