

U.S. Department of the Navy Press Briefing

**“The National Security Need for Vieques: A Study Prepared for the Secretary of the Navy”**

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Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig  
Commander, U.S. Second Fleet Vice Admiral William J. Fallon  
Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Atlantic Lieutenant General Peter Pace

**Introduction by Rear Admiral Thomas J. Jurkowsky, U.S. Navy, Chief of Information:**

Good afternoon. Thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. The purpose of the briefing, as you know, is to provide you some information concerning the Navy's report on its use of Vieques in Puerto Rico.

With us this afternoon are the Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Richard Danzig, Vice Admiral William Fallon who is the Commander of the U.S. Second Fleet, and Lieutenant General Peter Pace, Commander of the Marine Forces in the Atlantic Fleet.

Secretary Danzig will first have a statement for you. He will then introduce Admiral Fallon and General Pace who will talk about some of their findings, and they will also discuss the process that they undertook in the preparation of their report. All three gentlemen will then be delighted to take any questions from you that you may have.

We have copies of the report, the study that Admiral Fallon and General Pace undertook, and also copies of a letter that the Secretary has written to Mr. Rush, the head of the defense panel undertaking the review of Vieques. We have those ready for you along with a copy of our press release.

Following the briefing we'll have several individuals ready to answer any additional specific questions that you may have.

Mr. Secretary?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** Good afternoon.

The event that caused us to come together this afternoon was a very regrettable one, the death of David Sanes, a Navy employee on the live fire range in Vieques on April 19th. This in turn has caused the Governor of Puerto Rico to assemble a commission and both the Governor and that commission have asked that the Navy cease operations in Vieques and leave the island. I've talked with the Governor several times about this and reviewed the commission report.

As Secretary of the Navy my first responsibility is to ask what are the implications for national security of such a proposal, and then to turn as well to the question of what are the implications for the people of Vieques of the national security requirements, and how can we best reconcile these two.

Today we're going to talk principally about the national security requirement with respect to Vieques. I, as Secretary of the Navy, first addressed this by asking the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to identify an admiral and a general -- Admiral Bill Fallon, General Pete Pace -- who would engage in a careful, and from my standpoint necessarily dispassionate study of what the national security requirement is for Vieques. Their extensive work is embodied in the report that is now before you and they will have an opportunity to talk with you, present their views, answer your questions.

I wanted to say at the outset, though, that as Secretary of the Navy I have a particular responsibility, and I read their work with particular care and talked to them and several other people associated with this, and came to the conclusion very clearly that it is appropriate and indeed necessary for the Navy to be present in Vieques and to conduct bombing operations there, and to do so with live fire.

The situation in Vieques is one that offers very substantial training possibilities that aren't replicable elsewhere. I asked General Pace and Admiral Fallon to look with care at alternatives and they analyzed some 18 different sites. Then I stepped back from it and I asked myself what is it about Vieques that is so particular, of such special value, that in fact we should continue to operate there in light of their analysis of alternative sites.

They found those other sites not to be able to do the necessary job. And I concluded, stepping back from it, that there were five characteristics in Vieques that made it uniquely valuable. Each individual important, and together, like the fingers of a hand, all five are necessary to grip the problem of training.

The first factor is that Vieques gives an opportunity to launch aircraft from the sea and to overfly the island where there are realistic targets and to overfly it at a variety of altitudes without interference with commercial aircraft, because the island is remote enough from commercial flight patterns to be viable as a training ground.

The second characteristic was that the island, in part by virtue of being an island, is immediately adjacent to the sea and in this case to considerable deep water which would enable us to do training operations in which we could have gunfire from naval ships onto targets on the island.

To this was added a third characteristic which is that the island affords by virtue of its beaches and a large amount of acreage that we own on the island -- some 22,000 acres in total -- the opportunity for Marines to come ashore, and while we are doing aerial bombardment and while we are doing naval surface gunfire, for the Marines to exercise and operate alongside those activities.

A fourth characteristic is that Vieques is less than ten miles from Roosevelt Roads where we have a very large naval station with several billion dollars of investment. Roosevelt Roads

can support and does support our operations on Vieques. As such, it affords an opportunity for our ships to come in for repair, for reload of supplies, and activities of that sort. I would estimate that a substantial fraction of the population at Roosevelt Roads -- 2500 civilians are employed there as well as the military -- is in support of our operations in Vieques, and it's a key asset from our standpoint.

Fifth, and very significantly, the large size of our holdings in Vieques as well as the relatively small population, and the fact that that population is at a distance of some ten miles from where we do the live firing operations, enables us to conduct operations on Vieques safely. Though we had an extremely regrettable accident on the range it was on the range, and it was of a Navy employee.

In over half a century of operation on Vieques, we have never had an accident injuring civilians off the range as a result of activities intended to be on the range. This is, from my standpoint, an important reassurance.

