

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-u-s-base-on-guam-is-aimed-at-deterring-china-11674731857>

WORLD

New U.S. Base on Guam Is Aimed at Deterring China

Camp Blaz is eventually expected to house 5,000 Marines and be a hub for training in the Western Pacific



Guam's Camp Blaz is eventually meant to house 5,000 Marines, though fewer than 100 are stationed there now.

PHOTO: NANCY A. YOUSSEF/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By *Nancy A. Youssef* [Follow](#)

Jan. 26, 2023 6:17 am ET

ASAN BEACH, Guam—The U.S. Marine Corps marked the opening of a new base on America's westernmost Pacific island, as the Pentagon redirects its forces to counter China, which Washington has identified as a growing threat to U.S. security.

The first new Marine base since 1952, it is still under construction. It will eventually house 5,000 Marines charged in the short term with deterring and detecting threats in the region.

Longer term, the Guam base, about equidistant from Japan and Taiwan, is also slated to be a hub for Marines on Guam and across the Northern Mariana Islands to train for protecting Pacific islands, including vital sea lanes, in the event of an invasion.

As U.S. concerns grow about China's military power, and the threat to Taiwan, the base would prepare more Marines for potential conflict in the Western Pacific islands. Marines would be closer to the front lines of a potential conflict, available to quickly travel from island to island in small teams armed with antiship missiles to detect, harass and destroy enemy vessels. The new base would also reduce U.S. reliance on keeping large numbers of troops in Japan, where their presence has at times caused local resentment.

If there is a conflict with China, the Marines would be among the first ground forces to respond.

"We don't want to fight to get to the fight. We want to already be inside so if there's a conflict, the stand-in forces are already forward," said Gen. David Berger, the Marine Corps commandant.

In the absence of conflict, troops in Guam could practice live-fire exercises, while those stationed in the Northern Mariana Islands could practice maneuvers and overland transfers, defense officials said.

"The role of the Marines in Guam on that side of the international date line is to reinforce the policy of deterrence, which is the underpinnings of our national defense strategy," Gen. Berger said.



On Thursday, FA-18C Hornets did a flyover and hundreds of Marines stood in front of lines of palm trees and the Pacific Ocean and marched before top Guam officials, including the governor. Japanese defense officials also attended the event. The speakers didn't name China but referred to "challenges in the world."

Despite the fanfare during Thursday's naming ceremony, the base is more than a year away from becoming fully operational. Fewer



The ceremony inaugurating the base, which was activated in 2020, was delayed twice by the pandemic.

PHOTO: NANCY A. YOUSSEF/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

than 100 troops are currently stationed there, with the bulk of the rest expected to arrive by December 2024.

Regular troop training along the second island chain is further away, defense officials said, likely closer to 2027. Navy Adm. Phil Davidson, the former head of the Indo-Pacific Command, notably predicted China could try to attack Taiwan that year. The military still needs to iron out logistics because the U.S. doesn't yet have the infrastructure to house and support all the troops it wants to station in the region.

Guam and its nearby islands particularly lack ports for bringing in supplies and conducting some training exercises. The remote location makes building and supplying construction projects difficult, defense officials said.

Many residents aren't enthusiastic about the strain thousands of forces could put on their infrastructure. Others fear how much a large military presence could alter islands geared toward tourism.

In Tinian, for example, an island to the north of Guam still peppered by Japanese air-raid shelters used during World War II, thousands signed petitions opposing the U.S. plans to hold training exercises there, saying they fear the U.S. troop presence more than Chinese attacks, Tinian Mayor Edwin Aldan said.

Over time, through a series of meetings with the U.S. about what the military footprint would look like, more people have embraced the change, Mr. Aldan said. In the days leading up to the ceremony, Gen. Berger traveled to the Northern Mariana Islands of Saipan and Tinian to meet with government officials.

At first, "people were disappointed that there was going to be active bombing," Mr. Aldan said. But the U.S. scaled back the size of the exercises. Now, he said, residents and government officials are saying, "Let's work together so we can have access [to U.S. infrastructure]. You have access, and we can co-share, whatever the costs."

Guam is within China's missile-strike range and believed to be within North Korea's. A war-gaming exercise developed by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies and released earlier this month concluded that Guam is vulnerable to a Chinese attack and that the U.S. military should fortify its defenses. In 2022, the U.S. moved an antimissile system known as Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, from Guam's Andersen Air Force base to Camp Blaz, the newly named Marine base, to improve its defenses there.

The growing U.S. military presence on Guam has been at least a decade in the making. It began in 2012 after Japan asked the U.S. to move some troops out of Okinawa and gained traction in 2018 after the U.S. national-defense strategy called China a pre-eminent threat to U.S. interests and security in the region. Japan and the U.S. are funding the \$8.7 billion project, with the U.S. paying the bulk of costs.

There are roughly 10,000 U.S. troops stationed in Guam, compared with roughly 26,000 during the Cold War, defense officials said. Before Camp Blaz, the Marines operated barracks on the island from 1946 to 1992, when the U.S. began reducing its presence.

Camp Blaz is named for Brig. Gen. Vicente "Ben" Tomás Garrido Blaz, who survived a Japanese prison camp during World War II and became the Marine Corps' highest-ranking Chamorro, as the indigenous people from the Mariana Islands are known, as well as Guam's delegate to Congress from 1985 to 1993. Gen. Blaz died in 2014. His two grandsons and sister were at Thursday's ceremony.

The U.S. military activated Camp Blaz in October 2020 and was supposed to formally introduce it to the public shortly afterward, but the ceremony was delayed twice by the pandemic before finally taking place Thursday.

Write to Nancy A. Youssef at nancy.youssef@wsj.com