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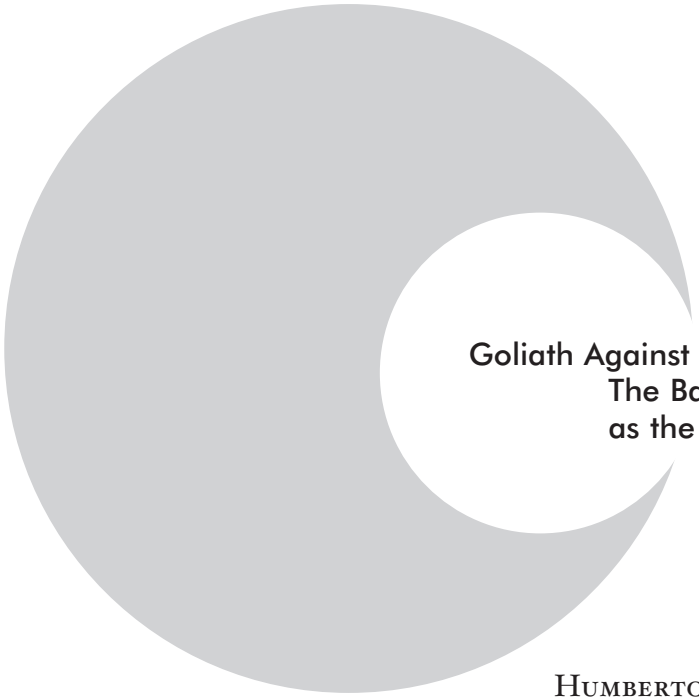
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**Goliath Against David:
The Battle for Vieques
as the Last Crossroad?**

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Translated by Judith Escalona

The biblical metaphor of David and Goliath has been used to draw attention to four aspects of the present conflict between the United States and its Caribbean colony, Puerto Rico, which stems from the American exploitation of the island municipality of Vieques as a military base and practice range since 1943. The superior might of the Philistine warrior Goliath over the Israelite shepherd David is an apt metaphor to stress the enormous disparity in the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico and their different strategies and resources in the “Battle for Vieques.”

U.S. colonial domination of Puerto Rico began with its victory in the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898. From that moment the laws of the United States are applied to the island. Since then, U.S. military hegemony has prevailed in the Caribbean, sustained by the two-eyed

sword of coercion and consensus.

The central point of the conflict is the cessation or continuation of military exercises in Vieques, and the cleaning and decontamination of the island when the U.S. Navy leaves. At the time of this writing (March 2001), the two newly-elected administrations—that of President George W. Bush, Jr. and the conservative, pro-military Republican Party; and that of Puerto Rican Governor Sila Calderón and the centrist Popular Democratic Party (PPD)—were conducting negotiations over the methods to be used to resolve the dispute. The main issues under discussion are the health of the *viequenses* after half a century of Naval exercises, and the options to be presented in a Vieques referendum over the continuation of these practices. By their very nature, these negotiations are asymmetrical and favor the Navy, but ultimately, it is

in the hands of the *viequenses*, with the general support of Puerto Rico and its diaspora, to accept or reject the result.

The first aspect of the Vieques question is that Goliath kills. It is he who—literally—throws the projectile at David. In 1999, David Sanes, a private security guard, was killed when a 500-pound bomb dropped by a Hornet FA-18, an aircraft of the U.S. Armed Forces, missed its target in Vieques. This was the most recent in a series of incidents. An earlier one took place in 1993, when an aircraft dropped five similar bombs ten miles from its target and a mile away from the civilian town of Isabel Segunda; four detonated but the fifth has never even been located.

The next aspect is the government of Puerto Rico's demand—unanimously supported by the Puerto Rican people—that all military activity cease immediately in Vieques, also known as *Isla Nena*. With regard to this, I will make brief references to the Native American and Hawaiian communities in the United States. The concepts of national identity—“Puerto Ricaness” (*puertorrique idad*)—, the diaspora, and U.S. citizenship within the context of the island's colonial condition will also be discussed.

Lastly, an appeal is made to governmental and non-governmental entities—American, Latin American, Caribbean, and international—to condemn the human rights violations in Vieques by the U.S. Department of Defense because its policy of cooperative hemispheric security cannot, by definition, be unilateral, while still giving the military pre-eminence over civil democratic power. The strategic change in the role Puerto Rico plays within the U.S. Defense Department's military structure is analyzed, therefore, from a geopolitical and global perspective. The conclusion reached is that only a program of restitution is appropriate in order to definitively resolve the dispute.

Goliath Triumphs Over David: The Navy in Vieques, 1943–2000

From the beginning of its military takeover of the Caribbean in 1898—principally, in order to control the maritime trade routes between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans once the Panama Canal was built—the U.S. established a system of bases and installations for naval maneuvers in several Caribbean countries. There were over twenty bases during World War II, the majority pertaining to the Navy. Several Caribbean territories—particularly the Bermudas, Puerto Rico, and Trinidad and Tobago—suffered social, economic, and political repercussions.

The prolonged suffering of Vieques at the hands of the Navy began in 1943 when 825 families (3,620 people) were displaced through the purchase of their lands or by being forced to abandon their homes.¹ The majority of those affected were squatters on the properties of the sugarcane corporations. The expropriations in the neighboring island of Culebra were also completed at this time. All these lands were acquired for military purposes and their use changed in accordance with military technological advances.

