

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 8, 2024

The Honorable Frank Kendall
Secretary of the Air Force
Department of the Air Force
1690 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330

The Honorable Carlos Del Toro
Secretary of the Navy
Department of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350

Dear Secretary Kendall and Secretary Del Toro,

American military bases in the Indo-Pacific are under threat. With its current strike capabilities, China can attack all U.S. bases in the region, targeting U.S. service members from Okinawa to those on U.S. territories of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In fact, unclassified analysis suggests China has enough weapons to overwhelm our air and missile defenses protecting those bases.¹ Strikes on U.S. bases could immobilize vital air assets, disrupt logistical chains, and significantly weaken our ability to respond in a conflict. Passive defenses, such as hardened aircraft shelters and dispersal of forces, may offer the most cost-effective way of strengthening our bases and improving their resilience.²

We are concerned about the alarming lack of urgency by the Department of Defense (DoD) in adopting such defensive measures. U.S. bases in the region have almost no hardened aircraft shelters compared to Chinese military bases. In addition, a DoD regulation involving World War II-era munitions is substantially delaying and driving up the costs of construction projects in Guam and CNMI aimed at building a more resilient posture for our forces to withstand Chinese attacks and continue operations. We urge immediate changes.

Current State of Bases

Many U.S. bases in the Indo-Pacific remain unprotected by any hardened structures, and aircraft are often kept close to each other to facilitate maintenance and other supporting tasks.³ The result is that critical U.S. air assets are highly vulnerable to Chinese strikes. Unsurprisingly, in

¹ Stacie L. Pettyjohn, *Spiking the Problem: Developing a Resilient Posture in the Indo-Pacific with Passive Defenses*, War on the Rocks (Jan. 10, 2022) available at <https://warontherocks.com/2022/01/spiking-the-problem-developing-a-resilient-posture-in-the-indo-pacific-with-passive-defenses/>.

² Christopher Lynch, et al., *Operational Imperative: Investing Wisely to Bolster U.S. Air Bases Against Chinese and Russian Attacks*, RAND Corporation (Jan. 17, 2023) at 10 available at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1996-1.html>; Timothy A. Walton, “Fortifying America’s Western Pacific Territories” in *Defending Guam*, Hudson Institute (July 5, 2022) at 34 available at <https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/defending-guam>.

³ Pettyjohn, *supra* note 1.

recent war games simulating a conflict with China over Taiwan, 90 percent of U.S. aircraft losses occurred *on the ground*, rather than from air combat.⁴

While “active defenses” such as air and missile defense systems are an important part of base and force protection, their high cost and limited numbers mean the U.S. will not be able to deploy enough of them to fully protect our bases.⁵ In order to complement active defenses and strengthen our bases, we must invest in “passive defenses,” like hardened aircraft shelters and underground bunkers, dispersal of forces across both within a base and across multiple bases, redundant logistical facilities, and rapid runway repair capabilities.⁶ Robust passive defenses can help minimize the damage of missile attacks by increasing our forces’ ability to withstand strikes, recover quickly, and effectively continue operations.⁷

The U.S. Air Force has commendably incorporated many of the core tenets of passive defense into its doctrine of “Agile Combat Employment” (ACE). The concept emphasizes increasing survivability of forces through dispersal of teams to operate in a “hub-and-spoke” manner.⁸ Concepts such as ACE should be expanded upon and prioritized to harden bases against the Chinese threat, as Secretary Kendall has stated.⁹

Yet, as explained below, it is apparent that the Pentagon is not urgently pursuing needed passive defenses.

Hardened Aircraft Shelters

Ongoing research by Thomas Shugart and Timothy A. Walton, analysts associated with the Center for a New American Security and Hudson Institute, respectively, paints a troubling picture of U.S. efforts to strengthen bases through the construction of hardened aircraft shelters.

