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Hawaii and Guam: Strategic Convergence Zones for the United States Forward Defense Strategy in the Pacific Rim

by James A. Kent and Eric Casino

Robert Kaplan had an article in the May/June 2010 issue of *Foreign Affairs* titled “*The Geography of Chinese Power: How Far Can Beijing Reach on Land and at Sea?*”¹ His discussion of what the Chinese Navy calls the “first island chain” and the “second island chain” in the Pacific Ocean drew our attention. These two maritime constructs are not simply linear descriptions of the layout of islands but ones with value-added undertones for both Chinese and American geostrategists over the Pacific Rim. Among these undertones, three are discussed below. First is the general observation that geography trumps politics in dealing with the emergent Chinese power. Second is that Guam and Hawaii because of their critically important position in the second island chain are historically poised to benefit the nations of the Pacific Rim by becoming new convergence zones. Third the emerging trends and the actions needed to capture, benefit from and give leadership to these trends for the Pacific century are discussed.

An Aggressive Proposition

The “first island chain” consists of the Korean Peninsula, the Kuril Islands, Japan (including the Ryukyo Islands), Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Australia (Kaplan, p. 33). The “second island chain” includes the U.S. territories of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands (Kaplan, p. 34). According to Kaplan the Chinese consider these two chains as “archipelagic extensions of the Chinese landmass.” This is an aggressive proposition, considering that Guam and the Marianas are within the forward defense arc of the United States. There is a critical need to question this China-centric perspective by expanding the strategic framework of analysis to embrace the whole Pacific zone that includes the two continents of North and South America as integral components of the Pacific Rim (see page 2, Pacific Rim Global Resource Unit).

To better understand this unfolding, China-centric perspective, a historic perspective is offered. The JKA Group between 1986 and 1992 was working in China for US West, a telecommunications company, (now Qwest) and the Philippines, for President Corazon Aquino. It was found that the then existing definition of “Pacific Rim” was somewhat useless for social, economic, and military purposes because it tended to limit the view to the United States and China as bracketing parameters. The JKA team set a course to define the Pacific Rim within a

¹ “The Geography of Chinese Power: How Far Can Beijing Reach on Land and at Sea?” by Robert Kaplan, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2010, Volume 89, Number 3, pp 22 to 41.

global resource unit context². With the help of a broad team of practitioners from Asia, North America, South America, and Australia, who had ongoing interests and knowledge about market trends, trade routes, product development, and social and cultural insights, the Pacific Rim was drawn in a new geographic context. As one can imagine, it was hard to find a map of the world that puts the Pacific Ocean in the middle. The traditional Eurocentric map marginalized the Pacific to the degree that one could not comprehend its vastness and structure. What cannot be seen geographically does not exist – as far as the mind is concerned.

The Pacific Rim Map the JKA team created, displayed below, shows the boundary line on the Eastern side of the Pacific follows the Andes Mountains in South America, the 98th meridian through the U.S., and the water/vegetation line in Canada, and northward to Alaska. On the Western side, the line comes down through Russia and continues on the border that puts Mongolia, Xinjiang and Tibet on the Indian side of geographic influence. The line actually follows the geographic area where the head waters of the Yellow, Yangtze and Mekong rivers begin their lives. Kaplan re-enforces this geographic line by pointing out China's use of force to keep the three geographic areas within their zone of influence. In the end that will not work for them since geography will ultimately trump political control. This concept is important to recognize for U.S. social, cultural and defense strategy in the Pacific³.

² The JKA Group employs Human Geographic Mapping to understand productive harmony between human and physical environments. By “entering the routines” of a community (The Discovery Process™), the actual functioning of the culture, its resilience and absorption capacity are described, including the geographic features that distinguish one population from another. Efforts to mobilize people in their environment and to foster empowerment in dealing with change are called Human Geographic Issue Management Systems (HGIMS)™. HGIMS provides the natural boundaries necessary for freeing the energy and creativity for people to act from a foundation of their geographic, place-based cultures (www.jkagroup.com).

