



COLONIAL LEGACY AND MILITARY STRATEGY

**The U.S. Military
in Puerto Rico**



**Prepared by Matthew Yarrow for the
Latin America/Caribbean Program
of the AFSC Peacebuilding Unit**

**Fourth of a four part report on
U.S. involvement in Latin America
and the Caribbean**



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Brief history of Puerto Rico

The island of Puerto Rico was called *Borinquen*, or “land of the great lords,” by its first inhabitants, the Taino Arawak Indians. The Arawaks were originally from South America and arrived in the Caribbean as early as 500 B.C. Spaniard Ponce de León established the first European settlement on the island in 1508. European diseases, forced labor, and Spanish violence greatly reduced the Arawak population. In 1517, four thousand African slaves were brought to Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans have since forged a strong identity from their Spanish, Taino, and African roots.

In the late 1800s, popular discontent with Spanish rule began to erupt in Puerto Rico. By the 1890s, the United States was experiencing growing economic pressures and was looking for foreign markets and cheap natural resources. There was also a common idea in the United States that “Providence has decreed that [Puerto Rico] shall be ours.” This notion was not lost on the people of Puerto Rico. (*See sidebar.*) These economic and expansionist pressures led to the Spanish-American War of 1898, where the United States triumphed over Spain and thereby gained control of Puerto Rico.

The U.S. military governed Puerto Rico until Congress passed the Foraker Act of 1900, which set up a civilian government under an all-powerful, U.S.-appointed governor. The U.S. Jones Act of 1917 included some governmental reforms, but disenfranchisement of the Puerto Rican people remained. The Jones Act also made all Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens and eligible to be drafted into the U.S. military.

The U.S. invasion in Puerto Rico opened the door for U.S. sugar companies, in conjunction with local capitalists, to convert large sections of the island into exploitative sugar plantations. The discontent of Puerto Rican workers grew with the Great Depression and led to labor unrest and a strong nationalist movement. U.S. officials responded by violently cracking down on protesters and trying to improve conditions on the island. In 1948, Puerto Ricans elected their own governor for the first time. A constitution was completed in 1952, which established Puerto Rico as a “Free Associated State” (or commonwealth), although the U.S. Congress continued to be in charge of the more important decisions affecting the island. The United States still exercises broad control over immigration, customs, mail services, currency, communications, and commerce on the island of Puerto Rico.

In the 1950s, the U.S. government promoted industrialization of Puerto Rico through tax breaks and a low-paid, but highly productive workforce. Although this program enlarged the economy and created industrial jobs, more jobs were lost at the same time in the agricultural sector. To relieve the pressures of unemployment, U.S. and Puerto Rican authorities promoted migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States, and, between 1945 and 1965, more than 500,000 people moved to the United States. The growth of pharmaceutical and petroleum corporations on the island in the 1960s led to serious air and water pollution and huge amounts of toxic waste. As early as the mid-1960s, foreign corporations began moving to places where labor was cheaper than in Puerto Rico. The long-term social and economic crisis in Puerto Rico has been exacerbated by the neoliberal policies of Puerto Rican Governor Pedro Roselló. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of people living in poverty grew by 600,000; in 1998, two-thirds of the population lived below the poverty line.¹

The American nation is a dangerous neighbor, especially for Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. We must trust very little in her statements.... On alert then, the United States urgently needs to establish a position in the Antilles.

— An 1894 editorial in Puerto Rican newspaper *La Democracia*

History of the U.S. military in Puerto Rico

Even before the United States invaded Puerto Rico in 1898, the island was viewed by U.S. military officials as strategically advantageous for the U.S. military in the Caribbean. Puerto Rico's position would give the U.S. Navy access to North, Central, and South America, as well as a prime location from which to defend U.S. interests in the region. After the United States acquired Puerto Rico, it became a crucial center for U.S. military surveillance, weapons testing, and training. Bases in Puerto Rico were also frequently used in the twentieth century as jumping-off places for military interventions in several Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The U.S. military began building forts and bases on Puerto Rico as soon as it came under U.S. control in 1898. These military installations, which now occupy about 13 percent of Puerto Rico's territory, were often built on land expropriated from Puerto Rican peasants. Below, a few U.S. bases in Puerto Rico are described to give an idea of the historical magnitude of the U.S. military presence on the island:

