

**STRATEGY
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**THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF A CHANGE
IN POLITICAL STATUS OF PUERTO RICO UPON COAST GUARD
MISSIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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The political status of Puerto Rico is a divisive and emotional issue. Political parties are structured generally around the three status options: statehood, commonwealth and independence. Meanwhile, there is renewed interest in the U.S. Congress to decide the permanent future of this U.S. territory. Puerto Rico has a sizable Coast Guard presence, as well as a major U.S. Naval base and Army garrison. A change in political status would have significant ramifications for U.S. strategic interests in the Caribbean. This paper will analyze the potential consequences on U.S. Coast Guard missions, and the effects on DOD bases.

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THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF A CHANGE IN THE POLITICAL STATUS OF PUERTO RICO ON COAST GUARD MISSIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN

INTRODUCTION:

In April 1997, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Resources held a hearing in Puerto Rico concerning the United States–Puerto Rico Political Status Act (HR 856). The bill called for a plebiscite to be conducted in 1998, the 100-year anniversary of the U.S. presence, which would identify the wishes of the people about the future political status of their island.

Leaders from the three political parties, representing Statehood, Commonwealth, and Independence, addressed the committee in support of their status preferences.

The statement made by the New Progressive Party (statehood) was delivered in flawless English. The message emphasized the contributions made by Puerto Ricans to the United States, in peace and war, and asserted passionately that they have earned the right to share fully in its promise.¹

The Popular Democratic Party (commonwealth) spoke half in English and half in Spanish. While affirming the strong bonds between the island and the mainland, and the high value of U.S. citizenship, the message underscored the uniqueness of Puerto Rican culture and concluded that the relationship with United States must be on terms other than statehood to preserve "national" identity.²

The Independence Party delivered its message³ entirely in Spanish, an unequivocal demonstration of Puerto Rico's distinct heritage and culture. It rejected the cultural assimilation inherent in statehood, as well as the 'colonial' dependency of commonwealth.

It seems certain that the status between the U.S. and Puerto Rico will undergo modification. Predicting the form it will take and when it will occur is more difficult. Each potential outcome has implications for U.S. strategic interests in the Caribbean.

NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS IN THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN

The Caribbean has long been an area of strategic interest to the United States. Initially, our interests were nearly exclusively naval in nature. These included: control of the approaches to the Panama Canal,⁴ and maintaining naval bases to counter hostile submarine threats to allied shipping in both world wars. After World War II, the Caribbean became a battleground for competing ideologies between East and West. Throughout the Cold War, Puerto Rico stood as a salient symbol to other Caribbean and Latin American countries of the benefits that accrue to nations that aligned with the West, adopted a democratic form of government, liberal institutions and an open market.

With the end of the Cold War, and the conversion of the Caribbean states to democratic forms of government (the notable exception being Cuba), the strategic importance of the Caribbean has changed. Our current National Security Strategy (NSS)⁵ identifies numerous economic, social and technological

threats to our collective security. Those pertaining to the Caribbean are "transnational threats" such as international drug trafficking, illegal immigration, terrorism, and environmental degradation.

