

Navy Uses US Citizens as Pawns in Domestic War Games

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Image: Navy SEALs conduct a capabilities exercise at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story on Virginia Beach, Virginia, July 21, 2012. Beginning in mid-January, Navy SEALs will be conducting war games across Washington State's coastal areas, including through public and private property. (Photo: [Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class William S. Parker / US Navy](#))


These exclusive Navy documents outline plans for combat training exercises along vast areas of Washington State coastline. Each shows the areas the Navy is prepared to utilize.

Beginning in mid-January, Navy SEALs will be practicing unannounced and clandestine combat beach landings across Washington State's Puget Sound and many other coastal areas of that state.



The simulated combat exercises, which will include the use of mini-submarines and other landing craft, will deposit Navy SEALs carrying "simulated weapons" on 68 beach and state park areas in Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Washington's west coast, unbeknownst to most of the relevant government agencies tasked with overseeing these areas.

Internal Navy emails, two slide shows (which can be viewed in full [here](#) and [here](#)) and other documents obtained exclusively by Truthout reveal the vast extent of the operations. They also reveal the fact that the Navy labeled the relevant files as "For Official Use Only" and emails as "Attorney-Client privilege," a move that exempts such documents from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

 Image: The Navy has planned exercises that could take place, according to their own maps, along the entirety of Washington State's coastlines. (Image: Document obtained by Dahr Jamail)

In the new scenario, which the military calls "realistic military training," Navy SEALs carrying "simulated" weapons may also travel across public and private property within city limits, and may swim through public and private marinas occupied by people living on boats. They could conduct war game patrols on roads through residential communities. In addition to tribal, state, federal and county lands, there are many properties on the Navy's list of training sites marked as private.

Naval plans include the use of special reconnaissance teams conducting patrols, which are authorized to go on simulated "direct action" missions. The definition of "direct action" is "short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted as a special

operation in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and which employ specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets.”

Public concern for what is clearly an ongoing [domestic military expansionism](#) is growing. Despite some strange conspiracy theories around [Operation Jade Helm](#) in 2015, the operation also provoked a very real concern: The spread of the military into residential and public areas. This, coupled with [several recently documented instances](#) of abusive, unlawful behavior by Navy SEALs overseas, has many people alarmed by what is to come.

War Games in Peace Parks

Across Washington, the Navy’s upcoming war game exercises, which are slated to begin January 14, will be carried out across 68 beach areas around the state, many of which lie within the boundaries of state parks.

Many of these beaches are popular with the public and contain campgrounds and marinas. According to maps in the two slide shows Truthout obtained, Navy SEAL activities will occur well inland from the beaches. Each site for the exercises will be “utilized” two to eight times per year, and “events” can last between two and 72 hours.

Naval maps of the areas where the exercises will occur show large areas where “surveillance and reconnaissance” will occur, along with “direct action” areas and “insertion and extraction” zones.

According to the documents, a “safety” buffer of 500 to 1,000 meters will also be maintained by a Navy support team in boats, vehicles and on foot, which will prevent bystanders from entering the areas.

This amounts to periodic closings of public land, including state parks and fishing areas, with no public comment periods or government oversight. Given that some of the exercises will entail Navy SEALs swimming through marinas where people live on their boats, along with exercises and patrols through residential neighborhoods and private land, maintaining a “safety” barrier of 500 to 1,000 meters simply does not seem possible.

One of many areas slated for direct actions in the Navy’s plans is Fort Worden State Park, on the northeast tip of the Olympic Peninsula. The Navy has designated a large area atop a hill there – a place that contains popular public trails and picnic areas – for its war exercises.

The hilltop location includes a seating area for quiet contemplation, called Memory’s Vault, which is referred to as a “peace park.” The public in the area will likely interpret the Navy’s use of this portion of the park as another of the many [gestures of contempt they have seen](#) from the military.

According to Karen Sullivan, former assistant regional director at the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s Division of External Affairs and a retired endangered species biologist, the Navy’s actions are also illegal. Sullivan has worked in the division for over 15 years, and is an expert in the bureaucratic procedures the Navy is supposed to be following.

She is now part of the [West Coast Action Alliance](#), one of two large multistate and international citizen groups that have tasked themselves with watchdogging the Navy, due

to what they believe are ongoing violations of the law, blatant acts of disrespect toward human and environmental health, and ongoing bellicose behavior by the military branch.

According to Sullivan, the Navy's actions are a violation of several laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act, Administrative Procedures Act, National Historic Preservation Act and possibly others, as well as a violation of the [public trust doctrine](#).

"They have exempted themselves from disclosing to the public, and even to state and federal agencies, the full scope and nature of their actions, in order to segment them into smaller pieces that individually may look harmless but cumulatively have big impacts,"

Sullivan told Truthout.

In one example, the Navy, without any consultation with the State of Washington, recently concluded that the war games would have no effect on historic and cultural properties – including those belonging to Indigenous tribes – and therefore there was no need to consult with the State or with tribes on the new sites for 2016.

Sullivan expressed deep concerns about the exercises the Navy has planned for Washington coastlines and the communities near them.

"Having Navy SEAL kill teams in battle gear conducting war games around private homes and public beaches, parks, campgrounds and marinas is going to have a big effect on the people living and recreating there," she said. "Besides potentially creating public fear and confusion, the Navy will close off the areas they're war gaming in. Doesn't that require a public process?"