It is sometimes thought or said that we are asking people on Vieques to be exposed to risks that are greater than on the mainland United States. I don't find that to be the case. What I find is that the population on Vieques at some ten miles from the live fire area is actually further away from the live fire area than populations are on ranges that are used by us and the Air Force in, for example, the State of Florida, the state closest to Puerto Rico, where there are instances where we have live fire both in Eglin and in Pinecastle where in fact the civilian populations are closer. We cannot, it seems to me, abide by a standard that says well, in Puerto Rico this is too close when in fact we know it to be perfectly safe and when in fact on the mainland we have just such kinds of operations.

From my standpoint then, here are five factors. The aerial capability, the sea capability, the ability of the Marines to land and to operate, the conjunction of Roosevelt Roads, and fifth and finally, the safety of the range -- a half century of operation under just such safety conditions -- that combine to make this a uniquely desirable place. We can bring together uniquely on the East Coast of the United States our operations there and train our battle groups and our amphibious ready groups before they go into situations of danger abroad in a way that is realistic because it involves live fire, in a way that is effective. We know from history that that kind of training over the long term saves lives.

So from my standpoint the analysis that Admiral Fallon and General Pace presented is a very compelling one and I am forwarding it to the Rush Commission with a cover letter with my personal endorsement.

I think that this is not the end of the discussion by any means. What people in Puerto Rico have to say about Vieques is very important. In the long term we need to make Vieques a circumstance in which the population on that island is better off because the Navy is there, not disadvantaged because the Navy is there. And that calls for us to do everything we can to provide reassurance about safety. It calls for us in my view to be more aggressive in releasing land that can be used by the people of Vieques for other purposes, and it calls for us to join in a partnership with the government of Puerto Rico in ways that we can together cause better economic development on Puerto Rico.

We will have occasions to discuss these on other days, and I've commissioned some follow-up work to try and enrich this and suggested some things to government officials in Puerto Rico who I very much respect. But from my standpoint the message of today is that from a national security standpoint this is an important and not replaceable site. I think if you have a chance to read through the report of Admiral Fallon and General Pace, you'll get a strong sense of that.

Rather than me say more about it, let me introduce Admiral Fallon and General Pace and they can speak directly to this, then the three of us will be happy to take your questions.

**ADMIRAL FALLON:** Thank you Mr. Secretary, ladies and gentlemen.

I'm the commander of the U.S. Second Fleet. I'm also the commander of the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) striking fleet in the Atlantic. One of my responsibilities, a primary responsibility is to see to the training and readiness of our forces so that they can be forward deployed. A second aspect of this is that I'm charged with the safety of these people.

This task that the Secretary gave to the Chief of Naval Operations [and Commandant of the Marine Corps] and which General Pace and I undertook was one that I felt quite familiar in undertaking, primarily because I've got over 30 years experience operating in the Atlantic, and I've been personally to Roosevelt Roads and to Vieques and worked on the ranges many times in the past, so it's territory that's pretty familiar to me.

The Secretary posed several questions. One of them was to take a look and see if in fact training at Vieques Island is really essential to our forces, and if it is, to also further look at the live ordnance training and to determine how essential that was. To get to the bottom line first, the answer was yes to both questions.

As to the training, this facility here at Vieques is unique. It is in fact the only place in the Atlantic in which we can bring together all of our forces at the same time, and by that I mean the combined arms aspect of air, sea, land and maritime support forces to actually train together in one place. We do training in many places throughout the country at various levels, but this is the only place in the Atlantic where we can actually bring it all together.

As to the issue of live fire, is it essential. My answer is absolutely, through my experience. You might ask why. My response would be in two parts. The first one is we have an obligation to our nation and to our people to train them to be most effective if they have to be called upon to go into combat. The area of greatest stress for them would be in a situation in which they were exposed to enemy live fire. It's in our interest and in their interest to ensure that if we have the opportunity to train them in these conditions ahead of time, to give them the exposure, to enable them to gain the confidence in working in this environment, then we should do it. Our experience certainly bears that out.

A second aspect of this is that if we don't do this, we put our people at risk, personal risk. We're talking about men and women, our sons and daughters, that might have to go to answer the call to arms to go into combat. By not exposing them to this entails a result in them potentially being in a situation in which the first time they find themselves under fire might be in a real situation. It's been our experience that if we can do this in advance to some degree, we

certainly lower the level of risk, this uncertainty.

Another question the Secretary posed was the issue of safety. In view of the tragic mishap that occurred back in April on the range, what are the procedures like? Are we in actuality operating in a manner that is as safe as we can possibly make it? Is there in fact a danger to the citizens on the island? My answer to that is I feel very strongly that the operations are safe on the island, and I would point if I could to this chart just to give you an idea of the geography.

