

**Civil Preparedness and Ballistic Missile Defense on Guam: Evaluating
Federal and Military Response Frameworks**

Charles V. Esteves

Marywood University

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Dr. Alexander Dawoody

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Abstract

An examination of civil preparedness and ballistic missile defense on Guam through the Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) and National Planning frameworks exposes a continuing gap between military and federal government readiness and civilian protection. Analysis reveals how the fragmentation of federal and territorial institutions hinders coordination between the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security, resulting in gaps in both missile defense readiness and civilian protection.

The study reveals that Guam's vulnerability is institutional rather than technological. Delays in the Guam Defense System, inconsistent implementation of DSCA, and limited inclusion of territorial leadership have weakened deterrence credibility. Resilience and legitimacy are interdependent: effective deterrence requires not only advanced defense systems but also equitable governance, transparent communication, and public trust. Policy recommendations call for a unified civil-military planning authority, a Guam-specific preparedness framework, infrastructure and information resilience, ethical oversight of defense activities, and expanded regional cooperation.

Keywords: Guam, DSCA, FEMA, deterrence, emergency management, ethics

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Introduction

Guam occupies a decisive position in the United States' defense posture within the Indo-Pacific. Located between the Philippine Sea and the Pacific Ocean, the island enables the projection of American power across East Asia while symbolizing national commitment to regional security. Andersen Air Force Base and Naval Base Guam anchor deterrence operations against China and North Korea; yet, the same geography that provides strategic advantage also exposes 170,000 U.S. citizens to direct threat from ballistic and hypersonic missiles (Sherman, 2021a). The island's dual identity as both a forward operating base and a civilian community highlights the central challenge of this study: the United States has yet to fully integrate its strategic deterrence architecture and civil preparedness systems on Guam. Effective deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, therefore, depends not only on military readiness but also on a coordinated civil defense structure capable of preventing, protecting, and recovering from threats.

The urgency of this issue intensified following the 2017 North Korean missile tests, which revealed both Guam's vulnerability and the absence of an integrated warning and shelter network. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's (INDOPACOM) subsequent designation of a comprehensive air and missile defense system for Guam as its top unfunded priority in 2021 (Sherman, 2021b) elevated the concern to national prominence. Although statutory deadlines identified 2025 as the target for initial operational capability, implementation unevenly progressed. Defense planning and civilian preparedness remain divided between separate governance systems, linked primarily through emergency coordination rather than unified design. The Department of Defense (DoD) continues to emphasize deterrence and response, while the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Government of Guam center on disaster management and recovery. These parallel structures have produced operational silos, resulting in weakened federal protection.

The governance of Guam reflects the intersection of federal and territorial responsibilities, revealing institutional complexities that are uncommon in the continental United States. The Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) doctrine establishes the legal basis through which the military supports civilian agencies during domestic crises (Department of Defense, 2018; National Guard Bureau, 2018). Complementing this mechanism, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) organizes national preparedness around five mission areas—Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2019, 2024). Although these frameworks align conceptually, their practical coordination has often faltered. Historically, civil-military cooperation on Guam has been episodic, primarily activated by typhoons or missile alerts, rather than being embedded in continuous planning and coordination. The 2025 reactivation of the Civil-Military Coordination Council (CMCC) by the Joint Region Marianas Public Affairs Office marked progress toward institutionalizing such integration; however, the council remains an emerging mechanism that may not be fully synchronized with national planning cycles (Joint Region Marianas Public Affairs Office, 2025).

Beyond institutional design, Guam’s defense posture intersects deeply with political and ethical dimensions. Residents of the island, though U.S. citizens, lack full congressional representation and the right to vote for president. This structural inequity influences local perceptions of defense initiatives and complicates the public's acceptance of federal decisions. Natividad and Leon Guerrero (2010) traced this inequity to Guam’s colonial history under Spanish, Japanese, and American control, while Jordan (2024) argued that enduring “democratic deficiencies” continue to constrain local participation in national security policy. In contrast to the continental states, Guam’s security, therefore, cannot be separated from its democratic legitimacy. The credibility of deterrence rests not only on

interceptors and radar arrays but also on equitable governance, transparent communication, and citizen inclusion.

There is an underlying assumption that proceeds from the understanding that the island's vulnerability is institutional rather than technological. Delays in the Guam Defense System, inconsistent DSCA application, and limited territorial inclusion potentially weaken deterrence credibility. To analyze these interdependent challenges, the paper draws upon four theoretical foundations: deterrence theory, crisis management theory, systems theory, and social contract theory. Together, these frameworks enable analysis from strategic, military, civilian emergency management, and political–ethical perspectives. Viewed comparatively, these perspectives reveal that sustainable defense requires both operational integration and civic accountability. Guam's security will remain incomplete until deterrence, preparedness, and governance operate as a unified system.

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to examine how existing research, doctrine, and policy address the relationship between deterrence strategy, civil preparedness, and interagency coordination on the island of Guam. The review supports the study by identifying how fragmented policy structures impede integration between military and civilian systems and evaluating theoretical and practical solutions proposed in the academic and policy literature. The review is organized thematically into four sections: federal policies governing defense and homeland security, civil preparedness in U.S. territories, comparative models from allied nations, and mechanisms of federal coordination, including DSCA and FEMA.