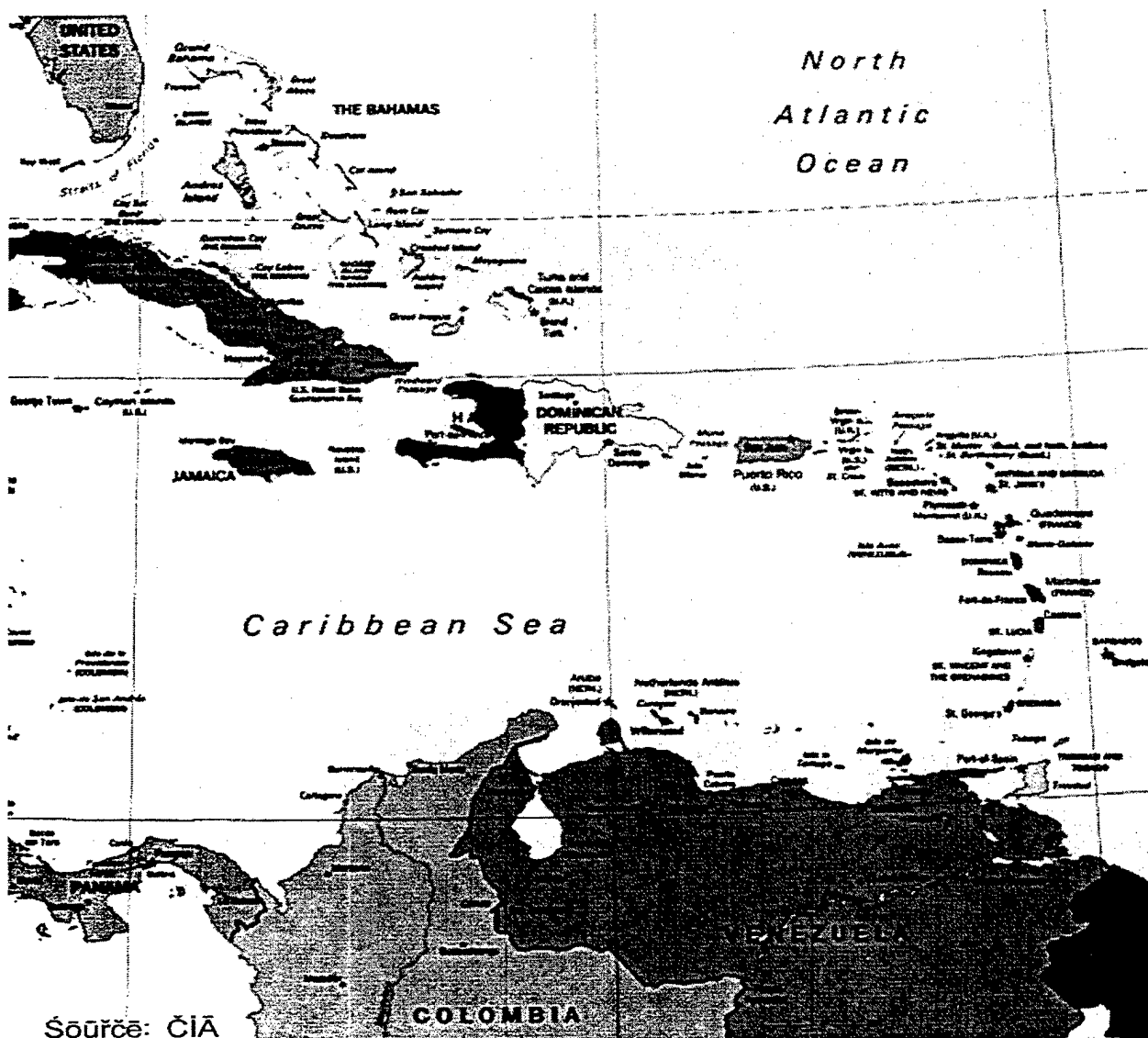


FIGURE 1 THE CARIBBEAN BASIN

The International Drug Trade - The Caribbean is a major route for drugs entering the United States. Only the southwestern border rivals the Caribbean as a transit route. The sophistication of the traffickers' methods, plus the large area to be patrolled by law enforcement, makes interdiction extremely difficult. Puerto Rico is central to both traffickers and law enforcement. Because it is part of the United States, and within the customs umbrella, travel between the island and the mainland is domestic. Drugs landed in Puerto Rico might just as well be in Kansas. The Caribbean is a major theater of operation in the drug

war. Since global maritime trade will triple by 2020,⁶ drug traffickers will rely on commercial means since the sheer volume of legitimate cargo makes scrutiny of individual shipments difficult.⁷

Illegal Immigration - Despite democratization and economic reforms, great disparities exist between wealthy and poor, most notably the Dominican Republic and Haiti. The promise of a better life in the United States is a powerful incentive to risk a dangerous journey. Haitians tend to travel westward towards Florida, Dominicans east towards Puerto Rico. The population of the Dominican Republic is expected to increase to 11 million in 2020, from 7 million in 1990.⁸ If the Dominican economy remains weak, there is little doubt that many people will be willing to risk traveling by small open boat across the 60 miles of sea to Puerto Rico. Once there, travel to the United States is relatively easy since there are no customs checks between Puerto Rico and the mainland.

The Threat of Terrorism - Terrorists could "make the rapidly growing cruise line industry a new target of opportunity."⁹ The Caribbean cruise industry caters to the North American market. Many cruise ships carry over 2000 passengers, the newest and largest over 3000. The major port of embarkation in the Eastern Caribbean is San Juan, a major air transportation hub. Neighboring St Thomas, in the U.S. Virgin Islands sees an even greater number of cruise ships. Both San Juan and St Thomas are U.S. ports, subject to U.S. port security regulations pertaining to passenger terminals.

Environmental Degradation - The Caribbean is one of the busiest tanker routes in the world. Numerous refineries ring the Caribbean, including the HOVENSA¹⁰ refinery on St Croix, which is the largest in the Western Hemisphere, and Statia Terminal on the Dutch island of St. Eustatius. Tankers calling at these terminals, as well as several others in the southern Caribbean, could cause an EXXON VALDEZ size spill that would affect numerous Caribbean states. Given prevailing ocean currents, a large oil spill in the Eastern Caribbean would very likely affect U.S. territory.

Military Interests: These center on theater engagement with other nations, such as providing training and other military -to- military contacts, which bolster democracy in the region. Military support to civil authorities, such as post hurricane relief and support for the anti-drug effort, is a significant area of regional peacetime engagement. Finally, the Caribbean plays a vital role in our national preparedness through training of U.S. forces in specialized warfare environments.

COAST GUARD MISSIONS

The Coast Guard's roles and missions place it in a unique position to promote national security.¹¹ These include:

Law Enforcement - Puerto Rico has been designated a High Density Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA).¹² An Interagency Task Force of multiple federal and local law enforcement agencies is charged with combating the threat. The Coast Guard is designated as the lead agency at sea, and co-leads with Customs in air interdiction. DOD assets are frequently employed, including airborne sensors and Coast

Guard Law Enforcement Teams on Navy vessels. Foreign nation cooperation and support is an integral component of this effort, with frequent contacts and joint operations.