- **Fort Buchanan** was established in 1925, originally named "Fort Miles" for the commander who oversaw the invasion of Puerto Rico. In 1940 it became a permanent U.S. military installation and was renamed "Fort Buchanan." Until 1966, it served as headquarters for the Antilles Military Command. In 1998, Fort Buchanan became home to U.S. Army South.
- Since 1902, the island of **Culebra**, about twenty miles east of Puerto Rico, has been used by the U.S. Navy for training and maneuvers. By the 1960s, about 700 of the original inhabitants of Culebra remained and attracted attention, so in 1970 *Life* magazine printed a special report about Culebra. In 1974 the U.S. government stopped using Culebra as a firing range and intensified training operations on the neighboring island of Vieques. (See page 9.)
- The **Roosevelt Roads Naval Station**, begun in 1941, is located on the eastern end of Puerto Rico. It is one of the largest naval facilities in the world, covering about 32,000 acres and encompassing three harbors and two-thirds of the island of Vieques. Through the years, it has been used as a major training base for the U.S. Navy and a springboard for U.S. military actions in the Caribbean. As of September 1995, the Department of Defense reported there are 4,149 active personnel stationed at Roosevelt Roads.
- **Camp Santiago** in Salinas, Puerto Rico, was established in 1940 as a Puerto Rican National Guard training facility. Covering more than 10,000 acres, Camp Santiago is used by special operations forces, the National Guard, and other military units.
- The **U.S. Naval Security Group** moved to its current location at Sabana Seca, Puerto Rico, in 1952. The 443 civilian and military personnel stationed there provide cryptologic and communications services to U.S. military agencies throughout the hemisphere.

Besides using Puerto Rico as a site for many bases and military installations, the U.S. military has also made use of the "human resources" of the island. Since 1917, hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans have been drafted or have enlisted in the U.S. armed forces: roughly 20,000 Puerto Ricans were drafted into World War I; 65,000 Puerto Ricans fought in World War II, and almost 50,000 participated in the Vietnam War. Puerto Ricans have often been over-

represented in the military and have suffered more than their share of casualties. In 1998, the number of Puerto Rican youth recruited into the armed forces (active duty and reserves) was 3,431.²

The Puerto Rican National Guard was founded in 1919 to serve two purposes:

- to complement the regular armed forces of the United States (If called to active service, the National Guard would be under control of the U.S. president.)
- to protect the peace and maintain public security within Puerto Rico if called to do so by the governor

The U.S. Department of Defense has been the main financial supporter of the National Guard through the years, providing salaries, arms, and equipment to this 10,000-member force. With about twenty-two armories and the Camp Santiago training center, the National Guard is the most visible military force on the island. Since its founding, the National Guard has been used numerous times to put down strikes, student protests, and nationalist rebellions.

The U.S. Army Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) program was created in 1919 with a mission to “train students to be officers of the branches of the U.S. Army.” In 1953, the U.S. Air Force initiated its own ROTC program in Puerto Rico. ROTC was originally compulsory for university students, but became voluntary after 1960. In September and November of 1969, there were protests against the ROTC presence on university campuses, and the ROTC building on the Río Piedras campus was burned. In March of 1970 and 1971, two large anti-ROTC demonstrations left four people killed and a dozen injured. In the aftermath of such protests, ROTC visibility decreased on campuses.

Post-Cold War U.S. military policy in Puerto Rico

Cold War military policy in the U.S. fixated on stopping the spread of anything that might be construed as a “communist threat.” During this period in Puerto Rico, the U.S. military prepared itself for war with the Soviet Union. Note the presence of nuclear weapons at Roosevelt Roads. In addition, with the Cuban revolution of 1959, U.S. military policy makers placed greater emphasis on combating internal “communist threats.” The Puerto Rican bases were used for naval training and some counterinsurgency training, as well as springboards for U.S. invasions in the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Grenada.