This is the island of Vieques, to the east of the large island of Puerto Rico. On the entire island, the only place in which live fire operations are actually conducted is in this area on the eastern side between these boundaries which I hope you can see from the back of the room. (Pointing to chart) The remainder of the island no live fire operations whatsoever, and in fact between the impact area as it's called, the live impact area, and the population centers, and I'll point out the two largest towns, Isabella Segunda and Esperanza on the island. And the fence line that separates Navy property on the east. All of this area in here is uninhabited. This is known as the eastern maneuver area. And in addition to being an area which our Marine amphibious forces can train ashore, it serves as a buffer between the impact area and the civilian population. Again, that is the only area of the island in which these activities are conducted, and it's a distance of about ten statute miles from the population center, the nearest major population center, to the impact area.

That in itself is an advantage that many of our other ranges do not have. We might be able to cover that a little bit later.

We looked at the procedures on the range, again, something that I'm very, very familiar with, having done this many times myself. I feel quite confident that the procedures are in place, and as the Secretary indicated there hasn't been a mishap off the range in over 50 years.

Another question that was posed to us was, is there an alternative to Vieques? Why is it that this island has to be the place where you do this training? Isn't there some other place, either in the continental U.S. or some other island or likely place in the Caribbean in which you could do it. In undertaking the answer to this question we looked very, very rigorously at every reasonable site, every conceivable site to start with, on the East Coast of the U.S., starting at Maine and working all the way down to Florida.

There were a couple of prerequisites. We need to have a place, because these are naval forces, that are accessible from the sea. So we kept the search within a couple of hundred miles of the coast but frankly, I think we've covered just about every place on the East Coast.

What we found was there are many sites at which training is conducted. In fact, there are some sites at which some live ordnance is conducted. In fact our forces use many of these sites. But there is no other place in the U.S. in which we could actually bring together all of the aspects of training which we conduct in the Puerto Rican op area, specially on Vieques.

If I could maybe give you an example. We looked at a range in Central Florida called the Pinecastle range. It's located north of Orlando. It's in an area of the Ocala National Forest. There is some live ordnance that's authorized for delivery in this area, in fact our Navy and

Marine pilots do use it occasionally for training. But it's not suitable for the kind of activities that go on at the range in Vieques. It's too far inland to be supported by naval gunfire support. The airspace around it does not support large air wing strikes which we have to practice to be able to give our people the exposure to the combat situations they're going to run across when they go out into the world.

The access to the place is very restricted. It also has other problems. Lots of population. Significantly larger population closer to the impact range there than there is in Vieques. For example, on the order of ten-fold. There are also restrictions due to fires in the forest. There's no Marine maneuver area. We can't move Marines ashore, amphibious landings. It's too far inland and so forth.

We took every range in the U.S. and went down a lengthy checklist to determine whether it might be suitable in each aspect, and we feel very confident that we've looked at these very closely.

What about other places in the Caribbean for example? Several islands have been proposed as alternatives. None of these are developed. All the places we looked at in the U.S. already had some kind of range development, some infrastructure already in place. What about some other islands? Let me, if I could, give you two examples.

Two that have been proposed to us several times have been the island of Mona down here in the passage west of Puerto Rico between the Dominican Republic and the island of Puerto Rico, and Desecheo Island, a small rock to the west of the big island.

A couple of factors about each. Mona initially looks large enough. It's attractive in many ways. There are not major airways in the area. It's reasonably close to some open ocean areas in the south that we might be able to use. It's a fair distance, over 150 miles, but potentially useable from Roosevelt Roads, but it has a big problem. It's unpopulated, that was a good factor, but it happens to be the home to several endangered species of wildlife. It's a wildlife refuges. It's a national park. It's home to many, many species of animals and plant life that are on the endangered list. The geography of the place is large enough but has some other drawbacks. It also happens to sit right in the middle of the Mona channel which is a primary shipping channel, an international shipping channel, and it would be very difficult to close that channel to traffic and operate in that area.

Desecheo is a little bit different. This has been proposed several times in many fora, [and we] looked at it very closely. The major drawback here is it's very small. The total size of the island is only about half of the impact area over here, so it's less than 500 acres. We don't think that's large enough to either put an appropriate bombing range on the island and it's certainly not large enough for the safety of people that might be working as range observers around there. There would have to be some extensive infrastructure put in outside the island which is very, very deep water nearby. The biggest problem is that it sits right underneath the major airway between the Dominican Republic and San Juan, so very, very little room to maneuver for airspace.

At any rate, just to give you a sample. This is an idea of the view that we took. We tried to examine every conceivable spot in the Caribbean, near and far, any that were proposed to us

and any that we could find from our own experience. So I think we've given it a very, very good scrub.