Nevertheless, the initial use of Vieques was to shelter the presumably defeated fleet of Great Britain as part of the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base in Ceiba, on the east coast of Puerto Rico. That reality never came to be, but even so, in 1947, the expropriations continued, reflecting the Navy's intent to acquire both islands entirely.² The first military exercise by the Atlantic Fleet in the area was held in 1948. The following year, some member countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) began to pay the United States for naval and military maneuvers in the waters surrounding the islands.

In the fifties, responding to the Cold War, Roosevelt Roads grew and was converted into the largest naval base in the world—if we include Vieques. Its purposes were many, among them, a practice site for the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility; a storage area for nuclear weapons (in violation of the Treaty of Tlatelolco); and a

launching site for several interventions in the Caribbean.³

The Navy took over 79% of the surface area of Vieques.⁴ A large portion of the population was relocated. Some moved seven miles away to Puerto Rico, (called *Isla Grande* in Vieques) while others migrated to the nearby island of St. Croix. The majority remained trapped in a strip of land, squeezed in the middle, in less than a third of the small island. Vieques experienced economic and social stagnation. In the long run, the Navy impeded its socio-economic development, already in crisis since the collapse of the sugarcane agri-industry, the island's economic base during the first four decades of the 20th century. In 1958, the island's social and psychological situation worsened when the Marines established Camp Garcia. Clashes between the besieged community and rowdy troops looking for a good time soon followed.⁵

In 1961—in the full heat of the Cold War over the Cuban Revolution—Governor Luis Muñoz Marín stopped another attempt by the Defense Department to entirely depopulate Culebra and Vieques. In a letter to President John F. Kennedy that demonstrated his insider's understanding of Washington politics Muñoz Marín explained his reasons—today, perhaps, prophetic—but the situation remained unchanged.

But economic considerations are not controlling in this situation. Many—perhaps the majority—of the people of Vieques will not willingly exchange the values of home and family and community roots for economic benefits, however generous. And, of course, the people of Puerto Rico would not and could not be induced to participate in uprooting 8,000 persons for financial considerations.⁶

In the following decades, the United States abandoned or reduced the size of most of its Caribbean bases in response to technological changes (for example, satellites and missiles). Military practices, however, continued in Vieques and Culebra. A smaller island, Culebra showed the effects of the military maneuvers sooner and several children were injured. In 1975, the *culebrenses* succeeded in ejecting the Navy because of several factors, among them the unanimous support of the residents, combined with the independence movement and the anti-Vietnam War sentiment that characterized the period. Another important factor—perhaps the determining one—was a confidential agreement between the government of Puerto Rico and the Navy. Richard Copaken, a Washington, D.C. corporate attorney acting on behalf of Governor Rafael Hernandez Colon (PPD), offered the Navy the unconditional use of the southern coast of Vieques.⁷

Culebra's Victory, Vieques' Loss —The Intensification of Military Maneuvers

Culebra's blessing was Vieques' curse. Military practices were expanded on the lands, coasts, beaches, nearby waters and air of Vieques. These became increasingly frequent, destructive and dangerous because of the highly sophisticated technology and chemical components of the armaments. At the same time, the Navy limited the days and the waters available for fishing. Soon the intensification of the military maneuvers annihilated the fish, the primary means of subsistence for many families of the moribund economy. The Navy had besieged the *viequenses* by land and was now assailing them by sea.

In reaction to the Navy's stranglehold, the fishermen organized the Crusade for the Rescue of Vieques in 1978. They began obstructing naval maneuvers, including those

of NATO. Anthropologist Katherine T. McCaffrey described it this way: “The David and Goliath-like insurgency, in which small wooden fishing boats confronted massive fighter vessels, was led by fishermen who expressed pride in their U.S. citizenship and support for the U.S. military—somewhere else.”⁸ Meanwhile, another sector of the community, vacationing and retired Americans with their summer homes in Vieques, allied themselves with the Navy.

The challenge posed by the Crusade For the Rescue of Vieques was not limited to the sea; they also sued the Navy in the federal court in Puerto Rico. As expected, the court acceded to the Navy’s overriding claim that its activities were essential to “national security.” But the fishermen won two partial victories: military activity was reduced at Camp Garcia, and the court ordered the Navy to conduct a study on the environmental impact of its activities. Unsatisfied with the court’s decision, Governor Carlos Romero Barceló (PNP) sued the Navy for ecological and environmental damages. The suit was withdrawn in 1983 after the Navy agreed to implement environmental conservation measures and initiate an economic development program for Vieques. The agreement was not presented to the court for ratification and was, therefore, unenforceable.

The agreement took the wind out of the Navy opposition’s sails and, by the end of the decade, was worthless.⁹ The Vieques community saw how promises become dead fish in the water, which is key for understanding their present skepticism regarding arrangements made by the Puerto Rican government. In the process, however, the struggle on *Isla Nena* transcended its local boundaries, crossing seven miles of water to *Isla Grande* and anchoring itself in the national political debate. The despair of the *viequenses* penetrated several sectors, including the political left, labor, and two new advocates—the churches and the diaspora in the United States—whose support is vital at the present moment.