As the Cold War drew to a close between 1989 and 1991, anticommunism as a basis of and explanation for military policy became outdated. The U.S. military searched for new ways and new reasons to be engaged in Latin America and the Caribbean. Below we will examine why Puerto Rico continues to be important to the U.S. military, and why the post-Cold War era has brought (somewhat counterintuitively) an *increasing* militarization of the island.

Although Puerto Rico can no longer offer the cheap labor or tariff-free trade that Mexico and other nations in Latin America can, the island still remains extremely important economically. Puerto Rico produces more profit for U.S. corporations than do the economic powerhouses of Mexico and Brazil combined.³ Commander of the U.S. Southern Command General Wilhelm echoed such economic considerations before Congress in early 1999.⁴ (See sidebar.) As in the Cold War era, there remains today a strong

Economic predictions persist that, by 2010, U.S. trade with the region will exceed that with Europe and Japan combined. Of every dollar Latin Americans spend on imports, 44 cents buy goods from the U.S.A. . . . With the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, it is likely this will increase, and more and more ours is becoming not an American culture, but a culture of the Americas. For these and other reasons we must pay increased attention to our [U.S.] affairs and interests in this hemisphere.

— General Wilhelm, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Southern Command

connection between economic policy and military policy. The military's presence in Puerto Rico serves to protect U.S. economic interests in Puerto Rico and throughout the Caribbean.

In the eyes of high-level military officers and many U.S. policy makers, Puerto Rico continues to be an important U.S. military enclave in the post-Cold War era. Several factors contribute to the idea that Puerto Rico is essential to the U.S. military. First, the complex of U.S. military bases and facilities in Panama is to be phased out by the end of 1999. In the resulting base realignment, the U.S. Southern Command moved to Miami. Two important subcommands—U.S. Army South and Special Operations Command South—moved to Puerto Rico, increasing the military importance of the island to the United States.

Second, the old argument that Puerto Rico is of great geostrategic value to the United States because of its proximity to North, Central, and South America is still being used by military supporters. To replace the invalidated threat of communism, the U.S. military has re-focused itself on nontraditional threats that supposedly undermine democracy and stability in the Caribbean and other parts of Latin America. These nontraditional threats include the narcotics trade, immigration, terrorism, political instability, natural disasters, and the open-ended threat of "critical uncertainties." According to military officials, Puerto Rico is strategically placed to deal with this new bag of transnational threats.

Third, Puerto Rico continues to be a center for U.S. military training, especially naval. A

1991 Department of Defense document reads: "Puerto Rico offers a tremendous training capability that cannot be duplicated anywhere on the East Coast of the United States. In short, these facilities remain vital to Atlantic Fleet training and readiness, with no suitable options available for an alternate site that allows the breadth of integrated training that is required."⁵ Puerto Rico has also been the site in recent years of multinational military exercises.

According to General Wilhelm, "Narcotics trafficking persists as the most corrosive threat to democracy, stability, and prosperity in our region."⁶ Defined as such, the U.S. military has made the war on drugs a priority in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Puerto Rico is no exception. As the U.S.-Mexico border has become increasingly militarized, new routes have opened up through the Caribbean.

Between 12 percent to 33 percent of Colombian

cocaine headed to the United States is smuggled by Dominican gangs, mostly through Puerto Rico. In 1994, the U.S. drug czar declared Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands a "High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area," opening the door for larger and more militarized antinarcotic efforts. Even though the 1997 Coast Guard drug interdiction campaign in the waters around Puerto Rico (Operation Frontier Shield) intercepted more than 30 tons of cocaine, levels of drug trafficking and use in Puerto Rico remain high. With Puerto Rico's numerous facilities and construction of new "antidrug" radar on the island, Puerto Rico's role in the drug war is being solidified for years to come.

Finally, the Puerto Rican bases provide the U.S. military with forward positioning that may be useful in responding to political instability in the Caribbean, such as that recently seen in Haiti. Also, the internal presence of U.S. troops and the Puerto Rican National Guard (officially part of the U.S. Army and Air Force) represent a deterrence to local political uprisings and an obstacle to self-determination in Puerto Rico.