Preventing illegal immigration is conducted in coordination with the U.S. Border Patrol, INS, and other local and Dominican law enforcement officials. Patrols of the Mona Passage between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico are particularly important because this is the primary route. However, illegal immigrants have also been landed in the Virgin Islands, and other islands in the Lesser Antilles chain, for subsequent transport to Puerto Rico, and the United States.

Maritime Safety – The Coast Guard inspects all commercial vessels to ensure compliance with international safety and environmental standards, and with domestic law. It also maintains the most extensive Search and Rescue (SAR) capability and readily responds whenever lives are at risk – regardless of nationality. Cruise ships are a particular concern.

Maritime Mobility – Puerto Rico is a densely populated island that relies on continuous maritime trade. Approximately 95% of all imports and exports move by sea. The Coast Guard supports this by ensuring navigational channels are well marked, by managing emergency situations, and by examining waterfront facilities to ensure no dangerous activities or special hazards exist. The Coast Guard is an honest broker among numerous maritime interests to manage the waterways effectively and efficiently.

Environmental Protection – The Coast Guard coordinates the federal response to all oil and hazardous materials spills. It develops contingency plans for response actions, and works with the marine community to reduce risk and make response operations less likely. Because of the international flavor of the Eastern Caribbean, and because a large spill will not recognize international boundaries, the Coast Guard engages in considerable international outreach and joint planning to enhance cooperation in the event of an emergency.

National Defense – Coast Guard port security activities protect against threats to key facilities, passenger terminals and ships. Coordination with lead agencies in the event of a Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) event is built into contingency plans. Also, the Coast Guard supports DOD units, including establishment of maritime Security Zones as needed. Coast Guard forces operating from Puerto Rico annually participate in multinational military exercises with other Caribbean and South American nations, such as TRADEWINDS. These exercises bolster U.S. influence and contribute to regional stability and cooperation. Many Caribbean and South American nations have navies that operate more like the U.S. Coast Guard than the U.S. Navy. Therefore, military to military contacts performed by the Coast Guard help shape the international environment.

Presence – The Greater Antilles Section (GANTSEC), a major command within the Seventh Coast Guard District, coordinates Coast Guard activities in the Eastern Caribbean. With the exception of the Air Station, which is located on the west side of the island, all GANTSEC units are located / home ported in San Juan. Approximately 350 active duty personnel are permanently stationed in the GANTSEC Area of Responsibility.

DOD PRESENCE AND MISSIONS

Both the Army and the Navy have a significant presence. The functions performed by the DOD facilities could be performed elsewhere, yet their location in Puerto Rico offers advantages to national security.

Navy: Naval Station Roosevelt Roads (NSRR) is one of the largest naval bases in the world in terms of land area. Its primary purpose is to support live firing by ships and aircraft, and amphibious assault training, on the nearby island of Vieques. The range at Vieques is used for pre-deployment exercises by carrier battle groups and amphibious ready groups. Allied forces also frequently use the range. Vieques is the only live firing range in the Atlantic theater, and therefore occupies a critical position in Navy and Marine Corps readiness.

Live firing on Vieques is a hotly contested issue. Over nine thousand Puerto Ricans reside there and there has been long standing local opposition to the practice. This issue reached the point of crisis in the spring of 1999 when a Marine F/A-18 strayed off course and dropped munitions near a Navy range control station. Tragically, a Navy civilian security guard, a native Puerto Rican, was killed, prompting widespread condemnation and protests. President Bill Clinton appointed a special panel to investigate the issue. After several months of study, the panel recommended that another range be found, but recognized that this would take several years. As of late January 2000, the Puerto Rican government consented to the use of the range using dummy bombs only, on condition that a referendum is held in 2001 to determine the residents' wishes about the Navy's presence.¹³ If residents reject continued use of the range, the Navy may be forced to abandon it by 2003. The Senate plans to hold hearings in early 2000 to close Naval Station Roosevelt Roads if the Vieques range can no longer be used,¹⁴ something most local leaders do not want to happen.

In addition to the range, the Navy also provides support for counter-drug operations. Airborne sensors and Navy surface units (often with embarked Coast Guard Law Enforcement Teams) routinely operate in the Eastern Caribbean and are supported by NSRR. Moreover, the Navy will soon operate the Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar (ROTHR) from the south coast of Puerto Rico and Vieques, which will provide an exceptional capability to detect suspect aircraft anywhere in the Eastern Caribbean.¹⁵ Although itself a matter of local controversy, due to alleged, though scientifically disputed, claims of health hazards from radar emissions, ROTHR will be a valuable contribution to the counter drug effort.

Army: The Army relocated to Puerto Rico forces previously stationed in Panama. Ft Buchanan is home to the Army component (USARSO) of the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). SOUTHCOM's Special Operations Command has also relocated to the island.¹⁶

National Guard: The Puerto Rico Army National Guard is a bilingual force that provides a unique capability to the Army for Latin American engagement activities. Forces have frequently been deployed under state authority to support counter drug efforts around the island. The Puerto Air National Guard operates helicopters and fixed wing aircraft. PRANG has also been an active participant in counter-drug efforts with Federal agencies, including the Coast Guard.

THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF PUERTO RICO

“ The Congress shall have Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States, ...”
— *U.S. Constitution, Art IV, Section 3, Clause 2,*

Within our Constitutional framework, Puerto Rico is a territory, subject to the “rules and regulations” prescribed by Congress. This invites heated debate among Puerto Ricans. While some agree that it is a territory, they would be quick to point out that this is second class citizenship; that it precludes citizens residing in Puerto Rico from voting for president or being represented in Congress, even though laws passed by Congress are binding on them. Others assert that Puerto Rico is a “freely associated state,” joined with the U.S. through a bilateral pact whereby Puerto Ricans enjoy U.S. citizenship, a common currency, market and defense. Still others, a minority to be sure, view the U.S. as a subjugating, colonial power. They claim that it is a territory as well, but are quick to assert that, because of its unique culture, Puerto Rico is a separate nation, unfairly deprived of its independence.

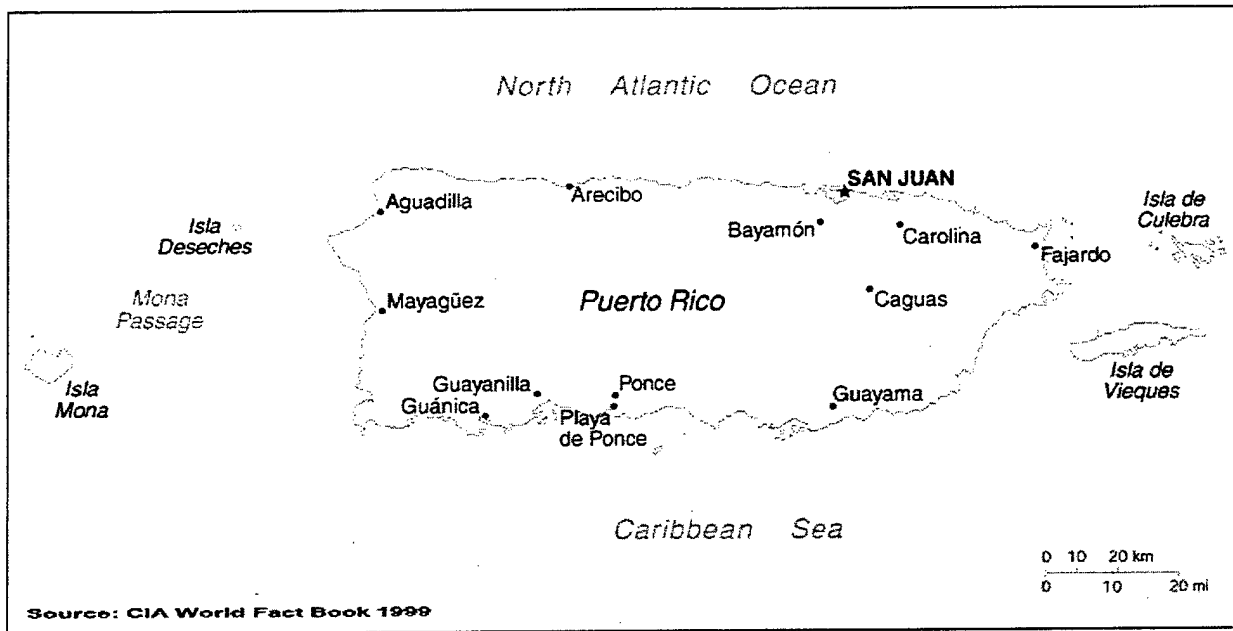


FIGURE 2 PUERTO RICO

Within our Constitutional framework, the nation is composed of states, territories, and possessions. The Constitution does not delineate special categories for a “Commonwealth”, or a “Freely Associated State.” “Territory” and “Property” are loaded terms, used by those dissatisfied with the status quo. Puerto Ricans continue to struggle with the implications of the Constitution’s territorial clause. It is the “Great Debate,” and involves questions of national identity, preservation of culture and language, and economic well-being.

Historical Background:

Prior to the U.S. invasion in 1898, Puerto Rico was a Spanish colony for nearly 400 years. The economy was agrarian, organized around large sugar and coffee plantations. The inhabitants of the island were a mixture of Spanish colonists, native islanders (Taino Indians) and African slaves. By the nineteenth century, they had a separate identity from Spain. In 1868 a popular uprising occurred against Spanish rule in the town of Lares.¹⁷ Quickly suppressed, the longing for greater say in the island's own affairs was not easily put down. (The anniversary of the Lares uprising, *El Grito de Lares*, is still celebrated today). Just prior to the Spanish American War, a group of Puerto Ricans in New York, aware of growing tensions between the U.S. and Spain, worked to engage the U.S. for the independence of Puerto Rico. (The similarity of the Puerto Rican and Cuban flags stem from this - the design is identical, the colors are reversed.) On the eve of war, Spain granted Puerto Rico limited self-government and representation in Madrid. But these reforms never fully materialized.

Most inhabitants of the island welcomed the U.S. presence in Puerto Rico, because it promised U.S. citizenship and greater freedoms than they had known under Spanish rule. Many were subsequently disappointed with the duration U.S. military governorship, approximately one and a half years. Moreover, the subsequent "unwillingness of the United States to install a popularly elected government caused great disillusionment and became a central factor in island politics."¹⁸ Even the hopes for U.S. citizenship were not realized until 1917.