Academic databases and official repositories were systematically searched to construct a comprehensive and balanced review. The following databases and search engines were used: JSTOR, ProQuest Military Collection, Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC), Homeland Security Digital Library (HSDL), EBSCO Academic Search Ultimate, and Google Scholar. Supplementary materials were drawn from official DoD, FEMA, and DHS publications available through the U.S. Government Publishing Office and Congressional Research Service. Search terms included combinations of the following keywords: *Guam defense, missile defense policy, Indo-Pacific Command, Defense Support of Civil Authorities, FEMA frameworks, civil preparedness in U.S. territories, strategic deterrence theory, homeland defense integration, infrastructure resilience, and ethics of deterrence*. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to combine terms, and truncations were applied where appropriate.

The range of years for inclusion spanned from 2009 to 2025, encompassing the post–Cold War evolution of deterrence strategy through the most recent Indo-Pacific defense assessments. Earlier foundational works, such as Payne’s (2020) discussion of deterrence paradigms and Morgenthau’s (1985) theories of power politics, were included for theoretical

grounding. The review incorporates peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, congressional testimony, defense press publications, and policy directives. Sources were selected based on their relevance to four criteria: their contribution to understanding U.S. missile defense policy, their examination of civil preparedness in territories or allied nations, their analysis of interagency coordination mechanisms, and their discussion of ethical or governance implications. Literature not directly addressing these categories was excluded.

The literature review applies a thematic rather than chronological organization to highlight how research across multiple disciplines converges on the need for integrated deterrence and preparedness. The following sections synthesize the body of literature into four interconnected domains: federal policies, territorial preparedness, comparative models, and federal coordination. Each theme contributes to understanding how the United States can strengthen deterrence and resilience on Guam through unified planning and governance.

Federal Policies

DoD Missile Defense Policy

The Department of Defense conceptualizes missile defense as a central element of integrated deterrence, designed to protect U.S. territory, deployed forces, and allies from ballistic, cruise, and hypersonic threats. The 2019 Missile Defense Review formally extended the homeland defense mission to Guam, recognizing that the island's proximity to the first island chain made it the most exposed segment of U.S. territory in the Indo-Pacific (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2019). Subsequent analyses by Indo-Pacific Command reinforced this view, identifying the Guam Defense System as the command's highest unfunded priority and the cornerstone of regional deterrence (Sherman, 2021a, 2021b).

Sherman's reporting from 2021 to 2022 provides the most detailed public record of policy evolution. His series documents how the Indo-Pacific Command and the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) proposed a hybrid architecture that combines the Aegis Weapon

System, Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), and the Army's Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System (IBCS). Congress codified this concept in the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, establishing 2025 as the target date for initial operational capability (Sherman, 2021b). However, even as the statute took effect, implementation lagged due to ambiguous command relationships and inadequate funding.

Sherman (2021a) and Yohannan (2010) both emphasize that bureaucratic fragmentation has slowed progress more than engineering constraints. Responsibilities for research, acquisition, and sustainment are distributed among the MDA, the Army, and the Navy, without a clearly designated executive agent. Sprenger (2009) reached a similar conclusion in a study of homeland defense planning for U.S. Northern Command. He found that interagency ambiguity, specifically unclear expectations between defense and civilian authorities, remains the most persistent vulnerability in domestic protection.

The broader deterrence literature supports this assessment. Payne (2020) described the divide between “easy” and “difficult” deterrence schools: the former assumes mutual stability under nuclear parity, while the latter recognizes that deterrence depends on dynamic adaptation and credible communication. Guam exemplifies the “difficult” model. The defense of Guam requires not only interceptors and sensors but also institutional coherence among agencies operating under different statutory mandates. Without coherence, deterrence signals risk becoming inconsistent or potentially unbelievable.

Policy documents portray Guam as both a testbed and a proving ground for joint integration. The MDA characterized the island's future system as “an operational laboratory for multi-domain missile defense” (Sherman, 2021a, p. 6). However, such experimentation carries strategic risk as delayed capability milestones weaken deterrence credibility, inviting miscalculation by adversaries. The literature consistently concludes that Guam's missile

defense challenge is primarily organizational: success depends on the ability to fuse service programs and authorities into a single operational network.

DHS Policies and FEMA Frameworks

In contrast to DoD, DHS approaches preparedness through resilience and continuity rather than deterrence. FEMA's National Preparedness System, formalized through Presidential Policy Directive-8, organizes national readiness around its five mission areas (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2019, 2024). The frameworks collectively define how the United States anticipates, absorbs, and recovers from hazards. To summarize, the National Prevention Framework (FEMA, 2016a) emphasizes proactive measures to deter terrorism and criminal acts. At the same time, the National Protection Framework (FEMA, 2016b) focuses on safeguarding critical infrastructure and key resources. The National Mitigation Framework (FEMA, 2016c) addresses long-term risk reduction, the National Response Framework (FEMA, 2019) defines emergency coordination procedures, and the National Disaster Recovery Framework (FEMA, 2024) sets conditions for long-term recovery. Together, the documents form a coherent system for natural or accidental disasters, but rarely account for deliberate, state-sponsored attacks.

Castelli (2010) and Banks (2011) observed that homeland security policy traditionally views the military as a temporary supporting actor rather than a coequal partner in preparedness. FEMA's frameworks also maintain that logic. They designate DoD as a support agency activated through DSCA requests, but do not integrate deterrence or continuity of operations into their doctrine. Dewan (2025) identified this gap in their study of Guam's infrastructure resilience, noting that FEMA's hazard-agnostic planning model fails to anticipate missile-related contingencies that could disable civilian lifelines such as power and water.