The conflict between the Navy and part of the Vieques community continued to smolder until it rekindled in 1989, when a veteran was displaced from lands under dubious jurisdiction. Nature, however, intervened in the Navy’s favor. Hurricane Hugo devastated the island. Reconstruction was slow but military exercises continued at full steam.

The Resurgence of David’s Struggle

The Goliath-like Navy kept David under its colonial boot until April 21, 1999, two days after Sanes’ death. That day, members of the Crusade for the Rescue of Vieques, Sanes’ relatives, fishermen, and others traveled on a launch to the firing range in order to erect a cross in his memory and to protest the military presence. This act began the protest occupation of the area now called Mount David and won the active support of the Vieques community in the drive to oust the Navy.

The Navy stoked the fires of opposition, accusing Sanes of abandoning the observation post to smoke a cigarette when he was not a smoker. It failed to sanction the pilot, still anonymous, or to report on the other four civilians wounded in the incident. The case remained closed for the Navy but not for the Puerto Rican people. The political parties, the churches and civil society—and finally, all the Puerto Rican people—jointly condemned the Navy and presented themselves against it.¹⁰ A basic characteristic of this support was, and continues to be, the heterogeneity of its composition.

On May 8, the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño (PIP) established a second camp of civil disobedience in the lands used for military exercises. At least thirteen other religious, labor, civic and political groups soon followed. Surprisingly, churches of all denominations—progressive and conservative, including the Catholic Church—formed a united front. Public figures from the arts, sports, and entertainment, and

from inside and outside the island, expressed support before their audiences during live performances and through the mass media.

The rising tidal wave of public opposition forced Governor Pedro Roselló (PNP) to create the Special Commission on Vieques on May 11. Secretary of State Norma Burgos was appointed to head the commission consisting of members from all the main political parties and churches, the Vieques community and the Puerto Rican public. In June, the commission issued a unanimous report with several recommendations, among them the immediate end to all military activities; the return of the land and its decontamination; and a study into the causes of the high cancer rate on the island. This report legitimized the Puerto Rican government's claim before the administration of President William J. Clinton. At first, Roselló accepted it as Puerto Rico's position and used it as his political warhorse. The Navy kept its same intransigent attitude: the island of Vieques is integral to the Atlantic Fleet's combat readiness.¹¹

The Roselló administration retreated from its position because of Puerto Rico's colonial condition and the PNP's goal to make Puerto Rico the 51st state. The about-face was predictable, given the weakness of the Clinton administration before the Defense Department during both his presidential terms. In July 1999, the governor dissolved the Special Commission on Vieques and created a working group to negotiate—behind the backs of the previously participating sectors—with White House and Defense Department officials.

Throughout 2000, the social and political forces unleashed by the Vieques struggle did not dissipate. The Navy's reports and statements were criticized for their lack of rigor and substance, their incomplete and inaccurate maps, and their false and diversionary information. Critics included a Puerto Rican marine who wrote in *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*: "The Pacific Fleets's facilities are not able to provide the particular level of training possible in Vieques. The Pacific Fleet is ready, however, and has not complained about a lack of realistic training."¹³

Today, the Defense Department is the most powerful agency in the federal government, a gradual consequence of the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 that ended the era of four quasi-independent branches of the military—the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines—with little coordination among them. The advancement of joint actions among them has strengthened the congressional and "military-industrial complex," the phrase used by the former General and President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his farewell address of 1961, upon observing its growing influence.¹⁴

Presidential Directives

After months of negotiation, in January 2000, President Clinton issued several directives, which were accepted by the Roselló administration, permitting the Navy to resume military practices in the lands and surrounding waters of Vieques, with certain limitations. The directives introduced two new factors into the dispute. A referendum would be scheduled in Vieques, with the date to be set by the Navy.¹⁵ The people of Vieques would be given the following two choices: "The first shall be that the Navy will cease all training not later than May 1, 2003. The second will permit continued training, to include live fire training, on terms proposed by the Navy." Raising the stakes and dangling a carrot at the *viequenses*, Clinton directed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to request \$40 million from Congress to support community development in Vieques, regardless of the vote. The former president also directed the OMB to request an additional \$50 million in assistance if the *viequenses* choose to allow training to continue.

The implications for the United States democratic system are profound. The intervention of the Navy—a military branch—in a civil electoral process is unprecedented in the United States of the 20th century. In other Caribbean countries— for example, in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Grenada, and Panama—the U.S. Armed Forces (mainly the Marines) has played this role often. The allocation of millions of dollars to create employment programs for the *viequenses*, and to mitigate the human and ecological disgrace of its actions, is tantamount to the Navy paying reparations for the damage done, with the gross intent of buying votes from a desperate community divided by half a century of incessant attacks. This vulnerability favors the Navy—and it knows it.

The Clinton administration was committed to the referendum and, very likely, the Navy does not want to go through with it. In order to hold the referendum the Navy would have to believe that conditions are to its advantage or feel forced by circumstances beyond its control. A poll held in mid-year 2000 in Vieques by the Caguas Diocese, however, revealed that 88.5% of those sampled supported the immediate departure of the Navy from *viequense* territory, and the initiation of a clean-up program.¹⁶ At the same time, the federal government launched a failed offensive in *Isla Nena*. It peacefully removed protesters from the civil disobedience camps—the majority from *Isla Grande*—temporarily jailing many in federal prison. Hundreds of civil disobedience cases have been tried in federal court.