The United States saw an island mired in poverty and illiteracy. Statehood seemed a far way off. Official efforts were focused on teaching the island children to speak English (with mixed results), and exposing them to American ways and customs. In effect, it was an "Americanization" effort. Save for the island's value as a forward military base during World War I, the island received little official attention. Not until Operation Bootstrap, an economic revitalization initiative during the late 1940's, did the island receive the type of investment it needed to raise itself from economic privation. Incentives were given to U.S. companies to locate factories on the island, and so began a period of transformation from an agrarian economy to an industrialized one.

Following World War II, the newly formed United Nations began to emphasize de-colonization.¹⁹ This prompted the U.S. to revise the relationship, the end result being limited self-government. The first popularly elected governor, Luis Munoz Marin, was sworn in on January 2, 1949. In 1952, under authority granted by Congress, Puerto Rico established its own constitution, consistent with the U.S. Constitution. Puerto Rico remained subject to federal laws but would be self governing in most other respects. This new relationship was termed "Estado Libre Asociado" or "Free Associated State." In English, the new status was called "Commonwealth." While satisfying the UN, the meaning of the terms is sufficiently ambiguous to fuel the debate. With some notable exceptions, it has for the most part been conducted in a civil manner. Extremist groups associated with the independence movement have committed violent acts. The most notorious were the attempts in 1950 on the life of President Truman and the 1954 attack in the U.S. Capitol where five congressmen were wounded. Throughout the 1970's and

early 1980's, the Armed Forces for National Liberation, or FALN by its Spanish acronym, "claimed credit for more than 100 bombings at mainland train stations, airports and multinational corporations. In Puerto Rico, FALN targets were naval, postal and National Guard facilities."²⁰ Another group, the Boricua Popular Army, also known as the *Macheteros* (machete wielders), also committed violence. Most Puerto Ricans however prefer far more democratic approaches to determining their future. Yet consensus remains elusive.

Culture and Demographics:

Puerto Rico has a population of approximately 3.8 million people, comparable to Arizona. It encompasses just over 3,500 square miles, or roughly equivalent to the combined areas of Delaware and Rhode Island.²¹ If Puerto Rico were a state it would rank 26th in population. Approximately 2.5 million Americans of Puerto Rican lineage reside in the United States, and comprise strong voting blocks in several major cities, such as New York, Chicago and Orlando. At least three members of Congress are Puerto Rican, and are outspoken on issues affecting the island, such as the status debate and the recent controversy over Vieques.

Although Puerto Ricans have been under the U.S. flag since 1898, and U.S. citizens since 1917, they do not identify culturally with the United States. "Despite the direct and indirect pressures to 'Americanize' felt throughout the twentieth century, Puerto Ricans do not, on the whole, regard themselves as 'essentially American... Puerto Ricans have retained an identity that is distinct and separate from their sovereign power."²²

The question of Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States centers on what it would mean for the culture, which no one wants to see diluted or Americanized. Even the question of the language used in schools is an issue of intense debate and local legislation. Language is a particularly emotional issue. "In the 1990 census, 52 percent of Puerto Ricans reported that they spoke just Spanish and could speak no English at all, another 24 percent reported they could speak English only with difficulty."²³ At the same time, most Puerto Ricans value very highly their U.S. citizenship, and do not want to surrender it. This seeming contradiction is central to the status dilemma.

Economics:

Puerto Rico has one of the most dynamic and diverse economies in the Caribbean.²⁴ Highly dependent upon sea-borne trade, Puerto Rico imports approximately 22 billion dollars worth of goods and materials annually. These include chemicals and petroleum products, machinery and equipment, food and clothing.²⁵ Eighty five percent of its imports arrive from the mainland United States in U.S. flag ships. Puerto Rico is a U.S. port, and therefore subject to federal maritime laws, which require that cargo transported between two U.S. locations be carried only in U.S. ships. This is a matter of controversy in political circles in Puerto Rico, since it increases transportation costs (U.S. ships being on average more costly per ton of cargo shipped than foreign vessels).

The island has plans to expand its container handling capacity and thereby capture a larger share of the trans-shipment market. Currently, trans-shipped cargo accounts for less than 10% of the cargo handled. If the plans come to fruition, Puerto Rico's geographic location would serve North South traffic, and greatly expand its role as the "Bridge to the Americas."

Exports amount to approximately 30 billion dollars annually and include such products as pharmaceuticals, electronics, apparel, canned tuna, rum, beverage concentrates and medical equipment.²⁶ Puerto Rico is home to many factories owned by U.S. corporations, which take advantage of tax incentives and a skilled work force. Since Congress repealed the principal tax incentive in the mid-1990s, it remains to be seen if the corporate manufacturing centers will relocate.

The island has several large refineries operated by major oil companies. In addition, fuel for the island's power plants is imported by tanker, often from foreign ports. As a consequence, there is steady traffic in large tankers.

