

## What has been the Navy's response to the protests?

According to the Navy's Special Panel on Military Operations on Vieques, "insensitivity has been the hallmark of its approach." Nonetheless, President Clinton declared that the Navy will continue to use the island for military practice. In response Representative Luis Guterrez stated "The administration has set the Navy on course to inflict further damage on the island." In 1983 the navy promised to protect the environment, create jobs and bomb less. The Navy never followed the agreement and in fact increased its bombing. Jesse Jackson recently visited the island and told military leaders "You just don't get it. These people don't want you here. Colonialism is a sin anywhere."

## What is the role of the U.S. military?

The U.S. military is used to protect and expand U.S. interests and control around the world from eastern Europe to the Middle East to the Philippines. It doesn't protect people. It defends the ability of big corporations to make large profits.

## Why should I care about the struggle for Vieques?

The U.S. military has no right to destroy Vieques. Vieques is a modern example of U.S. colonialism and a people's fight for self-determination. We have a historic opportunity to right a wrong and side with justice. In doing so we contribute to building a movement to change a system that guarantees privileges to a few at the expense of the majority of the world's population.

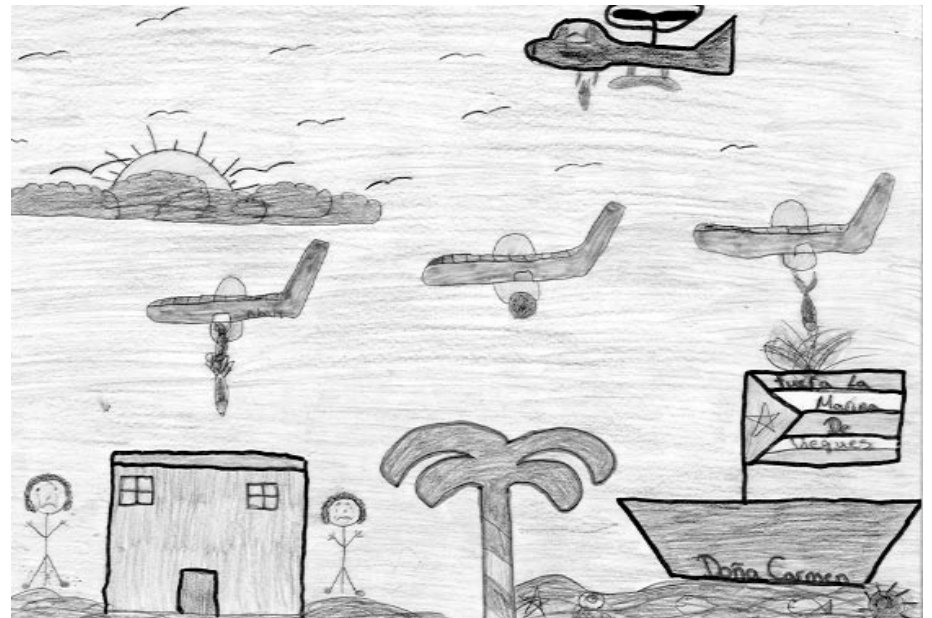
## What can I do?

You can call or write the President Clinton, (The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington D.C. 20500) or your congressional representative, talk to your friends and neighbors and contact Prairie Fire Organizing Committee regarding upcoming events.



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# Did you know that the U.S. Navy is bombing the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico?



Drawing by Vieques elementary school student

## Why is the U.S. military using Vieques, an island of Puerto Rico, for target practice?

Because they can. In 1898 the U.S. invaded and colonized Puerto Rico and still maintains control today. In 1938, when the military decided it needed a facility to test their bombs, it took over the island of Vieques. Contrary to the wishes of the Viequenses, the U.S. military expropriated the land and displaced thousands of Puerto Ricans. The Navy paid landowners as little as \$50 for 6 1/2 acres of land. Presently, the Navy controls 26,000 of the island's 33,000 acres. It occupies the island's most productive farming and fishing areas leaving the island's population squeezed between the ammunition depot and the training facility. Just imagine how you would feel if Vieques were your home!

## Where is Vieques?



Vieques is part of Puerto Rico. It is a small island roughly one-third the size of Chicago. Currently it has a population of 9,400. Prior to the U.S. military takeover almost 30,000 people lived on the island and sustained themselves through fishing and farming sugar cane.

### What is the U.S. military doing in Vieques?

The Navy has an ammunition storage depot and a weapons range on Vieques. The U.S. military conducts war games up to 200 days a year on the island. The U.S. Navy routinely drops bombs and practices different invasion scenarios using live ammunition. The rest of the year, it has the audacity to rent the facility out to NATO allies and Latin American countries to bomb the island and test their weapons. The Navy collects as much as \$80,000,000 per year in rental fees.

### What are the effects of the U.S. military presence on Vieques?

**Safety:** In April 1999 an errant bomb killed Puerto Rican citizen David Sanes and wounded four others. A year earlier National Guard war planes strafed a school bus and police car. According to the 1999 Governor of Puerto Rico's Special Commission on Vieques "the Navy cannot ensure the safety of the population of Vieques."



Viequenses take their land back

**Environment:** The bombing of Vieques is an extraordinary example of environmental destruction. Vieques was once covered with thick forests of palm trees. Now, according to University of Puerto Rico Professor José Seguinot, "the eastern tip of the island constitutes a region with more craters per kilometer than the moon." The training facility is littered with unexploded bombs and shrapnel. Chemical compounds, including napalm and uranium from the fired projectiles, pollute the land, water and air.

**Economy:** The Navy's expropriation of the land has caused an economic crisis that has forced the island's residents into poverty and dependency. The fishing industry has been destroyed. Twenty-six percent of the population is unemployed and seventy-two percent live below the poverty level.

**Health:** Vieques has the highest mortality rate of any municipality in Puerto Rico at 10.8 deaths per 1000 residents compared to 7.7 per 1000 residents for the rest of the island. The cancer rate on Vieques is 26.7% higher than the rest of Puerto Rico. Living in a "war zone" routinely disrupts people's daily routines. As teacher Javier Torres asks, "Do you know what it is like trying to teach with jet fighters and helicopters buzzing over us and bombs exploding in the distance?"

### What has been the response of the people of Vieques to the military?

The people of Vieques say "Not one more bomb." For decades they have petitioned, marched, blockaded the navy with their boats and occupied their stolen land. They want their land and their way of life back. Since 1999 the struggle has grown as organized protestors have occupied the most strategic points on Vieques and prevented the military from using the range. In Puerto Rico thousands of people have marched demanding an end to the bombing. There is consensus among all sectors of the population, including the Catholic Church, labor unions and all three major political parties, that the navy should clean up and return the island.

Photo: Ricardo Alvarez