DHS and DoD therefore operate under parallel but disconnected mandates; DHS prioritizes consequence management, while DoD focuses on threat prevention and response. Sprenger (2009) found that this separation leads to misaligned expectations in crisis. In the article, General Renuart's Capabilities-Based Assessment of homeland defense reached the same conclusion, calling for a unified policy that defines how civil agencies and the military should cooperate against asymmetric threats. The literature supports the idea that Guam's dual status as both homeland and forward base demands a new doctrinal synthesis that bridges deterrence and disaster management.

Civil Preparedness in U.S. Territories

Literature on civil preparedness across U.S. territories highlights systemic disparities in resources and representation. The Government Accountability Office (2019) found that the recovery efforts in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands after Hurricanes Irma and Maria revealed chronic shortfalls in federal coordination and logistical support. Those findings are particularly relevant to Guam, where the distance from the mainland and dependence on military infrastructure limit local autonomy during emergencies.

Frain, Rudge, and Tilton (2024) described Guam's democratic deficiencies as structural impediments to preparedness. The research indicates that the absence of full congressional representation hinders oversight of defense projects and erodes public confidence in federal programs. Natividad and Leon Guerrero (2010) traced these conditions to a long history of colonial governance under Spain, Japan, and the United States, arguing that the island's strategic utility has consistently outweighed its political agency. Furthermore, Jordan (2024) extended this critique, asserting that effective civil defense requires institutional parity with the mainland as much as resource parity.

FEMA's After-Action Reports for Typhoon Mawar (2023) documented a heavy reliance on accelerated relief operations, and it also highlighted the continued dependence of

territorial agencies on external command structures. Such dependency mirrors the problem identified by Sherman (2021b) in missile defense acquisition: authority and responsibility are diffused across multiple hierarchies, resulting in delayed decision-making and blurred accountability.

The literature consistently identifies two interrelated findings. First, preparedness in U.S. territories cannot be separated from questions of political representation and legitimacy. Second, enduring security requires institutional integration rather than episodic coordination. Guam's resilience depends on converting ad-hoc cooperation into formalized governance that unites defense and civil authority under shared accountability.

Comparative Models

There are comparative studies from allied and partner nations in the Indo-Pacific that provide instructive contrasts for Guam. Japan, South Korea, and Hawaii each have different models of integrating national defense and civil preparedness.

Japan

In Japan, ballistic missile defense is integrated into a national emergency management system that connects the Self-Defense Forces with prefectural governments. Milenkovic and Subotic (2023) described Japan's approach as a "whole-society deterrence posture," combining military readiness with civil defense drills and public education campaigns. The model emphasizes transparency, with public warning systems and evacuation protocols rehearsed nationwide. Although Japan lacks independent nuclear capability, Mazarr (2018) noted that its credibility in deterrence derives from visible preparedness and societal resilience.

The Republic of Korea

South Korea represents a different paradigm. Park (2024) examined the “Three-Axis System” of Kill Chain, Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD), and Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (KMPR), concluding that non-nuclear states under extended deterrence must integrate conventional defense with civil protection to maintain public confidence. The Republic of Korea’s investments in emergency and urban planning exemplify that integration. Park’s analysis further highlights a core insight applicable to Guam: preparedness is not merely a logistical function but a political instrument that sustains deterrence credibility among citizens exposed.

Hawaii

Hawaii provides the most direct domestic comparison. The state’s false missile alert in 2018 exposed weaknesses in public communication, procedural discipline, and interagency coordination. The subsequent DHS review emphasized the importance of unified command and standardized public messaging. Although Hawaii enjoys full statehood and federal representation, the event demonstrated how confusion at the interface of federal and state authorities can erode public confidence in national deterrence (Federal Communications Commission, 2018). Guam faces an even greater risk of miscommunication because it operates under multiple chains of authority that divide military, territorial, and federal responsibilities.

These comparative cases reveal that successful deterrence and preparedness share features: whole-of-government integration, clear command and control architecture, continuous training and public education, infrastructure resilience and redundancy, consistent communication, institutionalized coordination, public trust and transparency, and public participation. Each model highlights that resilience and deterrence reinforce one another.

Federal Coordination

Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA)

DSCA provides the statutory mechanism through which DoD supports civil authorities during domestic emergencies. DoD Directive 3025.18 (2018) defines the policy framework, assigning the Secretary of Defense responsibility for authorizing military support when requested by civil authorities and when such assistance does not interfere with primary defense missions. CNGBI 3000.04 (2018) extends these provisions to the National Guard Bureau, establishing procedures for coordination with state and territorial governments.

Sprenger (2009) documented that U.S. Northern Command's Capabilities-Based Assessment called for improved DSCA interoperability, emphasizing the need for shared planning assumptions and communication protocols across agencies. Renuart's endorsement of that assessment highlighted gaps in radar coverage, information sharing, and consequence management for missile or maritime attacks. These findings remain relevant for Guam, where DSCA functions must bridge military operations and civilian disaster response.

Historically, DSCA operations on Guam have focused on humanitarian assistance following typhoons. Banks (2011) observed that such operations illustrate the dual role of the military as both protector and responder. There is also the risk of creating dependency if local authorities are not integrated into the planning process. The reactivation of the Civil-Military Coordination Council (Joint Region Marianas Public Affairs Office, 2025) represents an effort to institutionalize DSCA principles within territorial governance. Despite these efforts, the council's authority remains advisory rather than directive. For DSCA to contribute effectively to deterrence, it must evolve from a reactive support mechanism into a proactive planning framework that links operational defense with civil readiness.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

FEMA's coordination mechanisms are designed to provide unity of effort across all levels of government. The National Response Framework (2019) and the National Disaster Recovery Framework (2024) outline the procedures for federal agencies to mobilize and sustain assistance. As Dewan (2025) and Frain et al. (2024) observed, these frameworks assume access to mainland resources and redundant infrastructure that territories often lack. Guam's isolation, limited port capacity, and dependence on military logistics challenge FEMA's ability to meet its own timelines for response and recovery. Yohannan (2010) noted similar logistical concerns during earlier congressional deliberations on Guam's military buildup, emphasizing that environmental and infrastructure limitations constrain both defense construction and humanitarian relief. FEMA's reliance on commercial air and maritime lift compounds these vulnerabilities; during crises, the military remains the only actor capable of immediate large-scale mobilization. Consequently, FEMA's effectiveness on Guam depends on pre-arranged coordination with DoD despite the absence of a permanent joint operations framework.