The truth is, there is no place that even remotely comes close to the capabilities that exist on Vieques Island.

If I could at this point turn it over to General Pace to give you a little bit more detail of the training aspects that we looked at.

**GENERAL PACE:** Thank you, Admiral Fallon.

I'm Pete Pace. I'm the Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Atlantic. It is my responsibility to train 92,000 Marines and sailors, both active and reserve, and to deploy them worldwide. As I stand here before you we have over 25,000 Marines deployed around the world, to include 2,000 Marines who are currently coming out of Kosovo where as you know about a month ago they went in under very, very trying conditions and did a superb job.

It may be of interest for some of you to know that those Marines in April, the end of March, April, had trained aboard their Amphibious Ready Group ships and with their carrier battle group support off of Vieques doing just the training we're talking about here. That was the last time they had a chance to train together before they were deployed overseas.

It was planned that way. When they got to the Mediterranean they went directly offshore at Albania and went ashore and started helping out in the humanitarian effort. When it became apparent we were going to be putting forces on the ground in Kosovo they were reloaded aboard ship, taken around to the Greek port of Thessaloniki, offloaded there, and as you know went into Kosovo. That's an example of what happens with ours sailors and Marines very frequently when they deploy overseas.

My responsibility to their mothers and fathers is to ensure that when we send them overseas I have given them the best possible training I can. I've pledged that to them, I've pledged that to my Commandant and my Secretary; and to be truthful, I don't really care where I do that training. I just care that I accomplish that training. And going into this study with Admiral Fallon, I thought surely, surely there are other places that we can do the same kind of training that we do in Vieques.

We did an exhaustive study, and as Admiral Fallon has already pointed out and is in a copy of our report, we looked at some 18 in very, very great detail, and we looked at all 50-plus sites around the United States where we do live fire now, places where we may be able to transfer some of our training.

The fact of the matter is that there are locations where if I could use a football team analogy, we can teach people how to throw a football. We can teach them how to catch it. We can teach them how to block and tackle. But only the facilities and environment Vieques allow us to scrimmage together and to learn how to be the team that we need to be so when we send our American sons and daughters into harm's way they're as well trained, and as well prepared as we

possibly can. That's our responsibility. We had that in mind as we worked very hard to find ways to lessen the impact on Vieques and our fellow American citizens in Vieques.

The Secretary and the Admiral have already articulated to you our basic findings, and I think now what I would like to do is stop and allow you all to ask us your questions.

Mr. Secretary?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** Both General Pace and Admiral Fallon will be appearing before the Rush Panel a week from tomorrow, Friday the 23rd, and that will be an open public discussion with I'm sure further questions, but we very much invite your questions for any of the three of us now.

**Q:** Are you doing anything to lessen the impact? Vieques has been a heartburn for the Puerto Ricans as long as I can remember, and I go back 30 years. Are you proposing to do anything to lessen the impact on the folks there?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** Yes, I think that's right on. The first thing we've done is to cease operations entirely at the moment. That's really out of respect for the people of Puerto Rico, the fact that an accident did occur, and that the Governor has asked us to pause and to provide some time for discussion, and in my view also very importantly for just this kind of analysis that Admiral Fallon and General Pace have just done and that we've provided to you. I might add that I'm sending [copies of the report] to the Governor directly today, I talked to him earlier today, and to the resident Commissioner, who I also talked with.

More broadly the question you're asking which is also a question that has been asked in Puerto Rico seems to me to be very appropriate. To make real progress in Vieques I think we need to make the situation in Vieques better for Vieques. That means to engage in a robust economic development program. It means to find ways consistent with the national security requirement to limit the magnitude of the firing that we do.

We now in fact are using the island for fire about 180 days a year. In 1983 when a Memorandum of Understanding was entered into between the Government of Puerto Rico and the Navy specifically for use of Vieques, we were doing about twice as much firing as we are now doing in terms of the amount. We have reduced it quite significantly. I think there's some possibility for reducing it further. There's also some possibility for working with the Government of Puerto Rico to return land and so forth. So I think there are real opportunities there. I'd like to come to grips with that in the weeks ahead. To do that we need to find some common ground with the government of Puerto Rico about what it is that we're doing.

**Q:** Just to follow that, Mr. Secretary, can Admiral Fallon or General Pace give us a ball park number as to how much would be the minimum that you could get by with at Vieques? It sounded like listening to the two of you there wasn't much you could without, but maybe I didn't understand.

**GENERAL PACE:** I'll take a shot at that and then Admiral Fallon I'm sure will want to talk from the Navy standpoint.

To give you an example, when we have a Marine Expeditionary Unit go to Vieques for training. Again, this is the last train-up before they're deployed overseas. Typically the artillery battery that goes ashore with them will fire about 500 rounds. The mortars that go ashore with them will fire about 500 rounds.