³ “The Revenge of Geography”, Robert D. Kaplan, Foreign Policy Magazine, May/June 2009. Kaplan's advice is that Western politicians and strategists need to "return to the map, and particularly to what he calls the political geography of the "shattered zones" of Eurasia. Also see Sir Halford J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History” The Royal Geographical Society, 1904 where the case is made for geography trumping politics: “Man and not nature imitates, but nature in large part controls”. Mackinder looked at European history as "subordinate" to that of Asia, for he saw European civilization as merely the outcome of the struggle against Asiatic invasion.

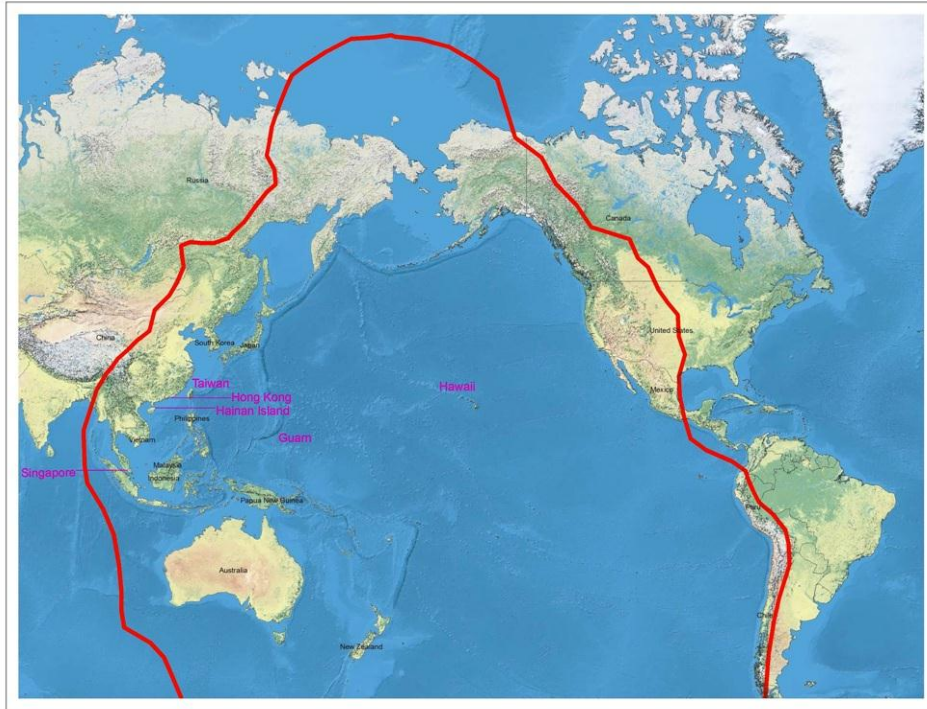


Figure One. Map of Pacific Rim

With this Pacific Rim Map a better understanding is gained of the Chinese and their relationship to the “second island chain” which falls on the “forward defense area” of the U.S. at Guam, the Marianas, the Carolines, and southern Oceania. Potential Chinese military activities here have no precedents historically. It was Japan, not China, which swept over most of the Western Pacific. The massive U.S. military response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and occupation of some islands in Oceania have resulted in what Kaplan calls “legacy bases” along both the first and the second island chains. There is little probability that China has the logistics capability to physically breach U.S. hegemony in much of the Western Pacific at this time. This, however, is rapidly changing with China’s foreign aid and economic development programs targeted throughout the Pacific island nations. The use of soft power, which they are using to gain influence and control, is the only choice China currently has given the U.S. administrative and military presence.

This second island chain is not comparable to the size, composition, resources, and strategic value of the first island chain. In this first island seascape the Chinese Navy will see little but trouble, says Kaplan. This is because first island chain island units are themselves nation-states and are wary of being under the shadow of Greater China hegemony. Japan once tried to dominate much of this first island chain under its discredited greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Furthermore there is the growing consolidation of the 10-nation ASEAN political and economic conglomerate that has a much greater frontage than China on the South China Sea and therefore having common claim on it. Some western geostrategists in the U.S. Naval War College consider the chain as a kind of “Great Wall in reverse”, where a well-

organized line of U.S. allies “serve as sort of guard towers to monitor and possibly block China’s access to the Pacific Ocean”.⁴