Training in Puerto Rico

Soldiers ram a high explosive round into their 155 mm Howitzer on Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, on Jan. 20, 1998, during Joint Task Force Exercise 98-1.

U.S. military programs in Puerto Rico

Because of Puerto Rico's Commonwealth status, most of the military programs carried out on the island are considered "domestic military policy." It is therefore difficult to obtain comprehensive data on all U.S. military programs and their funding. However, an attempt is made below to show the range and size of a few of the programs and activities currently being undertaken by the U.S. military in Puerto Rico.

Base realignment

In 1997, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean became part of the U.S. Southern Command's area of responsibility, which includes all of Latin America except Mexico. With closure of bases in Panama and movement of the two military commands to Puerto Rico, the traditional role of the island as guardian of the Caribbean is expanding to include all of Latin America.⁷ As U.S. Southern Command's director, General Wilhelm, stated in June 1999, "Puerto Rico will now assume the role that Panama has had for Southern Command for about the last fifty years. Puerto Rico will really become the hub of our operations." (*Miami Herald*)

The **U.S. Special Operations Command-South** will be moved from Panama to the Naval Air Station, Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, by summer 1999. This move will entail construction of new facilities at Roosevelt Roads in order to accommodate approximately 25,000 Department of Defense employees who will be based in Puerto Rico by the year 2000 (*Miami Herald*). Special Operations forces are made up of the Navy SEALs, Army Green Berets, and other special operations groups. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, Special Operations is "involved in developing military-to-military relations through exchanges and exercises. . . . It also plays a critical training and operations support role for the cooperative regional counterdrug effort."⁸

The **U.S. Army South** is in the process of relocating to Fort Buchanan in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico. Once established, this force will consist of 1,382 active and reserve members, a reduction from levels in Panama. U.S. Army South will rely on more than 16,000 members of the Puerto Rican National Guard and Reserve forces to carry out its "engagement activities."⁹

Other military construction in Puerto Rico

The budget fiscal year 2000 provides several million dollars to be spent on a new Army Reserve Center in Puerto Rico. In addition, a Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar is to be built on Puerto Rico. (See *Vieques* section of this report, pages 9-10) A monetary figure is not attached to this project.

Counternarcotics programs

In fiscal year 1999, the U.S. Department of Defense will spend \$406 million to "execute counterdrug detection and monitoring programs to assist law enforcement agencies to counter the flow of drugs in transit into Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands and across the U.S. Southwest border."¹⁰ Of this \$406 million, the amount to be spent in Puerto Rico is undetermined. The U.S. Coast Guard will receive \$25 million in fiscal year 1999 for drug interdiction efforts in the Caribbean and satellite communications equipment.¹¹ Since 1993, the Puerto Rican National Guard has also become more involved in counternarcotics efforts in Puerto Rican cities. Efforts include doing sweeps of housing projects to look for drugs and drug dealers.

Training programs in Puerto Rico

The Roosevelt Roads Naval Station, including the island of Vieques, is the site of numerous

training programs. Exercises are large “deployments for training” that often include several Latin American or Caribbean armed forces. In 1998, the Joint Task Force Exercise 98 and Cabanas 98 Peacekeeping Exercise were held in Puerto Rico. Also, Camp Santiago functions as a training center for the Puerto Rican National Guard and Special Operations Forces. The Western Hemisphere Drug Elimination Act of 1998 allots \$9 million during three years to the Coast Guard and Customs Service to establish, operate, and maintain a center at San Juan, Puerto Rico, “for training law enforcement personnel of countries located in the Latin American and Caribbean regions in matters relating to maritime law enforcement, including customs-related ports management matters.”¹²

ROTC programs

After an extended period of low ROTC visibility on Puerto Rican campuses, some ROTC programs are attempting to re-emerge. One ROTC colonel said to a local newspaper, “Twenty-seven years have gone by. This is not the Vietnam era.”