So could those numbers be lower than that? We need to do an honest scrub of that and determine. Do we need live fire? Yes. Do we need to make sure that our artillery tubes and our mortar teams can respond to calls for fire, put the ordnance on target quickly and accurately? Yes, we do. How much do we need to do that? We need to do a good solid scrub of that and determine whether or not we can reduce and still meet our readiness goals. We want to make sure that we do both, meet our readiness goals and be sensitive to the needs of the folks on Vieques.

**ADMIRAL FALLON:** If I could follow up on that, two aspects that are pertinent to the Navy. Probably, at least in my opinion after doing this analysis, the primary source of irritant to residents on the island I think is down in this area of Esperanza (pointing to chart). I believe the cause of that is primarily from the gunfire, the actual reports of the ship guns firing into the impact area. The ships for many technical reasons end up operating down in this area. So Esperanza, that population center, is within sound of those guns.

What we've discovered is, and it's not an earth-shattering discovery, but we require a certain number of rounds to qualify a ship's crew and the people with whom they work ashore. This isn't just a matter of firing a gun at something. We could easily do that and do for certain purposes out in the open ocean. But this gunfire support is designed for one thing. That's to support and ensure that the Marines ashore can survive. So to be effective it has to be calibrated with people ashore, on the ground, directing that fire. That's why it needs to be done ashore.

But I've also found there are occasions when the guns are fired for other purposes, for proficiency, for example, to keep the crews up to speed. They may get their initial qualification and then return because they have the opportunity to be down here operating again, which they come back and fire on the range. It's a good training advantage, but it's obvious to us now that there are probably ways we can consolidate this training and potentially have the gunfire qualification for the people at the same time that we're engaged in the larger exercise with the Marines ashore and maybe do some of this other firing that's required for repetition and proficiency at another place, maybe in the open ocean.

I'll give you another example. Air to ground. This is something that elicits a lot of emotion. The reality is, if you go in and look at the report you'll find that we do a relatively small amount of air-to-ground work. In fact the total number of live bombs that are dropped by a typical Navy air wing today is a fraction of what it was back when I was a junior officer. We're only averaging about 700 bombs per air wing these days, and about half of that ends up being expended at the Vieques range.

The other primary range where we do air to ground is out in the desert at Fallon, Nevada. We've seen that there is some capacity at Fallon that we think could absorb some of this air to ground fire. This isn't just a simple decision to move it to Fallon. The reality is that the area in which I am most concerned as a fleet commander is the training of the entire team. If we go to

move the ordnance to Fallon, we can train the aircrews and their immediate people that support the aircraft, but we don't have the opportunity to train the entire team.

If you'll allow me a moment. These weapons that we drop from our aircraft today are typically stored in many components for ease of transportation and stowage on the ship in a shipboard environment, which is very different from a shore station. It's very confined, very challenging, hot. It's a tough working environment. These pieces have to be assembled, they have to be moved to a place where they can be moved to the flight deck, then brought up, hung on the airplane, etc. Many steps. Every step in this chain requires human intervention. Every time there's human intervention, there's a possibility of a mistake. If we don't train our people in each of these steps, put them together, and end to end do this business from the time things are broken out of the magazine until they actually get on the target, we are not getting an opportunity to facilitate this entire endeavor.

So a long story, but I wanted to make the point. We have to do this at sea. So we're going to have to do some... That's the reason we need to do this training at Vieques. We have to do some of it in the sea environment on the ship.

So there is some room to maneuver here, we believe, but we'll still need to do some live fire.

**JOURNALIST:** Thank you.

**Q:** Mr. Secretary, as a result of this report you determined the contribution of Vieques for national security, but could the Navy consider for political reasons to withdraw from Vieques because the Navy had to withdraw from some other sites around the world for political reasons?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** A classic example of the Navy withdrawing from sites was from Kaho'olawe when we had an understanding from the government of Puerto Rico, we focused these efforts in Vieques. The practical reality is my job and I think General Pace and Admiral Fallon's, is to try and identify the national security requirement.

The President has appointed a panel appointed headed by Frank Rush with three other distinguished citizens on it to review what the Navy has to say and they'll have to make a judgment, taking account of statements of people from Puerto Rico and our observations about national security, about what makes sense. My expectation is they will be making that judgment over the next weeks. I would advise anyone who reads this report to make a judgment for themselves, too.

One of the things we've tried to do is lay out the data so you all can see it.

I think coming back to an earlier question, one of the ways we can contribute to some understanding here is to be as forthcoming and honest and visible with respect to what we see. So you will find in this analysis appealing attributes of sites that we do not think do it, and other people can read this and come to a conclusion about what they think is the right answer. We are telling you what we genuinely think without regard to politics is the right answer.