The Potential for Unintended Consequences

This analogy is ambivalent with serious hidden contradictions. If one accepts this line as marking China’s forward defense area, it unwittingly reveals a willingness to recognize and concede China’s claim that the South China Sea behind this wall is indeed China’s—a claim that the West and countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia are naturally denying. Any intention to box in China behind this first island chain is contrary to the principles of freedom of navigation that the United Nations desires all countries to respect in the case of the South China Sea. Concern about encirclement appears to be one major reason for China’s buildup of Hainan Island as a major submarine base and is an open preparation for defensive and assertive activity in maritime zones surrounding China. In view of these developments, there is new thinking that desires to define and reconfigure the South China Sea as the “Asian Mediterranean”-- a concept of maritime commons, open to free, international navigation.⁵

No nation has a monopoly or territorial claim on the Mediterranean, and neither should there be in the Asian Mediterranean. The more the West strives to box in China behind this wall, the more China is motivated to counter by controlling navigation inside the South China Sea by territorializing it as if it were a landmass. However there is one caveat that is of critical importance. Taiwan has defense agreements with the U.S. and is entwined with the countries in the first island chain. If China should take over Taiwan (or “when” as some analysts say), it would open up this geographic area to China’s influence literally over night by assuming control of the trade and defense agreements that Taiwan has with nations in the Pacific Rim, especially in the South China Sea. This expectation makes the second island chain as the U.S. forward defense area of critical importance to the whole Pacific region. This essentially means that there has to be policy recognition and commitment that puts Hawaii and Guam in a set of power relationships comparable to those of the first island chain that have dominated the Pacific for centuries.

An Alternative to a Military Construct

Previous Pacific Rim international research and business engagements show that both the first and second island-chain constructs need not be defined in exclusive military terms of defense and offense, of platforms of hard power projections. If we revert to alternative definitions of human geographic units inside and around the Pacific Rim rather than exclusively political units, increasing positive exchanges across the Pacific can be seen that have roots going back to hundreds if not thousands of years. Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia are the anchors of the first island chain, and movement up and down this chain was predominantly in terms of commerce and trade⁶. We recognize, of course, that during the days of European imperialism

⁴ Ibid, page 40.

⁵On the concept of “Asian Mediterranean,” see Eric Casino and Myongsup Shin, “South China Sea or ‘Asian Mediterranean Sea’: Re-conceptualizing a Common Regional Maritime Zone,” in *International Area Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 1999) pp. 43-63.

⁶For a broad treatment of international commerce in Southeast Asia, see Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988 and 1993). On China’s major attempt to project commercial power into Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, see the amazing exploits of “admiral” Zheng He in Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*. (Oxford University 1994). It is important to note that Zheng He

followed by Japan's counter-imperialism, there were eruptions of destructive colonial wars as well as unequal treaties and political and commercial domination.

The regions around the littoral edge of China are better understood historically as convergence zones rather than confrontation walls separating segments of the Pacific community. Its character as convergence zones is attested to by the coexistence here of ancient races and contemporary multi-ethnicities. Here one sees the coexistence of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, and Christianity. From here have emerged the mixing and deployment of hundreds of related Austronesian languages spread out across Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia⁷. Thus to draw connections and promote exchanges between Singapore and Guam, or between Hong Kong and Hawaii are warranted by centuries of similar exchanges in the history of the Pacific Rim communities that predate European colonization and Japanese imperialism.

It is important to recall that the colonization of the Pacific was through the agency of Western powers – Spain, England, France, Germany, Russia, the United States and Australia.⁸ The recent formal decolonization of the Marianas, Guam, Palau, the Carolines, the Marshalls and rest of Micronesia, Oceania and French Polynesia is a clear recognition by the United Nations that the Pacific was not historically under Western commercial, cultural and political influence, but had ancient informal and formal trade relationships that predate this colonization period.⁹

From 1565 onwards, somewhat after Magellan discovered Guam and the Philippines in 1521, Spain inaugurated 200 years of trans-Pacific trade known to historians as the Manila-Acapulco trade. In reality this was a commercial alignment between China and the Americas, with Manila as the transit point of American silver exchanged for Chinese exotic porcelain and silk bound for the Americas and Europe.¹⁰ As a result of centuries of international commerce and modern migratory movements, the overseas Chinese are today a significant demographic element in all Pacific Rim communities. When their talents, resourcefulness, and capital are coordinated with the new vibrancy of modern Chinese civilization, the Asia-Pacific region can expect to take the lead in constructive globalization in the 21st century. In this future scenario, the function of the sea and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ –The 200 Hundred Nautical Miles around continents and islands) will be decisive.

showed no interest in venturing out to the “second island chain” in the Western Pacific but confined his seven epic expeditions to territories in the first island chain down to Africa.