Marginalized Communities: Native Americans and Hawaiians

In U.S. colonial history—internal and external—several precedents approximating the Vieques case should be examined. Two of these concern the Native American and Hawaiian communities, neither of which are large populations. Both communities have won small victories in their struggle against federal and state powers whose decisions many times conflict with one another or, if not, run up against Congress. The largest minorities in the United States—African Americans and Chicanos—have struggled for many years and have attained participation and limited powers within the traditional political system, the product of a cruel and bloody history. Yet, African Americans have not succeeded in their demands for reparations and no movement of this kind exists, to my knowledge, among Chicanos.¹⁷

One of the major demands of both the Native American and Hawaiian communities—because of their ancestral legacy, their identity, and their language—is that they be recognized as a nation-within-a-nation, forged from a past of discrimination, oppression, and quasi-genocide. The return of their lands is their principal demand. In Hawai'i, where a substantial sovereignty movement exists, the end to military operations (that is, the cessation of the bombing) in Kaho'olawe and its return to the state was an important victory, although a slow decontamination process has prevented its use. Of course the differences between Native Americans, Hawaiians, and Puerto Rico are many, the most obvious being that the Native American population is small and dispersed and the Hawaiians are a minority in an archipelago with a multicultural majority.

A direct consequence of these controversies is the recognition by the federal government of its role as victimizer and that of the minorities as victims. This important realization has also been extended to Vieques; the United States accepted itself as victimizer (the Navy characterized itself as “bad neighbors”) and recognized the *viequenses* as victims by allocating millions of dollars as a kind of reparation and offering them conditional participation in deciding their future. The Navy's admission of guilt is the result of the political force created by the victims, bolstered by claims of their “Puerto

Ricaness” (*puertorrique idad*). Its power—principally in Vieques—is vital in order to right the historical injustice suffered by Puerto Rico. Its impact can go beyond the particular conflict in Vieques: “The interaction between perpetrator and victim is a new form of political negotiation that enables the rewriting of memory and historical identity in ways that both can share.”¹⁸ This means that at the proper moment a dialogue might begin regarding the relation between the two parties— Puerto Rico and the United States, the colony and the metropolitan power.

Puerto Ricaness and U.S. citizenship

In 1990, Puerto Rico and her neighboring islands of Culebra and Vieques had a total population of 3.5 million inhabitants, with 91.5% born in the country. Following them, in order of size, were those born in the United States of Puerto Rican descent, Dominicans, Cubans, and Central Americans. Puerto Ricans born in the United States totaled 21,717 persons, a drop of 7.7% from the 1980 Census¹⁹. Moreover, the Puerto Rican population in the United States increased to 2.5 million persons in 1990, representing 9.6% of the Latino population.

The support of the diaspora—whether born on the island or of Puerto Rican origin—for the Vieques cause has been massive, and includes the Congresspersons Nydia Velasquez (New York), José Serrano (New York) and Luis Gutierrez (Illinois). In each state where Puerto Ricans reside, support groups have organized. This diaspora defines its national identity as Puerto Rican, although its sensibility is necessarily different from that of Puerto Ricans born and living on the island.

“Puerto Ricaness” is a socio-cultural construction, not a juridical one. It does not have the political goal of establishing an independent state. In an important study, Arlene Davila says:

Yet despite their lack of political sovereignty, most Puerto Ricans consider themselves a territorially distinct national unit, a nation defined by its cultural distinctiveness notwithstanding its political and economic dependency on the United States.²⁰

This nationalism is based on culture, and is of an individual, subjective kind. Its expression is collective, although not uniform in terms of class and political affiliation. Out of the Vieques struggle has emerged a new and united sense of “Puerto Ricaness” that has no historical precedence. For the first time, there is consensus among those characterized as a divided nation, a nation in transition, or in the process of disappearing by melding into a generic Latino construct.

U.S. citizenship, imposed on Puerto Ricans since 1917, is another factor to be considered. It is perceived as positive, although it is of a second-class kind since Puerto Ricans do not have all the rights of those on the mainland. The great majority of Puerto Ricans are not conflicted about their U.S. citizenship and their “Puerto Ricaness.” Even the PIP (which saved itself from extinction by its role in the Vieques conflict), proposes its retention for those who so desire, should independence be achieved.

The support for Vieques unites the socio-cultural construction of “Puerto Ricaness” and the juridical-constitutional reality of U.S. citizenship in Puerto Rico and its diaspora. Both are the common denominator in the defense of the viequesenses’ human rights. Their fusion transforms the conflict into a socio-political one: the demand for the departure of the Navy from Vieques posits the possibility of a non-colonial citizenship, or the dilemma between citizens and imperial subjects.