According to preliminary information provided by Shugart and Walton, the difference between the number of hardened aircraft shelters being built by China and the United States is staggering.¹⁰ Despite the grave threat to U.S. bases described above, over the last decade, it is China, not the United States, that has built more than 400 hardened aircraft shelters. During the same period, the United States built only *twenty-two* additional hardened shelters in the region, on

⁴ Mark F. Cancian, Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, *The First Battle of the Next War: Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan*, Center for Strategic & International Studies (Jan. 9, 2023) at 87 available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/first-battle-next-war-wargaming-chinese-invasion-taiwan>.

⁵ Pettyjohn, *supra* note 1.

⁶ Lynch, *supra* note 2 at 10

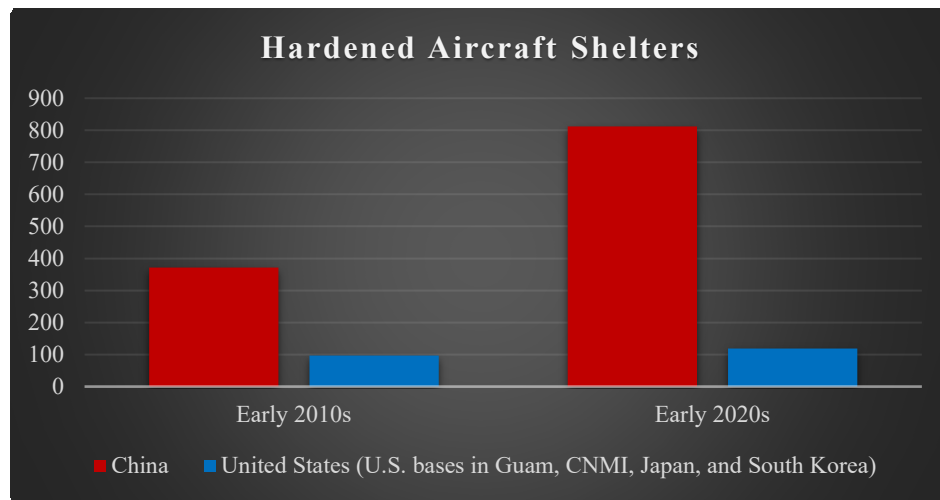
⁷ Pettyjohn, *supra* note 1.

⁸ Agile Combat Employment (Air Force Doctrine Note 1-21), U.S. Air Force (Aug. 23, 2022) available at https://www.doctrine.af.mil/Portals/61/documents/AFDN_1-21/AFDN%201-21%20ACE.pdf.

⁹ Marcus Weisgerberg, *Air Force Must Harden Pacific Bases Against Missiles, Secretary Says*, Defense One (Jan. 19, 2022) available at <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2022/01/air-force-must-harden-pacific-bases-against-missiles-secretary-says/360924/>.

¹⁰ This information was provided at the request of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party.

U.S. bases in Japan and South Korea. Notably, there are no hardened aircraft shelters in Guam or CNMI.¹¹



While hardened aircraft shelters do not provide complete protection from missile attacks, they do offer significantly more protection against submunitions than expedient shelters (relocatable steel shelters). They would also force China to use more force to destroy each aircraft, thereby increasing the resources required to attack our forces and, in turn, the survivability of our valuable air assets.¹² Constructing hardened shelters for all our air assets may not be economically feasible or tactically sensible, but the fact that the number of such shelters on U.S. bases in the region has barely changed over a decade is deeply troubling.

Base Resilience Construction

The limited investment into hardened aircraft shelters is a symptom of a broader problem within the DoD: we are spending hardly any money on military construction to improve base resilience in the Indo-Pacific. In FY 2024, the Pentagon will spend approximately \$15.7 billion on military construction projects worldwide.¹³ Of the total, DoD will spend below 2 percent on base resilience projects in the region, less than what it spent on such projects in 2023.