Disaster relief and humanitarian assistance

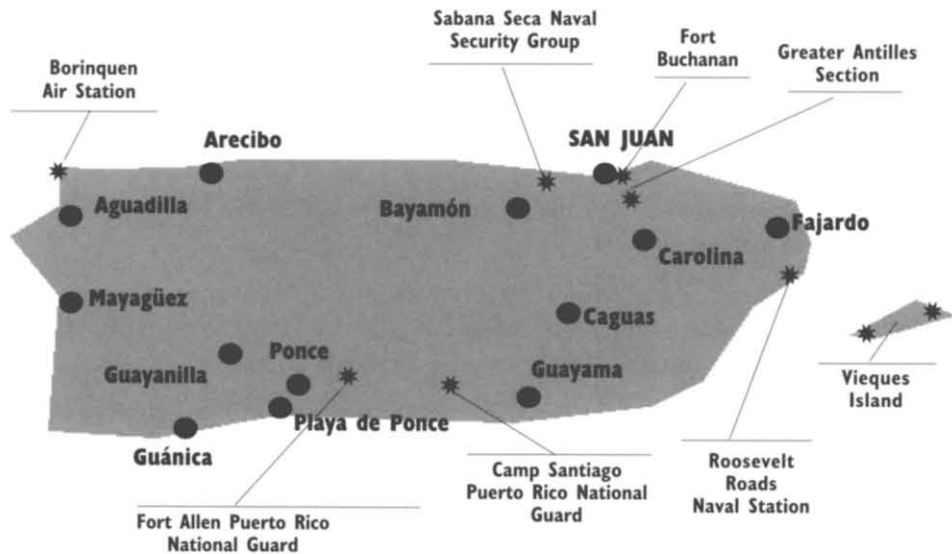
These two roles have become important post-Cold War missions of the U.S. military in the Caribbean. When Hurricane Georges struck Puerto Rico in September 1998, the U.S. military responded with its three-phase disaster relief program. Efforts included 152 Air Force missions in response to Federal Emergency Management Agency requests for delivery of hurricane aid, several thousand temporary roofs built by the Army Corps of Engineers, and several dozen generators installed by the 249th Army Engineer Battalion.

How Puerto Rico is affected by U.S. military presence

Over the years, the impact of the U.S. military has been felt in Puerto Rico in innumerable ways that are often hard to quantify. Puerto Rico has long been used as a place of rest and relaxation for military personnel. For years, buses from Roosevelt Roads would regularly drop off G.I.s at houses of prostitution in San Juan, increasing demand for sex workers. The U.S. military has had an unquestionable economic impact on the island as the largest single employer, landholder, and consumer. Puerto Rican veterans and ex-military personnel receive financial benefits from the military. The U.S. military has provided many programs such as summer camps, athletic programs, and educational programs in public schools, promoting an acceptance of and interest in the military among young people. An example is the Junior ROTC program, which imparts a military-based world view to its youthful participants. The environmental impact of U.S. military activities on Puerto Rico has been large and often under-reported (*See section on Vieques Island, pages 9-10*). The impact of the U.S. military on the people of Puerto Rico is due to its economic, social, and political influences, as well as its physical presence on the island.

This presence also affects the question of Puerto Rico’s status. Puerto Rico’s value as strategic U.S. military real estate has increased with the move to the island of the U.S. Special Operations Command-South and the U.S. Army South. This makes a change in political status even more difficult than before. However, the current pro-statehood government in Puerto Rico has been lobbying for an increased presence of the U.S. military, thinking this would bolster pro-statehood sentiment in the Pentagon and, by extension, the U.S. government. The military itself is a significant political actor, able to directly influence Congress and to mobilize public opinion, through organizations such as the Navy League, the American Legion, and various veterans groups. In the final analysis, increased presence of the U.S. military hinders the ability of Puerto Ricans to determine the political status of their island.

U.S. military presence in Puerto Rico



Borinquen Air Station

136 Coast Guard, 4 helicopters, Customs, Immigration, FBI and air National Guard, on 204 acres.

Sabana Seca naval Security Group

386 active duty and civilian U.S. Navy, secret listening post, on 2,250 acres.

Fort Buchanan

1,382 active duty, civilian and reserve forces of U.S. Army South, on 700 acres.