The election of Governor Calderón (PPD) in 2000 challenged the presidential decisions agreed to by the Roselló administration. Calderón has been true to her campaign promise, firmly rejecting—without violating—the presidential directives, and supporting the immediate cessation of all military activities. (It should be noted that Calderón, while PPD president and mayor of San Juan, was appointed by Roselló to the short lived Special Commission on Vieques.) In reaction to Calderón's election, during his final hours in office President Clinton sought his Secretary of Defense's recommendation—no later than November 6, 2000—for a long-term alternative to live ammunition exercises. The incoming administration of President Bush Jr.—cautious until now—accepted the Clinton directives. The new Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, approved a petition from Governor Calderón to postpone the naval exercises scheduled for March until medical studies were conducted. But in an official communiqué Rumsfeld informed Calderón that combat readiness remained the priority, and was not conditioned by the findings of the studies, funded with \$1.6 million from the Navy.²¹

The Puerto Rican government's strategy focuses on the harmful effects of the Naval practices on the health of the *viequenses*. According to several indicators, the incidence of infant mortality, cancer, and a heart condition known as vibro-acoustical cardiovascular disease is greater in Vieques than in *Isla Grande*. It is obvious that the arms and munitions (including reduced uranium and napalm) used for half a century in military exercises are the cause of these illnesses and others. The statistics demonstrate that the risk of cancer began to rise at the end of the seventies—when military exercises on Culebra drew to a close—and by the end of the eighties it surpassed Puerto Rico, indicating a direct link between military activity and cancer, a chronic illness with a gestation period of 20 to 30 years.

The PPD's position is surprising. Since its founding, this party has been characterized by compromise, avoiding direct conflict with the federal government in order to preserve its powers—as few as they are—within the insular sphere. Open confrontation has never been its policy in relation to the federal government. As a political strategy, defending "Puerto Ricanness" allowed the PPD to win the votes of religious groups, ecologists, and *independentistas*, a necessity for its successful campaign against the excessive corruption and capitulation of the PNP government on the issue of Vieques. In this sense, to emphasize the health issue, while leaving the studies in the hands of the federal government (with the weak participation of Puerto Rico's Department of Health), can be interpreted as the continuation of the PPD's politics of awe. Up to now its directives in support of Vieques have been pusillanimous. Why does the PPD not push with the same insistence on the referendum and the resulting violation of human rights, including the dangers to health, of the continued naval presence? While the Navy is conducting a campaign of misinformation and enticements to win votes, the government has not yet begun to address the issues of employment and medical care on a local level.

In mid-March Governor Calderón expressed confidence in the objectivity of the health studies the federal government is conducting. This is tantamount to an endorsement of studies that are at best dubious. To rely on the federal government to provide information that will impugn the Navy sets Calderón's strategy on a precarious course—as does the absence of coordination between the Puerto Rican government and the various groups from civil society challenging the Navy. In the final analysis, the sectors of the civil society—characterized by their heterogeneity—are not committed to any unilateral arrangement between the Puerto Rican and federal

governments. As such, they are free to accept or reject it. For them, consensus is rooted in having the Navy leave Vieques, not in the process to achieve this goal.

Also in March, the archbishop of San Juan Monsignor Roberto González met with President Bush's chief aide, urging him to hold the referendum earlier and insisting it include the option to stop the bombing immediately. During February and March, 100 "lobbyists of the people"—in a campaign coordinated by the organization *Todo Puerto Rico con Vieques* and which included representation from 200 Puerto Rican communities of the diaspora—visited more than half the U.S. Congresspersons to inform them of the Vieques issue.²² While these independent actions have brought the mighty U.S. Navy to its knees (at least metaphorically) the need for a concerted effort that will deliver the final blow remains to be seen. The weight or responsibility of leadership would seem to rest on Calderón's shoulders. The experience of the Roselló administration demonstrates that the government of Puerto Rico is more vulnerable to federal pressures when it excludes the civil society—of *Isla Nena* and *Isla Grande*—from the negotiation process. Governor Calderón has pursued this same policy.

On the other hand, the Navy, along with other federal agencies and congressional committees on the military, is conducting a more coherent program in order to break the fragile united front of the government and civil society of Puerto Rico. Its major site of action must be Vieques, with the sowing of divisiveness, purchasing of votes, and use of whatever other means necessary for remaining on the island. Any military activity before the referendum will be seen as a provocation. The possibility of violence is great and may offer the Navy an out from its commitment to the referendum whose unfavorable results would still be final.²³ The Navy, after abiding by the established time and limitations to its activities, would have to free Vieques. A vote against the Navy is a victory for the *viequenses* and a first step in righting a historical wrong. And it will not be the triumph of sparse and divided anti-American forces, but of civil-democratic power and "Puerto Ricaness," expressed through the vote of the Vieques community.²⁴

The Vieques issue has major repercussions on U.S. soil itself and worldwide. Already at the end of 1999 a high ranking official, Commandant of the Marine Corps General James L. Jones, observed that "the state of deterioration" in Vieques could have a "ripple effect" not only at home but abroad.²⁵ Many events covered in the press in recent months support this observation, including the protests against the increased bombing at Naval Air Station Lemoore in Big Sur, California and community opposition to radar towers in Cape Cod, the environmental pollution of Panama, and American soldiers' sexual attacks on women in Okinawa.²⁶

In Congress, the Defense Department stresses its concern for what it calls "encroachment," that is, the attempt by civil communities, American and foreign, to protect themselves from the impact of military activities on their lives and environment.²⁷ Civilians are portrayed as the enemy, invading military territory that includes areas in the U.S. and other countries where the military conducts maneuvers. This perception explains, in part, the insensitivity and the intransigence of the Navy before the devastating effects of its maneuvers in Vieques. There, war was declared against the alleged civilian invaders half a century ago and now a new lesson of deterrence is planned for the contemporary intruders. If the national security of the United States depends—incredibly—on Vieques, perhaps the historian Lars Schoultz is right in concluding that it does not matter if domestic, economic, or security interests predominate because at issue is "a pervasive belief that Latin Americans constitute an inferior branch of the human species."²⁸ An admiral went as far as saying that the exercises could not be transferred to the east coast of the United States because people live there.

