

# Puerto Rico's Debt Crisis

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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*Officially called a "Free Associated State or Commonwealth," Puerto Rico has been exploited as a US colony since 1898. Its elected governor is powerless - little more than a potted plant ruled by Congress with America's president its head of state.*

Washington never granted islanders control of their lives, welfare and destiny. They have no say over foreign relations, commerce and trade, their air space, land and offshore waters, immigration and emigration, nationality and citizenship, currency, maritime laws, military service, US bases on its territory, constitutionality of its laws, jurisdictions and legal procedures, treaties, radio and television, communications, agriculture, its natural resources and more.

Independence supporters aren't tolerated - men like Oscar Lopez Rivera, a decorated Vietnam War veteran, wrongfully imprisoned for wanting Puerto Ricans to live free, behind bars for over three decades.

Washington wants to continue exploiting its Caribbean colony for profit - raping and pillaging it at the public's expense, much like what's happening to Greece.

Athens is trapped in the euro straightjacket - Puerto Rico in America's claws. Nominally, islanders handle their own local affairs, much like how Washington DC residents have home rule under full federal control.

The Constitution grants Congress exclusive jurisdiction over the District in "all cases whatsoever." Its elected government exists at its pleasure. Local laws can be overturned.

District residents have no voting representation in Congress. They're disenfranchised in federal elections. They're colonial subjects like Puerto Ricans.

The Caribbean island is bankrupt - but can't declare it under US law, making it harder to gain concessions from creditors. It's debt entrapped, forced to pay bankers and other large creditors at the expense of providing vital social services. Its \$73 billion debt is impossible to repay.

In late June, Governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla said it needs restructuring. It's approaching 100% of its GDP - its current fiscal year \$4.5 billion servicing obligation is too great a burden to bear.

It's a wasteland of high unemployment, poverty and deprivation. Force-fed austerity exacerbates dire economic conditions. Islanders are US citizens without enfranchisement on the mainland. They pay federal taxes. They get back pathetically little in return.

In June, the UN Committee of 24 (Special Committee on Decolonization) heard testimonies from 30 island petitioners. Puerto Rico is locked in a destructive cycle of poverty, unemployment, brain drain and economic decline because of US imperial control, they explained.

Petitioners urged UN intervention to initiate a decolonization process – to “stand on the right side of history” helping Puerto Ricans regain their sovereign rights.

Washington calls activist islanders “domestic terrorists.” Oscar Lopez Rivera is one of thousands wrongfully imprisoned for their political beliefs since 1898.

Puerto Rico’s 3.5 million people live in an open-air prison – exploited under imperial rule, heading toward hardening by greater forced austerity, hitting its majority impoverished population hardest.

Puerto Ricans suffer from internal government mismanagement, political greed and dereliction of duty, widespread corruption, deplorable social services, rich and powerful monied interests exploiting ordinary islanders, and police brutality like US citizens and residents face.

One local observer describes two Puerto Rico cultures. On the one hand, its “language, music, art, history and affection.” On the other, its “crime, corruption, deceit and entitlement.”

The latter is killing the former. It’s “dying a slow, painful death.” Puerto Rico is on a downward cycle to oblivion – ordinary people devastated by an uncaring US Congress, its own corrupt government and monied interests demanding tribute, a lethal economic combination.

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*His new book as editor and contributor is titled “Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III.”*

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