Greater Antilles Section

356 Coast guard, 6 cutters, on 7.9 acres.

Vieques Island

U.S. Navy bombing test range and home of Over the Horizon Radar run by 20 civilian defense contractors, on 22,000 acres.

Fort Allen Puerto Rico National Guard

No residents, barracks and receiver site for Over the Horizon Radar run by 20 civilian defense contractors, on 940 acres.

Camp Santiago Puerto Rico National Guard

No residents, barracks, National Guard facility that can temporarily house thousands of troops, on 12,000 acres.

Roosevelt roads Naval Station

5,497 military, civilian and reserves, mostly Navy, but includes 277 Special Forces and 6 Hercules aircraft and 100 air Force personnel on 8,000 acres

Source: The Herald, 0000/99

What you can do

1. End the *de facto* block of media coverage of military-related issues in Puerto Rico and Vieques. Vieques activist Ismael Guadalupe thinks that this is a crucial step in changing U.S. military activities on both islands. You are encouraged to:
 - Talk with editors of local newspapers and other media contacts in your area about issues they should cover regarding Puerto Rico.
 - Share the information from this report and from other alternative news sources with members of your community through presentations, newsletters, or letters to the editor.
2. Talk with your representatives or senators about issues surrounding the U.S. military in Puerto Rico. Urge them to:
 - Support a process of demilitarization in Puerto Rico. Cite the damaging consequences of U.S. military presence there and the lack of a real need for such a concentration of military force in Puerto Rico. (No concrete military threats exist.)
 - Advocate to end use of Vieques Island as a bombing range and training facility. An exhaustive environmental cleanup must follow.
 - Demand that construction be stopped of the Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar, since the need for it has not been demonstrated.
 - Encourage transferring military dollars to programs to help the people of Puerto Rico rise out of poverty and create sustainable development projects in their communities.
3. Develop or join campaigns in your area to address issues of militarization. Make connections to similar struggles in Puerto Rico. (See organizations named on page 11)
4. Travel to Puerto Rico and learn firsthand about the effects of militarization.

Brief history of Vieques Island

The history of the U.S. Navy and the people of Vieques Island has been long and contentious. Upon its arrival in Vieques in 1941, the U.S. Navy forcibly seized about two-thirds of the island. The people of Vieques were either relocated to St. Croix of the Virgin Islands or to the middle third of Vieques. The Naval facilities on Vieques are part of the larger Roosevelt Roads Naval Station. On the western end of Vieques, the Naval Ammunitions Facility was erected to store hundreds of thousands of tons of explosives. On the eastern part of the island, an area was set up for bombing practice from ships, jets, helicopters, tanks, etc. The Vieques bombing range has been used for experimentation with new weapons: defoliants such as Agent Orange were tested in the Vietnam era, and in 1992 the Navy dropped live napalm on the island. Combat training on Vieques and naval maneuvers in surrounding waters are a regular part of the Navy's activities there.

Before 1941, Vieques was a fairly pristine island with arguably the most beautiful beaches around; today, it suffers serious environmental damage. According to a 1989 study, the eastern part of the island had "more craters per kilometer than the moon."¹³ Bomb fragments, unexploded ammunition, and scrap iron used for targets are never removed by the Navy; instead, they oxidize and break down, releasing toxins into the environment. Some chemicals (TNT, RDX, and Tetryl) are found in the island's drinking water in nearly the same concentration as at the bombing sites, indicating that contamination from the bombing sites travels to other areas. Such contamination has a critical impact on the islanders' health: The cancer rate in Vieques is approximately 52 percent higher than the Puerto Rican average, and many rare and serious diseases have appeared among the people of Vieques.¹⁴

Since 1995, the Navy has planned to build a Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar, which will consist of two facilities, one in Vieques and the other in Fort Allen in the southern Puerto Rican town of Juana Diaz. The radar facility will supposedly help U.S. authorities detect and interdict drug planes over the Caribbean. However, opponents point out that the system was designed to detect Soviet bombers, not small drug planes. Also, the radar cannot detect airplanes flying under 500 feet, as most drug planes do. Some critics suggest that the radar could be used to stem the tide of immigrants from lesser-developed Caribbean nations to Puerto Rico or the United States. Others think the radar will be primarily used for military purposes, such as developing "cyber warfare" capabilities, not counternarcotics efforts.¹⁵