Changes in the Strategic Value of Puerto Rico

Although Puerto Rico was transferred from the jurisdiction of the War Department to that of the Interior Department in 1934, the Navy has always been recognized as the dominant voice with respect to the island. The strategic military factor was the root cause in the conquest of Puerto Rico and it continues to be the major reason for remaining. This does not imply that the economic-financial colonial connection has not been important or lucrative for the American and Puerto Rican capital sectors. After the refining of raw sugar in the first half of the 20th century came manufacturing, tourism, petroleum refineries, pharmaceuticals, electronic and scientific productions, and other service-oriented activities—all protected by federal and local tax incentives. The elimination of these corporate incentives, such as section 936 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, is one of the main reasons for the island's current economic crisis. In the eighties and nineties, the advantages of the common market between the United States and Puerto Rico (in effect since 1900) were eroded by its gradual expansion into other Caribbean and Latin American countries through the Caribbean Basin Initiative and the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement.

Nevertheless, in 1997, the Southern Command took over the Caribbean from the Joint Forces Command. By then the vital components of the U.S. military in Puerto Rico, such as Roosevelt Roads Naval Base, Fort Buchanan and Camp Santiago, were in place. Puerto Rico's new strategic role became intra-hemispheric, principally designed to combat non-military threats—such as the traffic in narcotics, illegal immigration and terrorism—and for the training exercises developed for the interoperability of the Latin American and Caribbean security forces. It follows that the usual emphasis of the Southern Command in internal security in the Caribbean is not going to change. The training of Caribbean security forces in U.S. military installations on the island continues full force, now directed toward these threats. The Southern Command aims at inter-operability in order to incorporate them as de facto members of the U.S. armed forces at the wage levels of their respective countries.

Military exercises in Vieques put the Southern Command in continuous contact with other unified commands, mainly the Joint Forces Command and the armed forces of allied or friendly countries, intensifying the use of the training facilities and practice ranges on the island. Senator Kenneth McClintock (PNP) surprised all of Puerto Rico when he confirmed that the Navy has been charging foreign governments to rent the Vieques firing ranges and training areas since 1948.²⁹ Rental fees today are some \$80 million a year. The human cost is yet to be determined and perhaps will never have a price tag. The Special Operations Forces, stationed in Roosevelt Roads Naval Base and trained in Camp Santiago, would surely extend their exercises, as well as those of other hemispheric and NATO security forces, to Vieques. The increase in military activities would worsen an already intolerable situation for the *viequenses*.

Human Rights, Cooperative Security and Restitution

Human rights studies usually include three categories: (a) torture and crimes against persons; (b) political and civil rights (freedom of expression and association); and (c) social and economic rights (livelihood, health care, education). The United States presents a paradoxical posture on the question of human rights.³⁰ It refuses to sign the most important agreements or, having done so, to enforce them in its own country. However, it cries out loudly and intervenes frequently for their enforcement in other countries while proclaiming itself the model nation of the world. At present, the cred-

ibility of the federal government to conduct impartial studies on health in Vieques is null and void. The power of the Defense Department—under a pro-military administration, with powerful congressional allies, and a probable hands-off policy from the judicial branch—is formidable. A federal agency would be hard-pressed to find environmental contamination after half a century of bombing by air, land, and sea sufficiently damaging to the health of the inhabitants and the ecology of Vieques to stop the military activities. The issue of combat readiness will always obscure the demands of a community of islanders who are second-class citizens, decimated and sickened by the impact of the Navy on their lives.

The phenomenon of increased military power and presence inside the United States—already alarming in the last decade—reaches higher levels under the Bush administration with the presence former Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, now Vice-President, and former Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and current Secretary of State Colin Powell. Few seem to be aware of the increased power of the Defense Department in the new plan of homeland defense, that is, an expansion of military meddling in the civil sphere inside the United States.

It is this colonial scheme between the United States and Puerto Rico that allows the military branch to interfere in a civil-democratic electoral process—the referendum—and to impose two alternatives that keep Vieques in the line of fire. Meanwhile, the colonial government of Puerto Rico, supported by the Puerto Rican people, demands the inclusion of a third alternative that would bring the referendum closer to being truly democratic: the immediate and permanent end to the bombing.