**Q:** When national defense interests clash with civilian interests, the Puerto Rican

government now is just as adamant of having the Navy leave Vieques as the Navy is to stay in Vieques. So when these two things clash, there doesn't seem to be much room for a compromise, which is more important? Which is the one that should hold the... (inaudible)

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** I think they're both genuinely important. This is not by any means a unique case, as your question implies. There are many places throughout the United States where the Navy and Marine Corps and for that matter the Air Force and the Army are engaged in activities where residents are concerned about noise, where they're concerned about risk, where they would like to use the land for economic development. We encounter that very frequently in states as far away from Puerto Rico as California, and as close to Puerto Rico as Florida. You'll find yesterday in the Pensacola newspaper an editorial talking about the burdens there of national security and their judgments with regard to them.

I think all Americans accept, and I think Puerto Rico is a part of America in this respect and accepts it, that there are national security costs that we all pay as a part of the price of freedom, and that everyone contributes to that. There are 4,000 Puerto Ricans who serve in the U.S. Navy who are being trained in these places. I don't think anybody in Puerto Rico wants them to deploy unprotected and untrained. So the question is, how do we strike the balance? For me the answer is we ask ourselves genuinely, is this necessary for the national security? We have honestly asked ourselves that question in this context. We are showing you the results of our conclusions. You can make that assessment yourself. People in Puerto Rico can. It's a legitimate question.

Second, if you conclude as we have that it is important for the national security, then you need to get to the other question. All right, how can we make this on balance something that is at least minimally burdensome for the people of Vieques, and better still, positive for them by the economic advantage and the like.

I do not believe that if the Navy withdraws from Vieques tomorrow that economic wonder would come to Vieques. I think it would find that it had many difficulties still. I think the people on Kaho'olawe found that.

We need to try to take advantage of the Navy's presence to make this a stronger place economically and in all kinds of other ways. I believe we've done that very well in some dimensions and not well in others. We need to come to grips with it.

**Q:** (Inaudible) ... [Do you think your] position will prevail in the long run when President Clinton finally makes the decision, given the fairly unanimous opposition from Puerto Rican political leaders? Also do you have any concern that your ruling out of Mona will raise questions of whether you're more concerned about endangered species than about the human population on Vieques?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** With respect to the first question I think our obligation to the people of Puerto Rico and then to the nation more broadly is to give an honest answer to a set of important questions. It's not to attempt to guess about what the outcome will be or what is politically desirable for somebody or not, or what might appeal to immediately resolve this immediate irritant. Our obligation is to give a straightforward answer with respect to what the national security requires, and we've tried to the best of our abilities to do that. You have a

professional judgment here, but you can also examine it and make your own judgment.

With respect to Mona, you'll read the report and see on the various sites, I think the environmental considerations and endangered species are one variable. There are other variables as well. Admiral Fallon mentioned amongst other things the shipping lanes problem associated with Mona. There are problems of relocation and the like. But I think it's a fair debate. I'm sure this will be discussed along with the 17 other sites that are laid out in their analysis.

You could also debate whether we should go back to Kaho'olawe. There are options here, but in our judgment none of them make nearly so much sense as staying in Vieques and making that work, and I might add making it work better than it has for Vieques.

**Q:** Was Dog Island looked at as one of the alternatives?

**ADMIRAL FALLON:** Yes, it certainly was.

The question was Dog Island, which is off to the east about 160, 170 miles or so. I don't believe it's on the chart here. There are several issues with Dog Island. The first piece that was very attractive is it's unpopulated. It's in the vicinity of several other small islands, but a couple of critical deficiencies.

One is that it's very close to several large population centers including the island of St. Martin. In fact larger populations again closer than the range on Vieques. Another critical area is that it's underneath the terminal control area for the St. Martin airport, so there's certainly no room to do much air maneuvering whatsoever. So this is one that was also looked at several times in the past decades and it's come up short on many counts.

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** Can I just ask if anybody who hasn't had a chance to ask a question wants to ask one? Then we can take some repeat questions.

**Q:** The training that Sailors and Marines [undergo] at Vieques: how does that correlate to our actual performance in combat? How significant is it?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** In my judgment it's very significant. You don't want people deploying and doing in combat things they haven't done in training. Since we operate as a total group and gain our power from an ability to coordinate the operations of air, sea fire, Marines on the ground, and adjust each piece in response to the activities of the other, I think that's an extremely important thing, and it is something we have not found another site to do, except on Vieques. So from my standpoint it's very important.

I don't know, Pete, if you want to add anything to that.

**GENERAL PACE:** Thank you.

One of my other responsibilities is to be the Commander of Marine Corps Forces in Europe, so the Marine Expeditionary Unit that we trained on the East Coast and sent to the Mediterranean, I was fortunate to pick up on that end and then employ in Kosovo.