Integrating FEMA and DSCA operations would close that gap. FEMA's planning expertise complements DoD's operational reach, while DSCA provides the legal authority for the military to act within U.S. territories. The literature suggests that a formal joint framework, analogous to the Combatant Command–FEMA partnership in continental disaster exercises, could align deterrence, response, and recovery into a single continuum. Such integration would transform Guam from a passive recipient of assistance into an active node of national resilience.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite extensive research, several gaps remain in the literature. Most studies treat military defense and civil preparedness as discrete policy domains rather than interdependent

systems. DoD literature focuses on technological and operational aspects of missile defense, while DHS and FEMA literature concentrate on natural disaster response and recovery. Few sources examine how these frameworks could be integrated into a single governance model capable of addressing hybrid threats such as a missile attack on U.S. territory. Likewise, the academic literature on deterrence theory emphasizes state-to-state dynamics but seldom accounts for the civil dimension of deterrence, specifically, how civilian resilience and public trust contribute to the credibility of deterrence. The omission limits the field's ability to evaluate deterrence as both a strategic and a societal function.

Another persistent gap lies in the treatment of Guam itself. Although policy reports acknowledge and often highlight the island's strategic importance, little peer-reviewed research examines how its unique political status as an unincorporated territory influences defense and preparedness policy. Most federal documents assume Guam's integration into U.S. governance without examining the ethical and legal implications of its limited representation in national decision-making. The literature also lacks an empirical assessment of the CMCC and its effectiveness as a mechanism for aligning DSCA and FEMA functions. Finally, few studies apply systems theory or social contract theory to the practical coordination of deterrence and civil preparedness. The absence leaves a conceptual void in understanding how institutional legitimacy and ethical accountability contribute to sustaining national security in U.S. territories.

Summary

Despite the gaps, a consistent pattern emerges across the literature. Federal policy divides deterrence and preparedness into separate bureaucratic domains; territorial governance struggles to reconcile these functions under limited authority, and ethical questions of representation and legitimacy remain unresolved. Scholars and policymakers converge on a central insight. The credibility of U.S. deterrence in the Indo-Pacific depends

not only on missile interceptors and command networks, but also on the integration of Federal and territorial systems.

Deterrence theory explains why capability alone cannot sustain stability without confidence in governance. Crisis management theory clarifies how interagency fragmentation magnifies risk during emergencies. Systems theory demonstrates that the failure of one component can cause the collapse of the entire structure. Social contract theory grounds the discussion in legitimacy, asserting that government protection must be equitable across all jurisdictions.

The literature, therefore, supports a single conclusion: Guam's defense requires a unified architecture that merges military deterrence, civil preparedness, and moral accountability. Without that integration, strategic deterrence will remain incomplete, and the nation's most forward territory will continue to embody both its strength and its vulnerability.

Analysis

Guam's defense posture sits at the intersection of deterrence strategy, emergency management, and governance. The literature demonstrates that its security problem is not simply about interceptors or infrastructure but about how the United States organizes authority and aligns institutions. Issues are examined through three analytical perspectives: the strategic–military, the civilian emergency management, and the political–ethical. Each perspective is informed by deterrence theory, crisis management theory, systems theory, and social contract theory. Frameworks clarify how to define credible deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

Strategic–Military Perspective

Deterrence Theory and Strategic Credibility

Deterrence theory describes stability as the product of perceived capability and believable resolve. Guam's location, roughly equidistant between Manila and Honolulu, gives the United States operational reach across the first and second island chains. It also exposes a concentration of forces and civilians to ballistic, cruise, and hypersonic threats (Chase & Chan, 2016; Kristensen, 2025). Mazarr (2018) and Payne (2020) emphasized that deterrence fails not only when an adversary doubts U.S. capability but also when command systems appear indecisive or fragmented.

The Guam Defense System, intended as a 360-degree shield, illustrates both ambition and friction. The Missile Defense Agency envisioned a hybrid network linking the Aegis Weapon System, THAAD, and the Army's Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System (IBCS). Congress directed initial operational capability by 2025, but progress has been inconsistent because the services have not agreed on a lead integrator (Sherman, 2021a, 2021b). Yohannan (2010) observed this pattern more than a decade earlier,

during Guam's first significant defense buildup, when overlapping authorities led to inconsistencies.

Capability without unity may lead to system fragility. Gibson (2025) argued that deterrence in the Indo-Pacific depends on decision superiority, the ability to perceive and act faster than an adversary. JADC2, the Department of Defense initiative to integrate command and control across domains, remains incomplete. Until decision data flows freely between INDOPACOM, MDA, and allied systems, deterrence on Guam remains conditional. Cancian (2025) and Giambrone (2025) both warned that delays in fielding integrated networks create perception gaps that adversaries can exploit.