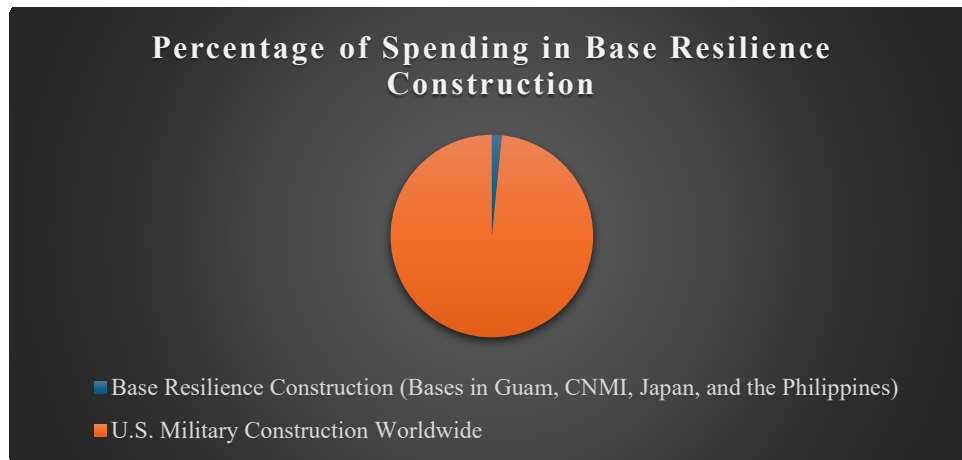
According to the 2024 Military Construction Appropriations Act, the Pentagon will spend \$136 million on the construction of an aircraft parking ramp and aerial port facility in Guam. In CNMI, the Air Force will spend \$78 million on airfield development and fuel tanks. In the

¹¹ See Andrew Tilghman, *Guam: Defense Infrastructure and Readiness*, Congressional Research Service (Aug. 3, 2023) at 35 available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47643>. Hardened maintenance hangars located in Guam were not counted as hardened aircraft shelters.

¹² John Stillion, *Fighting Under Missile Attack*, Air & Space Forces Magazine (Aug. 1, 2009) available at <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/article/0809fighting>; Cancian, *supra* note 4 at 126.

¹³ Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2024 (P.L. 118-122), Division A – Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

Philippines, DoD will spend \$35 million on an airfield development project at Basa Air Base.¹⁴ There appear to be no projects dedicated to base hardening for the entire region as part of FY24 funding.



Meanwhile, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command has identified \$11 billion in priorities that were “unfunded” by the President’s Budget Request for FY25, including \$3.3 billion in military construction.¹⁵ The size and nature of the unfunded priorities reflect a profound lack of seriousness in strengthening the U.S. bases closest to China and thus most vulnerable to Chinese strikes. If our bases in the Indo-Pacific lack the resilience to survive attacks and continue operating, our ability to deter China and respond quickly in the Taiwan Strait will be greatly diminished. It is essential that budget requests provided to Congress accurately reflect what our forces will need to deter and, if needed, defeat any threats against U.S. personnel.

Regulatory Obstacles to Construction

Another barrier to improving the resilience of U.S. bases in the Indo-Pacific region is a DoD policy that is causing significant delays to critical construction projects in the area of responsibility of Joint Region Marianas (JRM), the DoD command that supports U.S. forces in Guam and CNMI. Unexploded ordnances and discarded military munitions are still found on construction sites in Guam and CNMI and for decades, military construction on the islands followed the “Recognize, Retreat, Report” (RRR) procedures for dealing with such ordnances: call 911, cordon off the area, and coordinate with police and Explosive Ordnance Disposal units to pick up and remove the items from the site. Since World War II, tens of thousands of munitions have been removed under RRR procedures during construction in Guam and CNMI with no documented case of explosion or injury, and civilian construction in Guam and CNMI continues to be conducted following RRR procedures.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ See Noah Robertson, *Pacific leaders say they need more funding to compete with China*, Defense News (Mar. 14, 2024) available at <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2024/03/14/pacific-leaders-say-they-need-more-funding-to-compete-with-china/>.

However, in 2010, the DoD replaced RRR with “Munitions and Explosives of Concern” (MEC) procedures for military construction in Guam and CNMI. The military leadership at JRM recently informed the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party that the transition to and use of MEC procedures have added substantial cost and time to urgent construction projects, including those at Andersen Air Force Base and Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz, both located in Guam. JRM leadership also stated that delayed construction has increased operational risk for conducting major combat operations in the region and adversely affected our posture in the Pacific.