⁷ The most useful reference on Southeast Asian prehistory and the spread of the Malayo-Polynesian family of languages in the Pacific is Peter Bellwood, Man's Conquest of the Pacific: the Prehistory of Southeast Asia and Oceania. (Oxford University Press 1979).

⁸ For a good standard reference on early European discoveries in the Pacific, see Andrew Sharp, The Discovery of the Pacific Islands, Oxford University Press, 1960.

⁹ On the subsequent commercial colonization of Guam, Marianas, and the Carolines, see Francis X. Hezel, S.J. The First Taint of Civilization. (Hawaii University Press 1983). On the later decolonization of islands under the U.S. Trust Territories, see P.F.Kluge, the Edge of Paradise: American in Micronesia. (New York: Random House 1991).

¹⁰ A classic treatment of the Manila-Acapulco trade is found in William L. Schurz, The Manila Galleon. (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1939).

A Promising Alternative

Pacific Rim trends were recently highlighted in the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Yokohama, Japan on November 13 and 14, 2010. There is now talk that the APEC forum will be complemented by the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a proposed free trade zone that now includes Brunei, Singapore, Chile, and New Zealand (all in the Pacific Rim Global Resource Unit displayed above). The United States and Australia, and eventually China, will join this group that intends to eliminate most tariffs and other trade barriers. TPP is seen as a vehicle toward a much wider Pacific Rim treaty. It is very instructive to note what the summit report says: “Many Asian nations have viewed with alarm China’s newly assertive posture on territorial issues this year, and welcomed Washington’s efforts to re-engage with a region where it is seen as an important counterbalance.”¹¹ A less alarmist tone is the clear statement by President Obama made at the Summit on November 13, 2010: “the security and prosperity of the American people is inextricably linked to the security and prosperity of Asia.”

It is this deep historical background of commercial, scientific, and cultural relations across the Pacific that should assist and enrich creative rethinking on the future of Hawaii and Guam as strategically located at the geographic heart of the Pacific Rim. Especially important is the planned move of the Marine Corps’ base from Okinawa to Guam. This must take place in a manner that builds Guam into a full social and economic participant in the Pacific Rim power alignments and not just a military repositioning of U.S. forces. This requires that the move directly involve and benefit the people in order to avoid a long term citizen conflict that saps U.S. energy and forward defense security.

This shift to a new social and political reality is based on meeting citizen expectations to participate directly in actions that affect them. Citizen action has shown itself as a critical and permanent component in the political transformation currently sweeping the Middle East.

Other forthcoming events and trends, described herein, will encourage fresh recalibration of the potential of Hawaii and Guam for social, cultural, economic, scientific, and military innovations, as essential to engaging current and future Chinese influence.

The Navy, with its massive Pacific command Headquarters in Hawaii, is putting enormous resources into becoming free of fossil-fuels and energy independent within a five to ten year period for its ships, aircraft, and air stations.¹² There is an enormous opportunity for Hawaii and Guam to piggy back onto the opportunities the Navy research provides for applications in military and civilian enterprises. However, in order to benefit from this conversion activity, both Hawaii and Guam must mobilize to expand its thinking beyond the old paradigms of tourism, military bases, and service industries of the 20th century into what the 21st century has to offer. In this emerging era, the Pacific Rim is functioning as the major player in world affairs.

What the future implies is that Hawaii, given its centrality as the base of Navy, Air Force, and Marine infrastructure, could also become the commercial, scientific, and renewable energy innovation center for the Western Pacific. Hawaii has the capability to be the showcase of

¹¹ On the constructive presence of immigrant Chinese entrepreneurs, families, and workers throughout the Pacific Rim, see Sterling Seagrave, *Lords of the Rim* (Corgi Adult, 1996).

