

U.S. may mine 1/2 of Puerto Rico '2020 Plan' may be disastrous

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In 1494, Christopher Columbus presented the King and Queen of Spain with copper samples taken from mines in what is now Puerto Rico. Between 1509 and 1579, Spaniards extracted more than 1.2

The project, Garcia says, "implies the physical destruction of our country, which implies the cultural destruction of our nation."

million ounces of gold from mines on the island until discoveries of the metal in Peru and Mexico drew them elsewhere.

Now, some four centuries after that initial mineral exploitation, the Reagan administration has decided to dig up what the Spaniards left behind. Studies conducted by the U.S. government since the end of World War Two have revealed that Puerto Rico, often described as an impoverished island with minimal natural resources, truly deserves its name ("rich port"). Its vast deposits of gold, copper, nickel, manganese, chromium and other valuable metals could make it a treasure

house for the U.S. government — one that could have critical strategic importance if other mineral sources dry up.

Last week, two Puerto Rican mining engineers visited CU to discuss proposed U.S. government plans to turn the island into an international mining and mineral processing center to provide the United States with a stable supply of "strategic" minerals essential to national defense.

OVER THE NEXT THREE decades, the engineers revealed, the government plans to open up 2 million acres — more than half the total land area of the island — to mining. That plan, to be executed between 1985 and 2020, involves construction of 11 industrial parks, a large mineral processing center, huge open-pit mines in the island's interior, and a vast infrastructure to support the project, including 24 dams and a pipeline encircling the island that will supply the vast amounts of water needed to process the metals.

Engineers Alexis Massol and Eduardo Garcia, who work for the Taller de Arte y Cultura in Adjuntas, P.R., fear that the vast project, dubbed the 2020 Plan, may produce not just wealth but disaster. Mining on that scale, they say, could produce severe environmental problems in the form of erosion, deforestation, air and water pollution and acid rain that the

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