Alliance Coordination and Extended Deterrence

Deterrence credibility does not rest solely on national capability. Rozman (2022) demonstrated that regional security hinges on strategic triangles that connect the United States, Japan, and other partners. Guam's defense architecture is central to that geometry, and if coordination among allies falters, deterrence signals become inconsistent. Milenkovic and Subotic (2023) further explained that modern deterrence extends into economic and informational domains, where cohesion among allies communicates strength as clearly as the deployment of weapons.

Comparative experience supports this view. Japan's layered missile defense, built around the Aegis system and national early-warning networks, combines technical readiness and civil transparency. Regular parliamentary oversight reinforces national confidence and thus credibility (Mazarr, 2018). South Korea's Three-Axis System, examined by Park (2025), integrates conventional precision-strike options and civil preparedness. Both cases demonstrate that deterrence extends into the civilian sphere, where social readiness becomes part of national signaling. Guam is lacking in this dimension. Without local participation and public information systems, deterrence remains abstract to the population it intends to protect.

Logistics, Infrastructure, and Resilience

Resilience translates deterrence from promise to practice. Dewan (2025) found that Guam's infrastructure modernization under INDOPACOM's integrated plan remains uneven in energy redundancy and port hardening. Sherman (2021b) confirmed that key projects face delays due to budget uncertainty and disputes over environmental reviews. Frain, Rudge, and Tilton (2024) argued that inconsistent communication between federal agencies and local authorities undermines trust and reinforces perceptions of democratic deficiency.

The Department of Defense doctrine, as outlined in DSCA (Department of Defense, 2018) and CNGBI 3000.04 (2018), calls for the preplanned coordination of civil infrastructure and defense assets. To date, no standing joint logistics cell exists to merge FEMA and military supply planning in the Pacific. History shows the cost of such gaps. Thompson (1985) noted that the Nixon Doctrine's emphasis on regional burden sharing often left U.S. territories without sufficient self-sustainment. Maga (1985) similarly argued that credible defense requires visible readiness, not rhetorical assurance. Logistics, power generation, and repair capacity form the material proof of deterrence; without them, even advanced interceptors project vulnerability rather than confidence.

Civilian Emergency Management Perspective

Crisis Management Theory and Institutional Coordination

Crisis management theory views preparedness as a continuous process of information exchange and decision rehearsal. Failures occur not from ignorance but from uncoordinated systems. FEMA's five mission areas outline what must happen, but not how it is accomplished across agencies (FEMA, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2019, 2024). Banks (2011) and Castelli (2010) both note that the military's participation in civilian crisis management is often episodic, triggered by disaster rather than planned as part of governance. Guam's experience follows that pattern.

The reconvened CMCC represents an opportunity to institutionalize crisis management on the island. It joins Joint Region Marianas [and Task Force Micronesia], the Government of Guam, and relevant civilian agencies under a standing body for planning (Joint Region Marianas Public Affairs Office, 2025). As previously mentioned, the CMCC's advisory status restricts its influence. For Guam to implement effective crisis management, the council must evolve from a discussion forum to an operational node within INDOPACOM and FEMA structures.

The literature suggests that synchronization must extend from planning to exercise. Renuart's homeland defense assessment (2009) found that cross-agency drills significantly reduced decision latency during missile scenarios. If Guam's civil and military authorities were to train together under DSCA protocols, they could shorten the time between detection, indication, warning, and protection. The absence of joint simulation and after-action review mechanisms remains a critical shortfall.

Systems Theory and Interdependence

Systems theory explains why institutional fragmentation persists. Complex organizations, when divided by jurisdiction, lose efficiency unless feedback loops are in place. FEMA's after-action report from Typhoon Mawar (2023) illustrated this effect: military assets restored power rapidly, but civil agencies lacked a process for real-time coordination. Dewan (2025) observed a similar pattern in infrastructure projects where overlapping jurisdictions slowed construction.

Guam's emergency architecture can be conceptualized as three subsystems: the Department of Defense's defense mission, FEMA's disaster management system, and the Government of Guam's territorial response network. Each performs well within its own boundaries but interacts poorly with the others. Milenkovic and Subotic (2023) argue that integration among subsystems produces resilience by reducing bottlenecks and redundancy.

Creating a joint operations center that links these entities would embody systems theory's central insight: coordination is a form of structure.

Learning also defines system maturity. FEMA's experience responding to typhoons and earthquakes in U.S. territories offers a reservoir of institutional knowledge, but that information rarely informs defense planning. Integrating FEMA's disaster exercises with INDOPACOM's defense simulations would allow continuous feedback between recovery and deterrence planning. Crisis learning, if institutionalized, could transform Guam's reactive posture into an anticipatory system.

Political–Ethical Perspective

Social Contract Theory and Democratic Accountability

Social contract theory holds that government authority derives from the consent of the governed. Guam's political status complicates this premise. Its residents are citizens of the United States but lack voting representation in Congress and cannot participate in presidential elections. Natividad and Leon Guerrero (2010) described this as a colonial contradiction in which the island's people bear the risks of strategic significance without an equal voice in its governance.

Jordan (2024) extended this observation by arguing that representation is not symbolic but functional: without participatory governance, civil-military integration lacks legitimacy. Frain, Rudge, and Tilton (2024) documented how limited transparency in defense infrastructure projects erodes trust and fuels public skepticism. Legitimacy, they argue, is as critical to deterrence as weapon systems because it determines whether local communities will cooperate during crises. Maga (1985) and Thompson (1985) traced the imbalance to Cold War-era doctrines that prioritized geostrategic value over self-governance in U.S. territories. The persistence of that mindset undermines today's integrated deterrence objectives.