The safety of our service members and their families is obviously of the utmost importance, but based on a decades-long record of safe removal under RRR, it is not clear that the onerous MEC procedures are necessary. In light of this, the DoD’s refusal to exempt critical military construction in Guam and CNMI from the burdensome MEC procedures – despite JRM’s assessment that they are impeding urgent projects to strengthen our bases and create a more resilient posture – is confounding.

Secretary Kendall stated in February, “I bring us to the most pacing challenge that we have ever faced, China, China, China. Ladies and gentlemen, we are out of time. We are out of time. We are out of time.”¹⁶ We agree. Construction projects that strengthen our bases and increase their resilience may take years to complete. Onerous regulations, such as MEC procedures, that hamper these efforts must be fundamentally changed, if not removed.¹⁷ The time to act is now.

To better understand these issues and explore your proposed solutions, we respectfully request that you provide written responses to the following questions no later than May 29, 2024:

1. What steps have you taken to incorporate and enhance passive defenses to protect our bases and forces in the Indo-Pacific, including in Alaska, American Samoa, CNMI, Guam, Hawaii, Minor Outlying Islands, and allied and partner territory?
2. What plans do you have to create hardened aircraft shelters, underground bunkers, and other hardened facilities to protect aircraft, equipment, and forces operating out of U.S. bases in the Indo-Pacific?
 - a. What additional hardened infrastructure, reconstitution, camouflage, concealment, and deception projects and programs could enhance the passive defenses of U.S. critical assets and forces in the Indo-Pacific?
3. Do you plan to request additional funding for base resilience construction projects, including hardened aircraft shelters, underground bunkers, and dispersed and/or redundant facilities? If so, please explain.

¹⁶ Frank Kendall, *DAF Leaders Outline Sweeping Changes for ‘Re-optimizing for Great Power Competition’*, Air & Space Forces Magazine (Feb. 23, 2024) available at <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/watch-read-daf-leaders-re-optimizing-great-power-competition/>.

¹⁷ See Walton, *supra* note 2 at 36.

4. Has the Department assessed options to increase efficiency and speed for executing military construction so that such critical projects do not take years to complete?
5. Will you grant JRM an exemption from following MEC procedures for military construction?
 - a. Will you implement RRR procedures as the baseline for military construction throughout the Indo-Pacific?
6. The Pentagon accurately classified the PRC as the “pacing challenge.” However, with INDOPACOM acknowledging many unfunded projects, why does the Department’s budget not reflect its rhetoric on the PRC?

We appreciate your attention to these matters and look forward to a prompt response.

Sincerely,



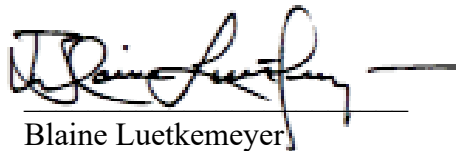
John Moolenaar
Chairman
Select Committee on the CCP



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



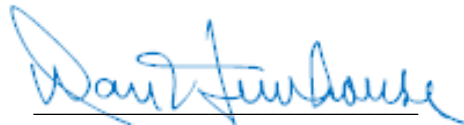
Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress



Blaine Luetkemeyer
Member of Congress



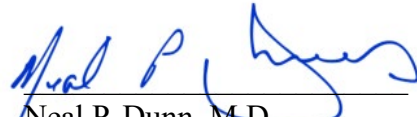
Andy Barr
Member of Congress



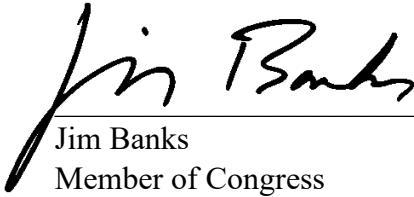
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



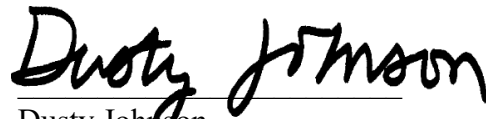
Darin LaHood
Member of Congress



Neal P. Dunn, M.D.
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Michelle Steel
Member of Congress



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Carlos A. Gimenez
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