Tourism is also a major industry. San Juan ranks as the fourth busiest cruise ship port in the world, (after Miami, Ft Lauderdale and St Thomas). Although the ships are virtually all foreign flag, their passenger clientele is overwhelmingly American. Over one million passengers per year visit Puerto Rico, and most of these begin and end their voyages in San Juan, owing to its air transportation hub.²⁷ Island resorts and hotels capitalize on the beaches, fishing, and eco-tourism opportunities. The potential for an industrial mishap, particularly a marine accident, to adversely affect the island's tourist economy is particularly acute. The 1994 oil spill from the grounded barge *Morris J. Berman*, for example, rendered the island's busiest beaches unusable during the peak of the tourist season.

Puerto Rico's unemployment rate has been approximately 13%, compared to 4.5% average in the U.S (the state with the highest rate is West Virginia at 6.8%). Also, Puerto Rico has a poverty rate of 55%, compared to a U.S. average of 13.5%. Average household income is \$29.7 thousand, vs. 36.6 thousand in the mainland U.S.²⁸ Although Puerto Rico's outshines other countries in the Caribbean, and its economy is underwritten by the basic stability of the U.S. economy, it is not on a par with the mainland U.S. This prompts many to question if Commonwealth is preferable.

Puerto Rico's economic potential must also be viewed in light of likely regional changes. The greatest inevitable change is the political and economic situation in Cuba. At some point, Cuba will enter a post-Castro era. We do not know how that transition will occur. We might even assume a period of instability. Ultimately, however, it seems most likely that there will be a softening of relations with the U.S., including an increase in trade and investment. Such a development will surely have an impact on Puerto Rico. "Many Caribbean nations...urgently need to develop individual strategies for meeting the looming commercial threat posed by Cuba's impending political and economic opening."²⁹

Cuba's greater landmass, resources and proximity to the U.S. (as well as to the Panama Canal) may compete with Puerto Rico in trans-shipping, tourism and manufacturing. How all of this unfolds will in turn be affected by Puerto Rico's own political status. Statehood offers the greatest economic protection, whereas independence offers the possibility of bi-lateral economic agreements with other

nations unimpeded by U.S. sovereign oversight. Puerto Rico is also positioned to profit from a future economic opening to Cuba.

THE STATUS CHOICES

Three times since 1968, including twice in the 1990's, Puerto Ricans voted in status plebiscites.

Statehood: This favors admitting Puerto Rico as the 51st state. Proponents stress the economic advantages of statehood, especially the anticipated increase in investment once Puerto Rico's status question is resolved. Residents would also be eligible for increased federal benefits. Federal income taxes, currently not assessed on island residents, would become effective, but the expectation is that Puerto Rico would achieve a net economic advantage by becoming a full partner in the most powerful economy in the world. Proponents downplay threats to the island's cultural identity, and insist that the use of Spanish language in schools, local courts and businesses would not be affected. Most importantly, as a state, Puerto Rico would have voting representation in Congress. Statehood advocates insist that under its present commonwealth status, Puerto Rico is a colony whose residents are disenfranchised from the U.S. political system. As a state, it would have two senators and six congressmen. The political party espousing this option is the New Progressive Party (NPP)

Commonwealth: Advocates deny that Puerto Rico is a territory at all. They view the 1952 establishment of the "Freely Associated State," or "Commonwealth," as a binding compact. Most commonwealth supporters acknowledge a need for enhancements, for example, the ability to enter into commercial treaties with other countries. Nevertheless, they view commonwealth as the only status that allows Puerto Rico to maintain its cultural identity and enable participation in the U.S. economy. Commonwealth supporters see the imposition of federal income taxes under statehood as destructive to the economy. They also see statehood as stripping Puerto Rico of some of its most popular symbols, including its separate Olympic team. Preservation of identity is extremely important, and many view the cultural irrelevance of native Hawaiians in their own islands as a cautionary tale. (This view underrates vast differences in demographics, political voice and artistic heritage, which make Puerto Rican culture far more resilient.) The political party most closely aligned with this option is the Popular Democratic Party (PDP).

Independence: Advocates of independence, like statehooders, see Puerto Rico as a colony subject to the powers of Congress. Like commonwealth supporters, they see Puerto Rican culture and identity as unique and are unwilling to see it diluted through an inevitable process of cultural assimilation under statehood. To *independentistas*, nothing less than complete autonomy from the United States is acceptable. As a state, it would be like Quebec, a culturally and linguistically separate nation that refuses to assimilate and will forever chafe against North American dominance. U.S. military presence in Puerto Rico, particularly the Navy's use of Vieques, and the recent relocation of SOUTHCOM elements to the island, reinforce the view that the U.S. is an occupying power. Should Puerto Rico achieve independence, continued U.S. military presence would be a matter for negotiation and compensation. Independence supporters feel that the island economy would prosper when freed from the constraints

imposed by U.S. laws. They would likely retain the U.S. dollar as the medium of exchange. The Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) most closely represents this option.