Construction has begun on the more than thirty towers connected by a 200-acre spiderweb





SAN JUAN STAR

U.S. Navy bombing practice on Vieques Island, 1997.

of steel cables that will make up the Vieques radar transmitter. The construction is taking place only 500 meters from a residential area and will probably destroy an archeological site of unknown historical value. (Navy officials won't let experts in to survey the site.) The electromagnetic radiation the radar will generate has been shown in previous experiments to increase rates of leukemia, brain cancer, heart abnormalities, and reproduction problems in humans, as well as genetic alterations in plants and animals.¹⁶

While the cumulative effect of the Navy's activities on the people of Vieques is immeasurable, numerous impacts are obvious. Residents of the island have reported stray bullets hitting their cars and bombs hitting residential areas of the island. In April 1999, two stray 500-pound bombs killed one person and injured four in an observation tower used for monitoring military exercises. Noise pollution from low-flying jets and explosions has affected the people's ability to sleep and spawned anxiety disorders in children. The residents cannot use or even visit the majority of their island. To travel to the "big island," they must skirt around Navy-controlled waters, which lengthens their trip from six miles to seventeen miles. The Vieques fishery, the livelihood for many islanders, has been damaged by contamination and the destruction of coral reefs, mangroves, and lagoons.

Because the Navy reduced the ability of the people of Vieques to farm, fish, or attract tourists and only provided 92 local jobs in return (in custodial work, maintenance, and security), levels of unemployment have historically been quite high.

Organizing efforts to evict the Navy from Vieques date back several decades. In 1964, the Committee in Defense of Vieques was organized to stop Navy attempts to take over the south coast of Vieques. In the 1960s and 1970s, Viequenses were able to take back small but important areas of Navy-controlled land by squatting on them. Between 1978 and 1979, members of the Vieques Fisherman's Association and activists from the Foundation for the Rescue of Vieques staged a series of protests against the Navy and interrupted Navy maneuvers with their fishing boats. In May 1979, twenty-one key activists were arrested and jailed in the United States. One

For fifty years we have literally been imprisoned. The Navy controls our land, sea, and air. This makes social and economic development impossible.

— Ismael Guadalupe, Vieques activist

activist was found murdered in a federal penitentiary in Florida, which brought international attention to the situation on Vieques. Activism on Vieques was rejuvenated in 1989 when the Navy tried to evict Maria Velazquez and Carmelo Matta, a Korean War veteran, from their home, which the Navy claimed was built inside its "imaginary line." In 1993 the

Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques (Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques) was formed. This group now leads the struggle to force the Navy to leave Vieques and is planning an alternative vision for the future of Vieques where the people's interests will come first.

In April 1999, 35-year-old David Sanes was killed and four others wounded when an F/A-18 jet, participating in naval war games, dropped two bombs a mile-and-a-half off target. Sanes's death united political, religious, and environmental groups in calling for an end to naval military activity on the island. A special commission, appointed by Gov. Pedro J. Rossello, concluded that the military training had caused "disastrous economic and environmental damage and that it violated the human and constitutional rights of the residents of Vieques." (*The New York Times*, Sept. 10, 1999) In response, President Clinton appointed a federal panel to study the Navy's need for operations on Vieques and possible alternatives.

Resources for advocacy work

The following organizations can provide activists with resources about Puerto Rico and ideas for further action:

Center for Puerto Rican Studies—Centro Library and Archives

Hunter College, 695 Park Ave., Box 548, New York, NY 10021

tele: (212) 772-5685

e-mail: eperez@shiva.hunter.cuny.edu

website: <http://hunter.cuny.edu/centro>

Fellowship of Reconciliation—Task Force on Latin America and the Caribbean

995 Market St., No. 1414, San Francisco, CA 94103

tele: (415) 495-6334; **fax:** (415) 495-5628

e-mail: fortlatam@igc.apc.org

Proyecto Caribeño de Justicia y Paz

P.O. Box 13241, San Juan, PR 00908-3241

Ave. Condado 607, Ofic. 601, Pda. 18 San Juan, PR

tele: (787) 722-1640; **fax:** (787) 724-5789

Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques

(Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques)