The commander of that organization, Colonel Ken Gluck, looked me in the eye and told me personally that it was the final wrap-up training at Vieques, the opportunity to tie it all together, to finally, to be able to scrimmage together as a team. To have the confidence in the weapon systems, to have the confidence in his subordinates and in his leaders to know when they were put into harm's way they were going to do well. That's part of the art, not the science. It's what is in here (places hand over heart), what you believe about your shipmates and their capabilities and your own personal competency to employ the weapon systems you have that make the big difference.

So I would tell you foursquare, absolutely direct correlation.

**ADMIRAL FALLON:** The two most recently deployed battle groups, the Theodore Roosevelt Group which is still deployed in the Mediterranean Sea, in fact they're on their way to the Persian Gulf today, and the Enterprise Battle Group, both commanders made it very clear to me that they considered the training they received and the training just before they left was done at Vieques, as absolutely critical to their success. Both of these battle groups deployed. The men and women on these groups were in combat within a matter of days of going. There was no chance to do anything else. The training they got here was the final training and very, very critical.

**Q:** The Joint Task Force exercises that begin this weekend off the coast of North Carolina: were those originally scheduled for Vieques?

**GENERAL PACE:** Yes, they were. The Joint Task Force exercise is a very, very large operation and in fact spans the greater part of the Western Atlantic. Our desire would have been to go down and do part of this in the Puerto Rican op areas. The key piece that we wanted to do was a thing that's called a SACEX, supporting arms combat exercise, in which Marine amphibious units disembark ships, go ashore, and they're then supported by the battle group and the other assets that we bring to bear so that they can get this combined arms, integrated live fire experience training. We're not going to be able to do that this time. So this group will be deficient in that regard.

However, we're fortunate in that this same group which is, the flagship is the John F. Kennedy, and it's known as the John F. Kennedy Battle Group, was down in the Puerto Rican area in April and had an opportunity to work on the ranges and got what I consider the minimum qualification prior to the closure of the range after the tragic mishap.

So my assessment so far is that they are deficient in that they will miss a significant part of this training, but they did have a minimum amount beforehand. That's not going to be the same for subsequent battle groups. The next one in line, for example, is the Dwight D. Eisenhower Battle Group. The immediate schedule for them would have them going to the Puerto Rican op area in late September to begin their training. This group has not had any significant at sea work yet, and they're going to need some of this training.

**Q:** (Inaudible). ... [So you are saying that Vieques is] the most important training center that the Navy has in the world?

**ADMIRAL FALLON:** Vieques is the most important training center that the Navy has on the East Coast of the United States. Therefore for ships and sailors and Marines that need to train in

the East because we can't get them to the West Coast, it is the most important place.

**Q:** If the Governor decides that you're right and you can continue the live fire, how soon will you start the live firing in Puerto Rico, in Vieques?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** What I'd like to do is to speak with Puerto Rican authorities about that and find a path that is most acceptable to them and that achieves the greatest degree of support from the people of Puerto Rico. I mentioned, for example, that there are 4,000 Puerto Ricans who are sailors in the Navy. We care very much about this relationship in a lot of ways, not just about Vieques, although we care very much about that. Our recruitment there is very important.

I mentioned Roosevelt Roads. We operate a major base there. We care a lot about that. My intention is to be sending a senior Navy admiral to Puerto Rico because I think we need to attend more to this set of relationships.

So how we would resume training even assuming there was agreement on this from a very wide spectrum, still it seems to me it's something that needs to be talked through and done with some sensitivity.

**Q:** To clarify that, there is no commitment by the Navy to resume training before the Rush Commission finishes. The Navy, if you can work something out with Puerto Rico, you might well start training again?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** I have committed to not resuming training on Vieques until the Rush Panel concludes its work and I'll stand by that. I'm rather confident that if there was widespread agreement in Puerto Rico on resumption of training that in fact the Rush Panel would conclude its work and we would resume.

**Q:** You talked about economic development. What sorts of things do you expect the Navy will be in a position to do to help economic development and how much are you willing to commit to that in terms of dollars?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** I'm willing to both develop that point and commit to a fair amount, but I need to do that I think in consonance with the work of the Rush Panel and discussions with the Governor and some understanding of the context we've created. Today is not the day for it.

You were just interrupted.

**Q:** If there is no agreement between the people of Puerto Rico and the Navy, you wouldn't be able to do the training, the live training?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** No, I wouldn't say that. I think we need to work through this panel process and come as close to agreement as we can. I wouldn't predict what will happen under various different theories about what might or might not develop with the Rush Panel and the people of Puerto Rico.

I can tell you this, though, from a national security standpoint I have no doubt that this training is very important, and I need to say that as Secretary of the Navy. And I think you will

find the uniformed Navy and the uniformed Marine Corps feel, if anything, more intensely on this point. There's going to be no question about the importance of this area for us.