Ethical Deterrence and Information Integrity

Bershadsky (2025) and Giambrone (2025) showed that cognitive warfare targets perception and willpower as much as infrastructure. Information integrity, therefore, becomes an ethical obligation. The false missile alert in Hawaii (Federal Communications Commission, 2018) demonstrated how a communication breakdown can erode confidence nationwide. Guam, operating under multiple command hierarchies, faces an even greater risk of miscommunication.

Natividad (2024) argued that ethical deterrence begins with transparency. When residents understand defense objectives, they become participants rather than bystanders. Public engagement programs, community education, and inclusion in decision-making build psychological resilience. Social contract theory thus merges with systems theory: legitimacy is not a static condition but a process sustained through interaction.

Information reliability also requires disciplined leadership communication. Disinformation campaigns by adversaries exploit fear and distrust. Consistent, fact-based messaging from both territorial and federal authorities denies adversaries that opportunity. Ethical deterrence, as conceived here, extends the theory of deterrence into the moral domain. The population's trust becomes a deterrent resource when leadership demonstrates honesty and competence.

Summary

Each theoretical lens clarifies a different aspect of Guam's defense challenge. Deterrence theory explains the strategic mechanics of credibility. Crisis management theory reveals why coordination often fails during emergencies. Systems theory describes the interdependence of institutions and their tendency toward fragmentation. Social contract theory grounds the discussion in legitimacy, asserting that authority to defend is inseparable from the obligation to govern fairly.

These perspectives together reveal eight determinants of credible deterrence: civil defense readiness, infrastructure resilience, alliance coordination, decision superiority, logistical endurance, institutional clarity, information integrity, and public trust built on ethical governance. These factors operate as interlocking components. Strengthening one without the other provides only partial stability. For example, infrastructure without legitimacy risks local opposition, while command authority without communication breeds confusion.

Guam's defense framework has made progress in capability and infrastructure modernization, yet it still lacks cohesion across governance and ethics. INDOPACOM's operational readiness, FEMA's planning expertise, and the Government of Guam's community networks remain discrete systems that interact only in crisis. The analysis confirms that credible deterrence in the Indo-Pacific depends not only on superior weaponry but also on the coherence of institutions and the trust that binds them.

A unified architecture that combines defense planning, civil preparedness, and transparent governance would transform Guam from a static target into a resilient node of deterrence. Such integration would embody the principles of deterrence, crisis management, systems design, and social contract legitimacy in a single operational reality. Until that integration occurs, Guam will continue to represent both a cornerstone of U.S. power and a measure of its strategic vulnerability.

Ethical Implications

The ethical dimension of Guam's defense posture arises from the convergence of deterrence, governance, and citizenship. The island's strategic value has elevated it to the forefront of national security planning; however, its residents remain outside full political participation in the federal system that determines their safety. The condition introduces a moral contradiction. The United States depends on Guam to project power in the Indo-Pacific, but the people of Guam depend on institutions over which they hold limited authority. The ethical implications of this imbalance extend beyond local governance; they shape how deterrence is perceived by allies, adversaries, and American citizens alike.

Represented Equities

Social contract theory provides the framework for evaluating equity in national defense policy. The principle that government authority derives from the consent of the governed cannot be reconciled with a defense system that excludes a population from meaningful representation. Residents of Guam serve in the U.S. Armed Forces at a high rate, pay certain federal taxes, host critical military infrastructure, and still lack voting representation in Congress and have no voice in presidential elections. Natividad and Leon Guerrero (2010) describe this arrangement as strategic dependency, while Jordan (2024) characterizes it as an enduring democratic deficit. The ethical issue is not only that Guam's citizens are underrepresented but that their political exclusion undermines the legitimacy of decisions made in their name.

The imbalance affects deterrence credibility. Frain, Rudge, and Tilton (2024) demonstrate that public trust and cooperation increase when citizens perceive themselves as having a shared ownership of national defense policy. When communities perceive defense initiatives as imposed rather than collaborative, they are less likely to support preparedness measures. Equity, therefore, becomes a practical requirement for deterrence. The United

States cannot claim to defend democracy abroad while maintaining structural inequities in its own territories. Expanding would align defense practice with democratic principles and strengthen the moral foundation of deterrence.

Duty of Care for Civil Protection

The government's duty of care extends beyond maintaining a credible deterrent force. It includes protecting all citizens, regardless of their geographical location, from the foreseeable consequences of armed conflict. FEMA's National Preparedness Frameworks (2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2019, 2024) define this responsibility as shared among all levels of government. Despite the notion of shared responsibility, Guam's infrastructure and emergency services remain dependent on Federal and military logistics for survival during a crisis. The ethical question is whether that dependency constitutes neglect of federal responsibility.

Dewan (2025) and Sherman (2021b) highlighted gaps in Guam's infrastructure resilience that could expose the civilian population to disproportionate harm in the event of a conflict. Power grids, fuel storage, and medical facilities remain concentrated within or adjacent to military installations, creating a dual vulnerability. When deterrence planning prioritizes base defense over civilian survival, it implies a hierarchy of value inconsistent with the ethical obligations of a democratic state. Castelli (2010) and Banks (2011) argued that integrating DSCA principles into territorial governance is a moral necessity because it transforms military assistance from a discretionary favor into a duty grounded in law.

Ensuring equity in protection also involves communication. The 2018 false missile alert in Hawaii demonstrated that inadequate crisis communication can inflict psychological harm on civilians and erode confidence in leadership (Federal Communications Commission, 2018). Guam's multilevel command structure increases the likelihood of confusion. Transparent warning systems, coordinated information protocols, and public education

programs are not optional humanitarian measures; they are moral imperatives that uphold the state's duty to protect its citizens.