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tele: (787) 741-8651

e-mail: bieke@tropic.net

AFSC Peacebuilding Unit Latin America/Caribbean Program

1501 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102-1479

tele: (215) 241-7180; **fax:** (215) 241-7177

e-mail: Aberryman@afsc.org

website: <http://www.afsc.org/pdesc/pd115.htm>

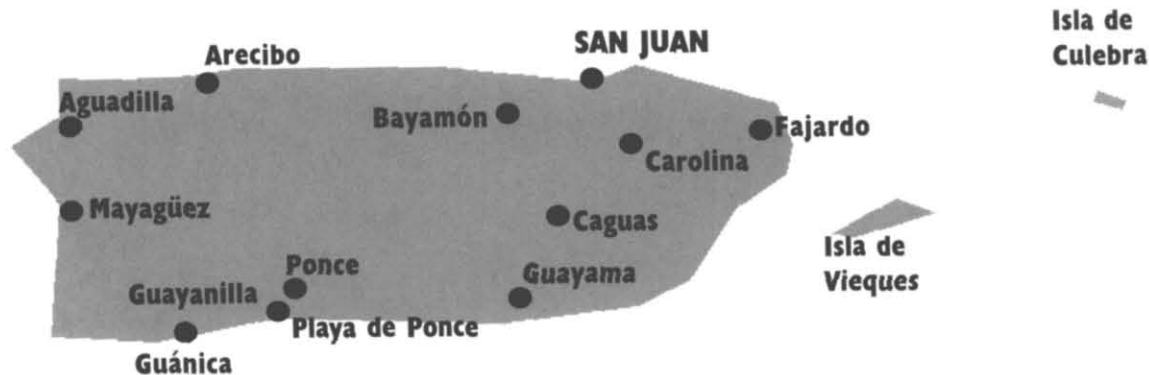
AFSC's Peacebuilding Unit, Latin America/Caribbean program, is partially supported by contributions from groups and individuals. Your donation will further work that addresses issues of U.S. policy in the region. All contributions to the American Friends Service Committee are deductible for federal income tax purposes.

Notes

- 1 Héctor R. Reyes, "Puerto Rican Soldiers Strike Back," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Sept./Oct. 1998, p. 7.
- 2 Source: Mike Dove of the Defense Manpower Data Center, Monterey, California, telephone: (831) 583-2400.
- 3 Juan Gonzalez, "Poorhouse of the Caribbean," *The Progressive*, Sept. 1998, p. 27.
- 4 Posture Statement of Gen. Charles E. Wilhelm, U.S. Marine Corps Commander in Chief, U.S. Southern Command, before the House Appropriations Committee Defense Subcommittee, Feb. 25, 1999.
- 5 Jorge Rodríguez Beruff, *Security in the Post-Cold War Caribbean*, p. 168.
- 6 Posture Statement of Gen. Charles E. Wilhelm, before the House Appropriations Committee, Defense Subcommittee, Feb. 25, 1999.
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COLONIAL LEGACY AND MILITARY STRATEGY

The U.S. Military in Puerto Rico



Statistics

Official name: *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico* (Commonwealth of Puerto Rico)

Capital: San Juan

Land area: 8,874 sq. km.
(more than three times the size of Rhode Island)

Terrain: Three-fourths of the island is mountainous, surrounded by a coastal plain.

Natural resources: copper, nickel, potential for crude oil, rain forests, fisheries

Population (1994): 3.86 million. In addition, 2.7 million Puerto Ricans live on the U.S. mainland.

Land use: arable land: 4 percent; permanent

crops: 5 percent; permanent pastures: 26 percent; forests and woodland: 16 percent; military bases: 13 percent; other: 36 percent (1993 est.)

Principal industries: pharmaceuticals, electronics, industrial machinery, cement, commercial fishing, agriculture

Currency: U.S. dollar

Per capita income: \$8,000 per year



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