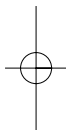
In this post-Cold War period, the Southern Command vociferously promotes cooperative security as the means to civil-democratic order in Latin America and the Caribbean. It has the opportunity to implement this novel form of reciprocity by creating a commission of neutral agents—intra- or extra-hemispheric, governmental or non-governmental—aimed at finding a solution to the Vieques question. In taking up this challenge, the United States would set itself apart from the so-called rogue countries that refuse all hemispheric and international supervision. The Vieques question is one of “the problems of the Caribbean whose vastness and complexity are too complicated for any one country (including the United States) to face alone.”³¹

Solidarity with the Vieques struggle stretches far south and north, from the Straits of Magellan to the Bering Sea, and includes the United States itself. Two examples of Latin American and Caribbean solidarity, pertaining to the moral and political order, should be noted. At the moral level, there is the participation of former President of Costa Rica and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Oscar Arias in the Caravan of Peace for Vieques in March of this year. Upon offering his “solidarity and commitment with Vieques’ struggle,” Arias asserted that the military had to “invent enemies” in order to justify expenses incurred during maneuvers.³² Solidarity at the political level—so necessary—has been absent, except in the case of Venezuela. During President Hugo Chavez’ visit to Puerto Rico basic diplomacy precluded his addressing the Vieques question. However, the absence of the Venezuelan navy during routine naval exercises with the United States can be viewed as tacit support for the Vieques struggle.

If Vieques votes for the Navy’s departure, the victimizing government of the United States will have to implement (with its customary resistance and slowness), the return of the lands with a decontamination program and provision of material and financial reparation for the damage done to the environment and the quality of life. Last, but not least in importance, it must admit its guilt and responsibility for the injuries committed against the viequense community. A vote in favor of the Navy, which can only

be gained through chicanery, would leave Vieques “a suppurating wound”—as the African American Congressman Ron Dellums stated in 1981—that will never heal, and would mean David’s slow and torturous death at the hands of Goliath.

The United States proclaims its political system as the one to emulate because of its constitutional flexibility, both fixed and variable in the face of economic transformations and social junctures. This view has been called into question recently in two situations. Firstly, the presidential elections showed the world the anti-democratic features— in addition to the partiality of the Supreme Court—of a worn out process that disqualified the presidential candidate with the most votes, preventing him from obtaining a majority. It makes one wonder what the possibilities are for holding a referendum in Vieques and having the results respected. Secondly, the rigidity of the United States politico-constitutional system, given shape during its expansionist period in the 19th and 20th centuries, keeps it from exploring policies outside this dysfunctional and perhaps archaic framework. Because of it, the United States is incapable of constructing a political relationship that is acceptable to the majority of the Puerto Rican people. It remains trapped by an annexationist minority, aware of this limitation, and for which no plebiscite is conclusive until statehood wins. In this way, the United States’ very own laws bar its self-proclaimed political flexibility. In this new millennium, it might prove useful to borrow a statement made by the Caribbean patriot Ramón Emeterio Betances regarding Imperial Spain and apply it to the United States: “It cannot give what it doesn’t have.”³³ The “Battle for Vieques” has major implications not only for the present and future of Puerto Rico but for the United States’ own democratic political system.



NOTES

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¹ Katherine T. McCaffrey, "Culture, Power and Struggle: Anti-Military Protest in Vieques, Puerto Rico," (Ph.D. Diss., City University of New York, 1999), p.3. For an important analysis see Maribel Veaz, "Las expropiaciones de tierras en la década del cuarenta en Vieques," *Revista del Colegio de Abogados*, 56, no. 2 (abril-junio, 1995), pp. 159-213.

² "Memorandum from Irwin W. Silverman, Acting Director, Division of Territories and Island Possessions, to Oscar Chapman, Under Secretary of Interior, Department of Interior, Subject: Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, August 8, 1947," Colección Viequense, Escuela Germán Rieckehoff. See also <http://www.vieques-island.com/board/navy/memost-croix.html>.

³ See Humberto García Muñiz, "Decolonization, Demilitarization and Denuclearization in the Caribbean," in Ivelaw L. Griffith, ed., *Strategy and Security in the Caribbean* (New York: Praeger, 1991), pp. 27-54.

⁴ The Navy occupied 10,522 hectares of the 13,355 hectares in Vieques. Jorge Rodríguez Beruff, "Vieques y la construcción de un poder civil en Puerto Rico," *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 168 (julio-agosto de 2000), p. 41.

⁵ A year later a novel entitled *Usma 1* was published reflecting this reality. The federal post office was the main meeting place for the islanders while picking up their mail; they did not have mailboxes in their new deedless homes. At the post office, waiting in futility for a letter from a white American, an employee of one of the federal government's social welfare agencies who had made her pregnant, a black Viequense woman decides to call her child Usmaíl, that is, the postal service of the U.S., and the title of this classic work by Pedro Juan Soto.

⁶ Cited in Arturo Mélenz, *La batalla de Vieques*. (Rio Piedras: Editorial Edil, 1989), p.188.

⁷ See Juan Manuel García Passalacqua, "Navy and Vieques," *The San Juan Star*, February 1, 1980, p.23.

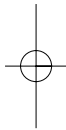
⁸ McCaffrey, "Culture, Power and Struggle: Anti-Military Protest in Vieques, Puerto Rico," p. 3.

⁹ See Sara Grusky, "The Navy as a Social Provider," *Armed Forces & Society*, 18, no. 2 (Winter, 1992), pp. 215-230.

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis, see Rodríguez Beruff, "Vieques y la construcción de un poder civil en Puerto Rico," pp.41-48.