Plebiscite Results: In the plebiscites, statehood and commonwealth are closely matched at about 45-48% each, while independence lags behind at no more than 5%. Disagreements over the definition of commonwealth in the most recent plebiscite caused most commonwealth supporters to vote for a "none of the above" category, which in fact received a majority of the vote. Subsequent polls indicate a strong reaction to the Governor's insistence that the plebiscite go forward despite the destruction caused by Hurricane Georges, and may reflect more transitory political feelings than long term analysis.³⁰

Despite congressional intentions, the 1998 plebiscite was held on local initiative. The federal bill to create the United States –Puerto Rico Political Status Act (HR 856), which mandated a congressionally sanctioned status plebiscite, passed the House, but not the Senate. One of the major areas of contention was the definition of Commonwealth contained within the bill. Statehood and Independence are straightforward options. Commonwealth is far more elusive. Commonwealth supporters felt that HR 856 ignored the relationship that has existed since 1952 and viewed the bill as an attempt to force statehood. Hearings held by the Senate did not reconcile the views of Commonwealth supporters and the limitations in the Territorial clause, as reflected in HR 856. (The Senate did, however, pass a resolution in support of Puerto Rico's self determination.)

The manner in which commonwealth is ultimately defined by Congress will likely skew the opinions of Puerto Ricans in a way that will break the deadlock between the NPP and the PDP. Congress will also need to specify the conditions by which it will consider statehood for Puerto Rico. For example, would a simple majority be enough, or will some super majority (e.g., 75%) be required?³¹

The Chairman of the House Resources Committee and principle author of HR 856, Rep Don Young (R-AK) issued a report on status in December 1999, and called upon Congress to approve legislation sponsoring a self-determination process for the island, including delineation of all constitutionally valid options.³² Rep. Young issued this report jointly with the ranking Democrat on the Committee, Rep. George Miller (D-CA),

In the meantime, we can conclude that while Puerto Ricans value their U.S. citizenship, they treasure their cultural identity and autonomy, and appear unwilling to assimilate into mainstream North American culture. How these competing drives will play out is unknown, but the potential consequences of each alternative must be recognized.

EFFECTS ON U.S. SECURITY INTERESTS AND COAST GUARD MISSIONS

Statehood

Statehood would result in two Senators and at least six Congressmen. Since many of the major threats, (e.g., drugs, illegal immigration, environmental) will likely continue, the influence of the congressional delegation in dealing with these problems will likely carry weight beyond their numbers. It

is reasonable to expect pressure on federal agencies to do more than their already considerable efforts. Political support in Congress for Coast Guard missions in the Eastern Caribbean would likely increase.

Effects on Coast Guard Units: Unit location and numbers could be affected. Local politicians and special interest groups have periodically expressed strong interest in Coast Guard property, particularly the base in San Juan, which would have enormous commercial value. The congressional delegation would exert considerable influence over how this issue is handled. This could have a disruptive effect on Coast Guard missions if a suitable alternative site is not identified. The chances of finding such an alternative site, however, is increasingly problematic, especially in San Juan Harbor. San Juan is extensively developed, with commercial plans already in place for underutilized waterfront. Locations outside of San Juan are possible, but maintenance and logistics would become more difficult. It is unlikely that GANTSEC command would locate outside of the San Juan area since it is the center of government and business, and the most logical location to coordinate with other agencies. Relocation of some units outside of San Juan would also affect quality of life because of greatly increased commuting distances from the newly constructed San Juan area Coast Guard housing facility.

Congressional representation may also push for greater Coast Guard presence in other areas of the island. Presently, there is only one small boat station, located in San Juan, on the north side of the island. In contrast, most of the recreational traffic, and consequently the greatest SAR caseload, is on the eastern side, where the Coast Guard does not have a permanent shore based presence. Congressional pressure could mount for an additional station or stations, so that permanently based inshore SAR coverage would be consistent with that provided in other states.

Effect on DOD Facilities: The facility at greatest risk is the Naval Station at Roosevelt Roads. The fate of the live firing range at Vieques will likely be resolved long before political status. Regardless of the fate of the naval station, one can assume a continuation of naval support in the counter drug operation. However, without the forward base and airfield, the level of naval activity in the area may be reduced.

Statehood would not likely affect USARSO, since statehood proponents widely supported its relocation to Puerto Rico in the first place. Moreover, the Army has long enjoyed a more positive relationship with local community than Navy, owing to the absence of contentious issues such as Vieques.

Commonwealth:

Coast Guard missions and force presence are unlikely to change under Commonwealth. Other than occasional expressions of interest in the Coast Guard property in San Juan, there are no contentious issues. Most political leaders are supportive of the Coast Guard's presence and missions.

Political and Social Climate: The primary effect of Commonwealth upon the Coast Guard is the continued high pitch of political tension. Commonwealth is viewed by more than half of all Puerto Ricans as a transitional status, and by supporters as imperfect. This condition contains the potential for political strikes and shutdowns, which affect basic services. The 1998 island-wide strike in protest of the sale of

the government owned telephone company to a private corporation was motivated largely by politics. Also, radical group activities are more likely to manifest themselves at times of political indecision, since that is their best opportunity to influence public perceptions, including those in the U.S. Military and Coast Guard facilities are routinely maintained at an elevated state of readiness compared to the average stateside facility.

Independence:

By far the greatest potential effects on U.S. strategic interests in the Caribbean would be a decision in favor of independence. Statehood and Commonwealth affirm U.S. sovereignty. Independence would create a new sovereignty.

Mission Impacts: Most Coast Guard mission areas would become the sole responsibility of the Puerto Rican Government, such as waterways management, environmental protection and response, port safety, and coastal search and rescue. Since the infrastructure and expertise for conducting these missions is not organic to the Puerto Rican government, there may be requests for transitional assistance.