**Q:** How do you think this report is going to be viewed in Puerto Rico?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** I, in embracing this report, did not attempt to analyze how it might be received in any place: the Congress, the White House, Puerto Rico, the Rush Panel. We attempted to call it the way we saw it. And I'll yield to you for expertise as to how it might be seen.

**Q:** I'm fairly sure people are going to say, it's the same old thing. They said they were going to give us a fresh new look and they reach the same old conclusions.

So if you're going to come back with an argument that people in Puerto Rico who oppose it and they're going to say it's the same old argument, why wasn't something else sort of... I know you said possible economic health, possible ceding back land later. But are these like bargaining chips that you're holding?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** I think it's important to establish the national security requirements, and if in some people's eyes that's the same old argument I would call it a kind of bedrock truth. I think we need to come to grips with it. The panel in Puerto Rico that developed a number of useful statements about Puerto Rican views did not come to grips with the questions that have been discussed this morning about national security needs, about alternative sites. That's a gap which needs to be inserted into the debate and I think people need to attend to.

We can take a couple of further questions from people, but first, we're going to need to stop in a minute. Second, let me just make sure, is there anybody who hasn't asked a question who wants to?

**Q:** You mentioned you were examining how much live firing goes on and that sort of thing. I know that environmental impact of training has been an issue for some Puerto Ricans. Is there anything else that is being looked at in terms of addressing or reexamining environmental impact of the training in Vieques?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** Did you want to say something on this or I can? (Turns to Lt. Gen. Pace and Vice Adm. Fallon)

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** There are several studies underway. There is a tendency sometimes in these discussions for propositions to be advanced that aren't necessarily factually or scientifically based. We have not found reason in terms of the health of the people of Vieques, for example, to see any reason to believe that naval activities in any way cause a deterioration of that health. There are examples of environmental stewardship by the Navy in Vieques that are exemplary and have been identified as such by environmental agencies.

As a result of requests recently, there have been a number of environmental agency activities and studies and we're all very interested in what they produce, but I see no reason to believe that the Navy stewardship of the environment in Vieques will be found to be deficient.

Let me just say, we'll take the last questions, Otto, and then we'll take you last. Go ahead.

**Q:** Mr. Secretary, four or five years ago the Navy and Marine Corps made the exact same arguments for continuing operations at Kaho'olawe, which was important to (inaudible) as Vieques may be to... Because of the powerful political delegation in Hawaii we lost Kaho'olawe and the Navy and Marine Corps continued to function. You can state any impact of the loss of that range, but again, the Puerto Ricans might say the difference between Kaho'olawe and Vieques is Senator Inouye.

**ADMIRAL FALLON:** If I could, Mr. Secretary, address that one. Having had experience at that range and most of the Pacific ranges, also. A big difference.

Kaho'olawe, there's a major fallback. In fact the reality is that on the West Coast there is another range on San Clemente Island, which in fact is used today for many of the things for which we use Vieques.

The West Coast also has an extensive array of particular air to ground ranges that are not accessible to the East Coast. So the bottom line is there was a strong desire to hold onto Kaho'olawe because it's halfway across the Pacific, en-route to our operating areas. There are many advantages to having a range there. The fact of the matter is there is another place on the West Coast, at San Clemente, where much of this is done. There is no option on the East Coast.

Again I have no particular vested interest in Vieques. It's a beautiful island, as we rediscovered again last week when we were down there looking at it. But I can do the training anywhere. I'd like to do the training in the best possible place so I can ensure that my people are prepared for any eventuality in the best way, to minimize their risk.

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** There are 57 sites in the United States where there is training undertaken that arguably intrudes on the neighborhoods and 56 of those are well represented by congressmen and senators. I think this aspect of the Vieques issue tends to be overplayed. I think the people of Vieques have a very real right to a consideration of their views, and we have an obligation to be responsive to them. But our judgment about the national security requirement here is really not influenced by the character of the congressional representation.

**Q:** You said that you talked today with the Governor of Puerto Rico. How was his reaction to the report?

**SECRETARY DANZIG:** I think the Governor, as he's made clear, would like us to leave Vieques. He's a thoughtful actor like also your resident commissioner, I think he wants to read the report and see what we have to say and respond to it. I think he would have hoped that our conclusion would be that from a national security point we could go elsewhere. I have to tell them quite clearly that that was not our conclusion.

Let me tell you all that I think the report represents a very substantial effort by a lot of people headed by General Pace and Admiral Fallon. I commend it to you. It's an effort to make a serious contribution to a discussion which tends frequently to be emotional, but I think benefits a lot from some clear looking at the facts.

Thank you all for your role in that.

(END)