

# [***Chinese Migrants Spark Concerns About US Military Base***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BN6-MPR1-DY68-12DH-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Nick Mordowanec

**Highlight:** A visa program allowing Chinese nationals to enter the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands could threaten security, an expert says.

**Body**

A visa program allowing nationals from the People's Republic of China (PRC) to enter Guam through the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) has concerned lawmakers and regional experts who fear exploitation by a major adversary.

In 2009, U.S. Customs and Border Protection adopted the Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program that allows individuals to enter the CNMI through places like Saipan, the largest of the Northern Mariana Islands, for two-week periods without long-term documentation.

The CNMI is about 120 miles north of Guam, a U.S. territory, 1,500 miles east of the Phillipines, and just over three hours from Tokyo by plane.

In January, the U.S. Marines opened their first new base in 70 years on Guam—one of just 17 "non-self-governing territories" recognized by the [*United Nations*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/united-nations?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

Guam is home to two strategic U.S. bases: Naval Base Guam (NBG) in Santa Rita, and Andersen Air Force Base in Yigo. [*NBG*](https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/in-depth-overview/joint-region-marianas-naval-base-guam), which in 2009 was combined with Andersen Air Force Base, is about 38,000 square acres.

Guam Customs and Quarantine (CQA) said the situation in the CNMI, a separate commonwealth to the U.S. territory of Guam that [*shares a maritime boundary with Japan*](https://www.newsweek.com/us-allied-air-forces-flex-firepower-pacific-1868015?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) in the West Pacific, "continues to be of concern" due to Chinese nationals purportedly circumventing or manipulating the process for legal entry.

Concerns are more opaque than the those over the migrants entering the U.S. through Mexico, said CQA PR officer Alana Chargualaf-Afaisen, with threats relating to military intelligence, terrorism, communicable diseases, human trafficking, drug trafficking and illegal gambling.

U.S. lawmakers previously voiced concerns that Chinese nationals were using the waiver scheme to enter Guam through the CNMI and there engaging in criminal activities.

"It's been going on regardless of the situation at the southern border, but it's a different geographical urgency," Cleo Paskal, a non-resident senior fellow for the Indo-Pacific at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington D.C., told *Newsweek* via phone.

"If you're the PLA (People's Liberation Army), and especially the PLA Navy, the biggest direct American threat to you is Guam. You have U.S. forces in Japan and in South Korea, but the main outpost is Guam.

"And if you're going to take trying to take Taiwan, and Guam becomes operational, it's going to be a lot harder. So, you want to be able to disable Guam."

Concerns about China's role and impact on the CNMI, and in turn Guam, have been relayed by U.S. lawmakers to [*Department of Homeland Security*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/department-of-homeland-security?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) (DHS) Secretary [*Alejandro Mayorkas*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/alejandro-mayorkas?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

A group of 32 senators and representatives, including [*Marco Rubio*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/marco-rubio?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) of Florida and [*Joni Ernst*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joni-ernst?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) of Iowa, wrote a letter to Mayorkas on November 30, 2023, raising concerns about Chinese nationals' ability to enter Guam through the CNMI without a separate B-1 (business) or B-2 (tourism) visa.

They cited instances of four companies in Guam being sanctioned due to purportedly using illegal labor from China. Other cases allegedly involved the use of messaging apps to coordinate illegal jobs and boat rides to Guam, and the prosecution of two Chinese nationals by the U.S. [*Department of Justice*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/department-justice?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) for using the U.S. Postal Service to distribute methamphetamine in the CNMI.

"We understand and applaud law enforcement officials on the islands who have been successful at capturing those who come to CMNI for criminal reasons," the letter reads. "However, we encourage the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to change this policy and apply the visa requirements equally across all territories.

"It is imperative we deter Chinese Communist Party aggression, espionage and transnational repression."

One of the signees of the letter was U.S. Rep. James Moylan, who in 2022 [*became the second Republican*](https://www.newsweek.com/guam-flips-republican-first-time-30-years-1758032?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) to represent Guam in [*Congress*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/congress?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) since the seat was created in 1972.

*Newsweek* has reached out to numerous lawmakers who expressed concerns, in addition to the DHS, for comment.

Paskal argues that it's "time to close China's backdoor to the U.S." and amend the "discretionary parole" system enacted in 2009—not just for the concerns listed by Guam officials, but for economic reasons as well.

Paskal said the effect of Chinese money on ***politics***, and the argument of the CNMI being dependent on the visa program for tourism, can change at any time. She said China could pull all their tourists from the commonwealth, or that there could be a geostrategic incident that means Chinese visitors aren't welcome in the U.S. anymore.

"[Guam Gov. Arnold Palacios is] saying, 'We need to diversify and we can't facilitate an economic dependence on a country that is at least a competitor, if not more,'" said Paskal, who has personally visited the CNMI twice within the past year.

"But they'll still get the Chamber of Commerce, which has heavy PRC-linked members pushing for the continuation of the situation. The way it stands is, currently, there's been sort of this electronic visa thing that's been put forward as a compromise.

"But there's no justification for Chinese not to have to do the same tourist visa as the rest of the U.S. [The application processes for] tourist visas sometimes in Beijing are like five days. It's not a big impediment to have to apply for a visa. So, this continuation of this loophole is very suspect."

Prior to COVID-19 restrictions, Chinese tourists made up about 40 percent of visitors to the CNMI, according to August 2023 testimony provided by Palacios to the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources.

One big draw was casinos, which sparked something of an economic boom for the region after the Chinese-run garment industry from the 1980s to the early 2000s—which included more than 30 factories operating on Saipan—dissipated due to human rights and labor violations.

"When the garment industry shut down, the commonwealth lost a major source of revenue, and drastic austerity measures had a deeply destabilizing effect," Palacios said. "To make up for the loss, we turned to Chinese tourism and also to Chinese casino gaming."

At its peak, a casino on Saipan reported billions of dollars in rolling chip volumes generated at just 16 VIP tables—in turn propping up the commonwealth's government and economy.

"But this was short-lived and had unfortunate consequences," Palacios said. "Today, Chinese tourism has dried up and the casino has shut down. The commonwealth economy continues to struggle, and the government is in deep fiscal distress. These are conditions that make the [*commonwealth again acutely vulnerable*](https://www.newsweek.com/us-grows-guam-presence-deter-china-wary-locals-are-denied-choice-1786778?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) to CCP (Chinese Communist Party) exploitation."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2368825/guam-us.jpg)

**Graphic**

Guam US

Matt Roberts/Getty Images for GUAM VISITORS BUREAU

The flag of the USA and Guam are seen during the SMS Cormoran II 100 Years Memorial Ceremony at U.S Agana Navy Cemetery on April 7, 2017 in Guam. Concerns about Chinese nationals and nefarious activities on the island have sparked new concerns from lawmakers and policy experts.

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