San Juan would likely remain one of the top four cruise ship ports in the world. In the absence of strict security regulations and enforcement, cruise terminals and ships could become much softer targets for terrorist groups. Also, from a maritime safety standpoint, cruise ships operating from San Juan could escape any form of U.S. verification of their compliance with international standards, placing thousands of U.S. citizens at risk in a region where the Coast Guard would have reduced response capability.

Drug trafficking from Puerto Rico to the United States would continue. Without the enormous multi-agency U.S. effort to stem the flow, barriers to entry would be far more porous. It would be unreasonable to expect a new, small nation, despite its best intentions, to match the scale of the current effort. Landing drugs in Puerto Rico would no longer be landing them in U.S. territory. However, high volumes of trade and travel with the mainland will continue and, inevitably, so will drug smuggling, much as it does from other Caribbean countries. It would therefore remain in the U.S. interest to continue interdiction efforts in the Eastern Caribbean.

Containers are an obvious means of hiding significant quantities of illegal drugs. Even with improved container scanning equipment, it would be hard to imagine checking every container without creating bottlenecks. In short, independence will not likely eliminate Puerto Rico as a drug route, and may serve to make route denial more difficult. The U.S. would certainly seek a bilateral agreement to maintain a joint counter drug effort.

Effects on Basing: Even with bilateral agreements, the current level of counter-drug operations would be difficult to sustain without permanent basing. The fate of current Coast Guard bases, especially Air Station Borinquen and Base San Juan, would be uncertain. However, the most conservative assumption would be that these would no longer be available for exclusive USCG use. Moreover, the current effort is multi-agency in nature. Reduction, or elimination, of other agency presence would drastically reduce effectiveness. The loss of U.S. military bases in Puerto Rico would have a similar

effect. If Roosevelt Roads and Ft. Buchanan were forced to close due to an unwillingness to negotiate basing rights, much of the sensor capability used to support the counter drug effort would be eliminated.

Second Order Effects: A serious consideration for the U.S., and for the Coast Guard is the effect Puerto Rican independence would have on U.S. responsibilities in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The USVI has shown no signs of wishing to alter its current status with the United States. The Coast Guard will retain all of its statutory responsibilities there. However, it may need to perform these missions without the benefit of a significant infrastructure in neighboring Puerto Rico. The smallness of the Virgin Islands, coupled with far greater vulnerability to hurricanes and minimal logistical support capabilities, make it very difficult to significantly increase the permanent Coast Guard presence. Quality of life would also be a factor. Although the USVI is the "American Paradise" for vacationers, it is far more difficult to live there year round. Public schools are very poorly maintained and funded, and private schools are prohibitively expensive for most military personnel. Medical facilities are very limited and the islands have a very high cost of living. For most military personnel, especially those with families, a tour in the Virgin Islands includes many hardships not experienced in Puerto Rico.

Independence would also affect the U.S. commercial shipping industry. Since Puerto Rico would no longer be subject to U.S. coastwise trade statutes, several U.S. companies that currently carry the bulk of cargo between the island and the mainland U.S. would have to compete with less expensive foreign carriers.

CONCLUSIONS

Most Puerto Ricans value their U.S. citizenship and approximately ninety five percent favor either Statehood or Commonwealth. Accordingly, Independence would appear to be the least likely outcome. With continued U.S. sovereignty, U.S. strategic interests and Coast Guard contributions toward them will remain fairly constant. Statehood may even enhance the Coast Guard presence.

At the same time, we should not rule out the possibility of eventual independence. Cultural autonomy has a powerful appeal. The potential for greatest change is among the commonwealth supporters, because they are most susceptible to being disappointed by a Congressional definition of commonwealth, given the limitations of the Constitution's territorial clause. If commonwealth falls short of expectations, the only long-term options may be statehood or independence. If limited to these two, it is not at all inconceivable, and it is perhaps even likely, that Puerto Ricans would opt for independence, especially if some transitional provision could be made for those wishing to retain their U.S. citizenship.

The question will boil down to economic viability. If the majority comes to believe that Puerto Rico can be an economic success as a separate political entity, then independence may hard to resist given the cultural imperative. If independence were selected, the only remaining U.S. territory in the Eastern Caribbean would be the U.S. Virgin islands, and U.S. Coast Guard responsibilities there would be far more difficult to manage.

Given the divided public opinion, it may take years before consensus develops for a clear majority on status. It seems unavoidable that, for the debate to be realistically focused, Congress must define the

permanently acceptable options and the process for achieving them. Absent Congressional definitions, the political parties will continue to define for themselves what their status preferences mean, leading to further political stalemate, false expectations, and frustration.

Regional stability and democracy will always be in our national interest. U.S. efforts in countering drugs, immigration control, suppressing organized crime, providing disaster relief and international training, all advance the cause. The U.S. military presence, including the Coast Guard, help shape the strategic environment. Coast Guard missions will remain at a high tempo in the Eastern Caribbean for the foreseeable future. A status change for Puerto Rico may ease or complicate the level of difficulty, depending on how the intense debate unfolds.

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ENDNOTES

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