Ethics of Strategic Decision-Making

The ethical challenges of Guam's defense are not confined to domestic governance. They also influence the morality of U.S. deterrence strategy abroad. Bershadsky (2025) and Giambrone (2025) described how cognitive and information warfare increasingly target populations rather than militaries. The shift blurs the distinction between combatant and noncombatant domains. In such an environment, the ethical legitimacy of deterrence depends on the principles of restraint and proportionality. Any defense system that places civilians in the line of escalation must ensure that the benefits of deterrence outweigh the risks of provocation.

Payne (2020) and Mazarr (2018) cautioned that deterrence through punishment, when applied without consideration of escalation dynamics, can endanger civilian populations. Guam's dual identity as both a military hub and a civilian community amplifies this risk. Ethical deterrence requires that defense planners treat civilian protection as coequal with military advantage. It will require designing command architectures and response options that prioritize defense and de-escalation over retaliation.

The ethical framework of decision-making also extends to environmental stewardship. Frain et al. (2024) and Natividad (2024) document the ecological strain of base expansion on Guam's limited land and water resources. Environmental degradation undermines both human security and moral legitimacy. Ethical deterrence demands that national defense protect not only against external threats but also from self-inflicted harm to the local environment and community well-being.

Legitimacy, Transparency, and Public Trust

Legitimacy transforms deterrence from a technical enterprise into a moral commitment. Systems theory teaches that stability depends on balance among components; when public trust deteriorates, the entire system becomes unstable. Transparency in defense planning and communication is both an ethical obligation and a strategic requirement. Public access to accurate information fosters cooperation rather than resistance.

Natividad (2024) emphasized that the inclusion of local voices in planning builds what she calls civic resilience, a form of social capital that strengthens deterrence by uniting the community behind shared objectives. Giambrone (2025) and Cancian (2025) argued that integrated deterrence cannot succeed if the public perceives it as imposed or exploitative. Ethical governance bridges this divide by aligning federal authority with local participation and engagement.

The same logic applies internationally. Rozman (2022) and Park (2025) noted that allies judge U.S. credibility not only by its capability but also by its adherence to values. When the United States demonstrates ethical consistency between its domestic and foreign policies, it enhances confidence in its alliances. When it fails to extend equitable governance to its territories, it invites questions about its moral authority abroad. Ethical consistency, therefore, strengthens deterrence more effectively than additional deployments or rhetoric.

Consequences of Ethical Failure

If the current gaps remain unaddressed, the consequences will extend beyond Guam. A failure to integrate civil protection into deterrence planning would expose civilians to preventable harm and weaken U.S. credibility among partners who depend on American leadership. Such a failure would also amplify adversary narratives portraying the United States as an inconsistent defender of democratic values. The erosion of moral legitimacy could degrade deterrence even if military capabilities remain intact.

Internally, ethical neglect would deepen local mistrust, reducing cooperation during crises and increasing resistance to future defense initiatives. The resulting fragmentation would weaken both the civil and military pillars of Guam's resilience. Systems theory predicts that when one subsystem collapses, whether moral, social, or institutional, the entire network loses coherence. Preventing that collapse requires moral foresight equal to technical innovation.

Ethical Integration as Strategy

The ethical implications of Guam's defense problem point to a single conclusion: moral coherence is strategic coherence. Integrating deterrence, civil protection, and governance transparency fulfills both ethical duty and operational necessity. Social contract theory provides the moral justification, while systems and crisis management theories offer the organizational methods for implementation. Ethical deterrence, therefore, is not an abstract ideal but a practical discipline that ensures capability serves justice rather than expediency.

The United States has the capacity to protect Guam through technology, infrastructure, and military presence. What remains is the moral decision to align those instruments with equity, representation, and environmental responsibility. When deterrence reflects both power and principle, it commands credibility abroad and trust at home. Ethical integration thus transforms Guam from a contested symbol into a living demonstration of democratic defense.

Policy Recommendations

The preceding analysis demonstrated that Guam’s vulnerability stems from fragmented authority, insufficient integration between defense and civil systems, and limited public legitimacy. Addressing these deficiencies requires policy reforms that align national strategy with territorial governance. The following overarching recommendations are organized thematically to unify deterrence, preparedness, and ethical governance within a single policy framework.

Establish Unified Civil-Military Governance

Joint Civil-Military Planning Authority

Congress and the executive branch should formalize a permanent joint planning body for Guam that unites the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Government of Guam under shared authority. The current Civil-Military Coordination Council (CMCC) should be reauthorized as a statutory entity with operational authority to synchronize infrastructure protection, emergency management, and continuity of operations (Sherman, 2021a; Dewan, 2025; Sprenger, 2009).

Clarify Legal and Command Relationships

Federal legislation should define Guam’s crisis command hierarchy under DSCA. Explicit lead-agency designations would eliminate jurisdictional ambiguity among DoD, FEMA, and territorial agencies (Banks, 2011; Department of Defense, 2018; CNGBI 3000.04, 2018). Clear and structured authority communicates unity of effort and strengthens the credibility of deterrence.

Integrate Preparedness and Deterrence Frameworks

A Guam-specific framework should merge FEMA’s National Preparedness System with Indo-Pacific Command’s integrated deterrence strategy. FEMA’s five mission areas should be expanded to include Deterrence as a sixth mission area. Joint annual exercises

should evaluate both civil and military readiness under shared performance metrics (FEMA, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2019, 2024).

