consumer access to financial products while maintaining appropriate consumer protections.

THE NAVY AND VIEQUES

HON. TONY P. HALL
OF OHIO
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Tuesday, July 27, 1999

Mr. HALL of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, in April, U.S. F-18 fighter jets accidentally dropped two 500-pound bombs on an observation post nearly a mile from their target on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, killing a civilian and wounding four others. Although Vieques has housed a naval live-fire training facility for over 50 years, there are 9,300 civilians who live on the island.

The following research memorandum was authored by Rebecca Brezenoff, a Research Fellow with the Washington-based Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA). This timely and pertinent article investigates the issues and dilemmas facing the history of naval operations on the island of Vieques:

Washington now finds itself embroiled in a sticky problem on the little-known Puerto Rican Island of Vieques, the site of one of its more perplexing public relations nightmares. Recent tragic events resulting from the military's continuing use of most of the heavily inhabited but relatively small island as a live-weapons storage and training facility present the Clinton Administration with a growing need to reevaluate its policies there. The increasingly militant demonstrations now being staged in Puerto Rico against the Vieques facility and the unity of the Puerto Rican population on the issue suggest that the problem will not go way, but requires some hard decisions now.

The island-municipality, located just off Puerto Rico's southeastern coast, once again emerged into the national news following its latest fatality. On April 29, when two Marine fighter jets on a night training run over Vieques missed their mark by a mile and dropped bombs near an observation post, killing a U.S. Navy guard and injuring four other people. Certainly not the first serious incident to have affected the training facility, it is one that is likely to remain in the headlines as it prompts heated debate among citizen groups and government leaders, both here and in Puerto Rico. For decades, civilians on the island have suffered the effects of friendly fire. This time, a pitiful moment may be at hand for the Pentagon to review its options and have the wisdom to dismantle the base.

The Navy's primary argument in favor of Vieques' continued use has been the unparalleled importance of the live-ammunitions training grounds for military readiness. The facility has been used by U.S. military personnel since 1941, when the Navy expropriated more than two-thirds of the 51-square-mile island for weapons storage and for ordnance ordnance target practice. Vieques has been both figuratively and literally raked by all branches of the military. And not just the U.S. military. The participation of foreign nations and foreign entities has been solicited—even via advertisements on the Navy's website—for a price. The fees collected in 1998 alone amounted to $80 million, but the increased bombing volume further strained the island’s economy and worsened living conditions.

For all the Navy's purported efforts to be a good neighbor to the Viequeños, it words and deeds are today viewed with mistrust. Assuredly, Vieques has been subjected to numerous bomb and ordnance explosions, with serious consequences. The problems of Vieques are not only limited to the physical damage caused by vibrations from war games, and the ongoing danger of bomb accidents from ships and planes; Vieques has been both figuratively and literally raked by all branches of the military. And not just the U.S. military. The participation of foreign nations and foreign entities has been solicited—even via advertisements on the Navy's website—for a price. The fees collected in 1998 alone amounted to $80 million, but the increased bombing volume further strained the island’s economy and worsened living conditions.

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