¹¹ It was not the first time the Navy raised these objections. In 1981 it used the same argument before the Armed Forces Committee of the House of Representatives, the civil legislative power of the United States, which recommended it find an alternative site. The Committee was not convinced of Vieques' indispensability to the Navy. The Navy ignored the Committee's recommendation. See United States, Cong., House, Committee on the Armed Services, Naval Training Activities on the Island of Vieques, 96th Cong. 2nd. sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1981).

¹² See the incisive comparative analysis of Vieques with the training camps in the Atlantic and some in the Pacific by Juan Giusti Cordero, "La Marina en la mirilla: una comparación de Vieques con los campos de bombardeo y adiestramientos en Estados Unidos," in Humberto García Muñiz and Jorge Rodríguez Beruff, coords., *Fronteras en conflicto: guerra contra las drogas, militarización y democracia en el Caribe, Puerto Rico y Vieques* (Rio Piedras: Red



Caribeña de Geopolítica, Seguridad Regional y Relaciones Internacionales, Proyecto Atlantea, 1999), pp. 133–201; and also his “One-Stop Shopping for Navy Facts: A Response to the Navy’s Vieques Website,” August 2000), <http://www.viequeslibre.com>. The Navy’s website is at: <http://www.navyvieques.navy.mil>.

¹³ Rafael Matos, “It is Time to Return Vieques,” U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings (October 1999), p. 26.

¹⁴ See Lars-Erik Nelson, “Military-Industrial Man: Henry M. Jackson: A Life in Politics by Robert Kaufman, University of Washington Press”, *The New York Review of Books* 47, no. 20 (21 December 2000), p.6.

¹⁵ “William J. Clinton. Memorandum on a resolution regarding use of range facilities on Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, 31 January 2000,” Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, vol. 36, no. 5 (February, 2000), pp. 198–199.

¹⁶ “Consulta de Vieques de la Diócesis de Caguas, 10 de junio de 2000,” <http://www.viequeslibre.com/resultados-consulta.htm>.

¹⁷ We should not forget that another ethnic group, the Japanese-Americans, forcibly placed in internment camps during World War II, has received monetary reparation.

¹⁸ Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Restoring Historical Injustices* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000), p. xviii.

¹⁹ Franciso L. Rivera Batiz and Carlos Enrique Santiago, *Island Paradox: Puerto Rico in the 1990s*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), pp. 110–114.

²⁰ Arlene M. Davila, *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico in the 1990s*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), p. 3.

²¹ See Dale Eisman, “Vieques Still Vital to Navy, P.R.’s Governor Advised,” *The Virginian Pilot*, March 9, 2001. This pro-military newspaper offers some of the best coverage on the Department of Defense, specially the Navy. See <http://www.pilotonline.com>.

²² The PIP and the PNP did not participate; the former abstained because the status issue was not discussed, and the latter because it supported the presidential directives.

²³ The *Virginian Pilot* reported an increase in acts of aggression against naval personnel and vandalism of its property in Vieques. See Jack Dorsey, “Sailors Don Flak Gear, Helmets as Vieques Attacks Intensify,” *The Virginian-Pilot*, March 9, 2001.

²⁴ See Juan Giusti Cordero, “Vieques: A Message from Camp García”, *CENTRO Journal of The Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, Vol. 11, no. 3 (Spring 2000), pp. 115–121.

²⁵ “DOD News Briefing, Office of Assistant Secretary General of Defense (Public Affairs)”, 3 December 1999. The Department of Defense website: <http://www.defenselink.com>.

²⁶ See “Navy Bombs Anger Californians,” Associated Press, February 26, 2001; “Radar Tower Rekindles Fear Cape Residents Wary of Upgrade,” *The Boston Globe*, March 3, 1901; “Marines Not Welcome,” *Okinawa News*, February 17, 2001.

²⁷ See the views of the Subcommittee on Readiness and Support of the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate on the issue of the “encroachment” held March 20 this year, (http://www.senate.gov/-armed_services/hearings/statement/2001/ro1320.htm); and Otto Kreisher, “Environmental Concerns Hampering Military Training,” *San Diego The Union-Tribune*, March 20, 2001.

²⁸ Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. xv.

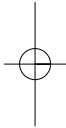
²⁹ “Navy-News on the Internet-Firing Banks,” *The Vieques Times*, vol. 126 (April, 1999), p. 6.

³⁰ See Noam Chomsky, “The United States and the Challenge of Relativity,” in Tony Evans, ed., *Human Rights Fifty Years On* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 24–57, and David P. Forsythe, ed., *The United States and Human Rights: Looking Inward and Outward* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

³¹ Thomas Keck, Brigadier General, "The Cooperative Agenda of the U.S. Armed Forces in the Caribbean," in Joseph Tulchin and Ralph Espach, eds., *Security in the Caribbean Basin* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000), p. 186.

³² Marga Peres Arroyo, "Avivan el reclamo de la salida de la Marina", *El Nuevo Día*, 12 March 2001.

³³ "Patria, Justicia, Libertad," Proclama del Comité Revolucionario de Puerto Rico (16 de julio de 1867), in José Pérez Moris, *Historia de la insurrección de Lares* (1872, Rio Piedras: Editorial Ed.1, 1975), p. 296.



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