Congress should direct the Government Accountability Office to conduct biennial reviews of Guam's preparedness and deterrence integration. Lessons learned from disasters, wargames, and missile defense tests must inform future planning (Sprenger, 2009; Renuart, 2009). Institutionalizing feedback enables the conversion of episodic coordination into continuous adaptation.

Strengthen Infrastructure and Information Resilience

Infrastructure and Logistics Integration

A Guam Infrastructure Resilience Fund should combine defense and civilian investments to support hardened energy systems, decentralized fuel storage, and redundant logistics networks (Dewan, 2025; Sherman, 2021b). Joint oversight would ensure that critical infrastructure serves both security and humanitarian purposes, converting vulnerability into deterrent strength.

Information Integrity and Public Communication

The Guam Joint Information Center should be leveraged more effectively for coordinated warning and threat messaging, as well as rumor control and management. Standardized communication protocols across federal, military, and territorial agencies would prevent misinformation and ensure public confidence during crises (Bershadsky, 2025; Giambrone, 2025; Federal Communications Commission, 2018).

Advance Ethical Governance and Public Trust

The federal government should expand territorial participation in national defense policy through formal consultative mechanisms within the National Security Council process. Transparent decision-making, accessible environmental reviews, and public engagement

would reinforce legitimacy and civic resilience (Natividad & Leon Guerrero, 2010; Jordan, 2024; Frain, Rudge, & Tilton, 2024).

DoD and the Government of Guam should create a Joint Ethical Review Panel to evaluate the social and ecological effects of defense projects. Environmental sustainability, encompassing renewable energy, water conservation, and responsible land use, should be considered integral to deterrence planning (Natividad, 2024; Frain et al., 2024).

Expand Regional and Allied Cooperation

Guam should serve as the regional hub for allied preparedness and deterrence cooperation. A Pacific Deterrence Resilience Forum would enable Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the Philippines to coordinate civil defense and crisis communication (Rozman, 2022; Park, 2025; Milenkovic & Subotic, 2023).

Joint civil-military exercises with allies should incorporate humanitarian assistance and infrastructure protection alongside missile defense operations. Shared training reinforces alliance unity and supports Giambrone's (2025) and Cancian's (2025) call for distributed deterrence across the Indo-Pacific.

Summary

These concise recommendations provide a blueprint for transforming Guam from a vulnerable outpost into a resilient node of national and regional deterrence without being too prescriptive. Unified governance ensures coherence of action. Integrated preparedness aligns civil protection with strategic defense. Infrastructure and information resilience enable operations to sustain themselves under pressure. Ethical governance secures legitimacy, while cooperative alliances extend stability across the region. Implementing these policies would demonstrate that the United States views deterrence not as a posture of coercion but as a commitment to protect its citizens and partners.

Summary

The defense of Guam reveals a more profound truth about American strategy: that capability alone does not constitute security. Across this study, the pattern is clear. The island's strength lies in its geography and infrastructure, but its weakness lies in its organization. The United States has the means to defend Guam from missile attack, but has not fully built the institutions that make that defense credible or legitimate. What began as an inquiry into deterrence evolved into a study of governance of how fragmented authority and uneven responsibility weaken the very deterrence they intend to uphold.

The research traced Guam's position within the broader Indo-Pacific architecture and found that the island has become both indispensable and vulnerable. Its defense system, conceived as a 360-degree shield, remains unfinished not because of a technological failure, but due to institutional friction among the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Government of Guam. The problem is structural: separate authorities operate under parallel doctrines that converge only in crisis. The gap between planning and execution, between deterrence and preparedness, defines Guam's risk more than any adversary's capability.

The literature and analysis converged on several consistent insights. First, deterrence in the Indo-Pacific has outgrown its Cold War assumptions. Modern deterrence requires more than weapons; it requires systems that are adaptive, transparent, and legitimate. Second, resilience of infrastructure, information, and governance is now a form of deterrent power. An adversary's calculus changes when a society demonstrates that it can endure disruption and recover quickly. Finally, deterrence cannot succeed if it excludes the people it intends to protect. Legitimacy and trust are not rhetorical virtues; they are operational necessities.

Guam's democratic deficit complicates its defense. Citizens who serve in the armed forces and host the nation's forward bases remain without full representation in the political

system that governs them. The condition undermines confidence and erodes the moral authority of deterrence. Ethical governance, therefore, is not ancillary to security; it is the foundation of it. The United States cannot credibly defend democracy abroad while maintaining inequity within its own territories. Addressing that contradiction is both a moral duty and a strategic imperative.

The policies presented in this paper attempt to establish unified governance, align preparedness frameworks, reinforce infrastructure and communication, and embed ethical oversight, which are not new concepts. Versions of them have circulated for decades in congressional hearings, strategic studies, and after-action reports. What remains undone is their integration. Guam's defense problem persists because no single institution is responsible for the entire system. Integration is not a technical challenge but a political decision: to treat the island not as an outpost of convenience but as part of the American homeland.

The lessons extend beyond Guam. The island is a mirror of national coherence. The United States' approach to defense reflects its understanding of the relationship between power and principle. A defense posture that joins military readiness with civil protection and ethical legitimacy will project credibility far more effectively than one built solely on technology. Deterrence, at its core, is a statement of confidence.

Ultimately, Guam's security hinges on alignment. The nation must decide whether its strategy abroad and its values at home can coexist within a single structure. When they do, deterrence becomes more than a mere posture; it becomes a tangible proof of governance. A coherent defense of Guam would demonstrate that American power and democratic integrity are not competing priorities, but rather inseparable elements of the same concept.

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