¹² In a recent column, Tom Friedman, (*The U.S.S. Prius*, The New York Times, Opinion Page, December 18,2010) discusses in detail “weighing anchor for a green navy”. The conversion of the Navy and the Marine Corps to a fossil-free future creates enormous opportunities for Hawaii and Guam to enter the 21st century as partners with this green conversion.

renewable energy for the world. The islands are endowed with 11 of 13 world climates along with wind, solar, geothermal and wave energy resources, which can all be developed as integral resources of ongoing, practical industries, as soon as outstanding cultural and environmental objections can be overcome. Hawaii likewise is the hub for high tech companies in the region, and as such, the islands would complement innovation enterprises in Singapore in Southeast Asia and Japan in Northeast Asia. Recognizing the emerging Pacific Rim trends especially in the Chinese sphere, the alignment of Hawaii with its counterparts in the convergence zones of East Asia will contribute to the security and growth of Trans-Pacific commerce, technology, science, education, and business leadership development.

Coming Emphasis on the “Gathering Place” in the Convergence Zone

Hawaii is slated to host the next APEC summit in 2011 and undoubtedly also the expanded Trans-Pacific Partnership.¹³ Therefore strategies need to be developed now in order to use these powerful gatherings as an opportunity to create a paradigm shift of historic proportions for U.S. interests in the Pacific. To optimize these events and social constructs, it will require Hawaii and Guam to undertake various actions that can set the course for the 21st century:

- Understand in a dynamic policy and infrastructure shift that Guam and the Northern Marianas are our forward defense areas and must be stabilized in a healthy and productive manner, not just as platforms for the projection of American hard power over the Western Pacific, but also as guarantor for securing free trade among the nations and economies of the Pacific Rim. The defensive scope of Guam and the Marianas includes other “legacy positions” and “legacy alliances” in Oceania and the South Pacific stemming from the allied victory in the Pacific War. Without a stable and prosperous Guam, the U.S. is forced to rely on military influence and control, thus missing an opportunity to address Chinese hegemony by having a full social, cultural, and economic partner in this forward defense area.¹⁴
- Create a local Task Force in both Hawaii and Guam of key innovators and change agents who are currently working on producing the shift from fossil fuels to green energy in order to present a social and economic strategy to the APEC conference of how these two islands intend to accomplish sustainability and future economic and social power positions in the Pacific. The Task Forces would build on the Navy’s

¹³ The choice of Hawaii is just the latest recognition of how historically important Hawaii is as the hub of diverse transactions for countries in the Pacific Rim. It was the “gas and go” center of international whalers in the whole Pacific in the 19th century. Subsequent immigration waves have brought in Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, Thais, Cambodians, Filipinos, Portuguese, Hispanics, Afro-Americans, and Pacific Islanders -- all continuing to enhance Hawaii’s original Polynesian population and culture. Hawaii is the home of international institutions such as the East-West Center and the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. The University of Hawaii and the Hawaii Pacific University have students and faculty from all quarters of the world. It is uncanny how Hawaii’s schools and multi-ethnic community have educated and nurtured two great world leaders – Dr. Sun Yat-Sen the Chinese President who led China’s independence struggle; and President Barack Obama of the United States. (In fact, President Obama’s personal trajectory amazingly links Jakarta, Honolulu, and Washington, D.C.) Hawaii is historically a convergence zone in its own right and that history can be rediscovered and built upon.

¹⁴ Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, has discussed the concept of Guam serving as the U.S. “forward defense area”. His concepts are included in a paper: “From Stabilization to Sustainability: A Collaborative Approach to Manage the Social, Cultural, Environmental and Economic Change Created by the Marine Corps’ Move to Guam”, By James A. Kent, Kevin Preister, John Ryan and Eric Casino. The paper was presented at the University of Guam’s Conference on Island Sustainability, September 2, 2010. The paper can be viewed at: www.jkagroup.com/whatisnew

innovations for parallel civilian development in linear time that result from the total commitment of the Navy, Guam and Hawaii to be fossil fuel free by 2020. Guam and Hawaii loom large as convergence zones for the Western Pacific--just as Singapore and Hong Kong are in the Asian Mediterranean. As convergence zones they become indispensable to free commerce and trade and provide a hedge to the inevitable future expansion of Chinese influence in the second island chain.

- Incentivize the institutional collaboration to increase our pool of talented, local people. Programs are needed to remedy the “brain drain” that has diminished the talent pool in Hawaii and Guam for several decades. Expansion of intellectual capital is the bottom line for insuring influence and participation that is essential in competing for enhancing U.S. influence in non-military sectors. As Wince-Smith of the Council on competitiveness has said: “Talent will be the oil of the 21st Century.” The Navy programs in and of themselves will generate many new careers in industries that can be grown in the Pacific and should be optimized on a fast track to blunt and turn around the brain drain.
- Initiate “*Life Options for the Future*” programs to enable Hawaii to become more like the Singapore of the Pacific. A “*Life Options for the Future*” program will enable leveraging of social and economic benefits for local residents from the actions that are currently taking place in all sectors: military, environmental, scientific, and business development. A “coming home” program can be associated with “*Life Options*” to bring back to Hawaii and Guam people who have, for economic reasons, been forced to leave. Building over the long term a livable, healthy and sustainable environment is essential to participating in the Pacific era as a full partner and not as a subordinate to other powers.
- Convene gatherings that can produce a long-term action program, one that will be supported by the nations of the Pacific Rim, to understand how “*citizen-based stewardship*,” a major trend can be harnessed in a manner that produces economic equity as well as levels the playing field for the people who are citizens of these countries and territories. The U.S. forward defense strategy must be expanded to incorporate the building of Hawaii and Guam into scientific, commercial, education, technology and business convergence centers. This effort can convert the islands into centers of power such as Singapore represents in the South China Sea. To outperform China in this expansion area the U.S. needs the support and energy of the Pacific people if it is to remain an important and major player in the Pacific Rim. To aid in this move it needs to be kept in mind that geography trumps politics.
- Incentivize educational and business institutions to create a productive alignment of Singapore, Hong Kong, Guam, and Hawaii that can usher in the era of a “*Blue Nation of the Pacific*”¹⁵ within the Pacific Rim’s Global Resource Unit.

¹⁵ Lee Webber, former President and Publisher of the Honolulu Advertiser, President of Gannett Pacific and former President and Publisher of the Pacific Daily News, now living in Guam, has recognized the concept of a “Blue Nation.” He is also quoted as saying “If the cartographers of old would only have used this (cultural mapping) tool, lines may have been drawn [differently] in the Middle East and other areas around the world.”

There is emerging acknowledgement on the part of the Western powers that indeed this is the century of the Pacific Rim. It is also recognized that China is fast becoming a major player through social and economic alignments with the countries of the first island chain and is positioning for second island chain action. For instance In the latest tsunami disaster that hit Japan, China has been a first responder by sending in aide teams to collaborate with other international teams to service the human and physical devastation there.

The U.S. in order to deal with the shifts taking place in these power alignments will necessitate insuring convergent zones of influence in the second island chain that are socially and economically healthy and free of any oppressive control by world powers. The era of using raw military influence and control is over both for the U.S. and China. In its place is a surfacing recognition that change which promotes healthy and productive societies must come from the bottom-up. To work in this manner, requires a major commitment to a readjustment in U.S. policy and actions. This readjustment wil insure that our military presence is a contributing factor to social stability, and enhances local prosperity leading to security in the Pacific of the 21st century.

James A. Kent is a global community analyst with extensive experience with geographic focused social and economic development policy in Pacific Rim countries. He is President of the JKA Group (www.jkagroup.com) which has three enterprises: James Kent Associates, a public policy consulting firm; Center for Social Ecology and Public Policy, a non-profit that builds public policy from social ecological concepts; and Natural Borders, a human geographic mapping company. Jim has presented at hundreds of universities, policy forums, and conferences focusing on military issues in the Pacific, environmental policy directed towards the cooling of the earth, citizen based policy formation and implementation, and culture-based enterprise development through collaboration.

Dr. Eric Casino is a social anthropologist and policy consultant with a long-term interest in international business and development programs in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Beside his association with the JKA Group, he has spent time as an East-West Center research fellow and worked as a consultant with the World Bank in the Philippines. His academic track record included a resident Fulbright Scholar at the University of California Santa Cruz, a visiting lecturer at the Asian Institute of Management, and a language instructor with the Defense Language Institute and Foreign Language Center. He currently is with the adjunct faculty of the Hawaii Pacific University in Honolulu.

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