Connie Gallant is the board president of the [Olympic Forest Coalition](#), a group that promotes the protection, conservation and restoration of natural forest ecosystems and their processes on the Olympic Peninsula. Like Sullivan, she agrees that while the military needs to train, the methods the Navy is employing across Washington are unacceptable.

"Navy SEALs must be well-trained for any situation," she told Truthout.

"However, given the fact that there are already many beaches throughout the country where they are currently training, in addition to having a new 60-acre Pacific Ocean complex in San Diego County that adds 1.5 million square feet of coastal development, I question the need to add our pristine beaches to their inventory. Landing on the beaches is only the first step; combat training typically includes the use of ordnance weapons."

Gallant sees the use of Fort Worden State Park in particular as an egregious example of what the Navy's exercises can do to a once-pristine area.

"Because Fort Worden was a military base long ago and is now a historical park, this may give the Navy a good excuse to reclaim it as yet another post/training area – thereby preventing us from enjoying our leisurely walks, exercises, environmental training of marine life, bird watching, photographing, and communing with nature. Paradise ruined,"


she said.

Truthout has [reported extensively](#) on the wide-scale negative impacts the Navy's war gaming has had, and will have, on wildlife around the region.

Nevertheless, the Navy is poised to move forward with its exercises, and according to Sullivan, it is doing so using nefarious, illegal methods.

"The Navy will retrofit an environmental assessment [EA] for the places where they've already done their war games all around Puget Sound, but eight new sites for 2016 will likely be exempted from the EA via a self-declared 'categorical exclusion,'"

she said. "This is illegal because the new sites are a part of the big picture and cannot legally be separated from them."

 Image: Naval documents show specific areas, like this state park area, where beach landings of SEAL teams could take place, including areas where war gaming could take place. (Image: Document obtained by Dahr Jamail)

Categorical Exclusion

The Navy is using an exemption process called a categorical exclusion (CATEX) as a means of sidestepping federal regulations that could prohibit its use of these areas for exercises.

By definition, a [categorical exclusion](#) is

"a category of actions which do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment, and, for which, therefore, neither an environmental assessment nor an environmental impact statement is required."

According to an email obtained by Truthout, the Navy intends to issue its own CATEX on some of the SEAL activities as a means to segment and hide the full scope of its actions. Other communications have revealed that the Navy will retrofit an EA for the big action but will continue to CATEX pieces of it to keep it going.

The email also said,

"... the Navy, without any consultation or concurrence with Washington's State Historic Preservation Officer [SHPO], has concluded in the CATEX that there is no effect on historic properties and therefore no need to consult with the SHPO."

The Navy's method essentially ensures that it will get its way, as there is not going to be time for a full and legitimate EA and public process period between now and mid-January (in just a few days), when it begins its exercises for at least the second year in a row.

A glance at the [Code of Federal Regulation citation](#) for this shows that the Navy's actions are anything but uncontroversial, or consistent with federal, state or local laws. They

certainly do not fall into the categories of public transportation, emergency utility repairs or improvements to existing rest areas and weigh stations, for which categorical exclusions were originally intended.

Hence, in the case of these upcoming exercises across Washington State coastlines, the Navy is issuing its own categorical exclusions for a massive amount of covert training in civilian-populated areas. By doing so, it is circumventing state, local and possibly federal governments by concluding “no significant impacts” in its own assessments – and it continues to proceed in secret.

“Realistic Military Training”

The Navy defines realistic military training (RMT) as training that is “conducted outside of federally owned property.”

Hence, according to that definition and according to the US military’s Special Operations Command (SOCOM), the RMT process is theoretically designed to ensure coordination between US Department of Defense representatives and local and regional officials in the areas where their exercises are to be conducted.

Steps like risk assessments, medical plans, surveys of training areas and coordinating their activities with local, state and federal law enforcement officials are supposed to be mandatory.

However, in the Navy’s upcoming coastal exercise, not one of the measures listed by SOCOM has been offered to the public or to local or state officials in Washington, and no publicly available documentation exists that such measures have ever been considered.

According to SOCOM, the purpose of RMT is “[t]o hone advanced skills, [and] the military and interagency require large areas of undeveloped land with low population densities with access to small towns.”

Yet, many of the areas outlined in the Navy’s documents for their upcoming exercises take place in populated areas, on developed land.

Well over 100,000 people live on the Olympic Peninsula alone, and Olympic National Park hosts 3 million visitors per year.

“This is particularly galling with Navy SEALs about to conduct insertions, extractions, launch and recovery, special reconnaissance and other activities with ‘simulated weapons’ in populated areas without the knowledge of the public,” Sullivan said.

“Training like that cannot be considered anything but RMT. The fact that the public is completely unaware of it because the Navy has not notified them, despite legal obligations via NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] and policy obligations as described in the SOCOM presentation, is further evidence of its intent to deceive the public and circumvent the law.”

There are numerous other RMT-type events that have occurred around the United States in recent years, including “urban” training events in various communities around the country.

A December 2015 US Army report titled “[Intelligence Support to Urban Operations](#)”

addresses challenges facing military action in an urban environment.

“With the continuing growth in the world’s urban areas and increasing population concentrations in urban areas, the probability that Army forces will conduct operations in urban environments is ever more likely,” [the manual](#) states.

Clearly, the Navy’s training in Washington is also focused along these lines as well.

“The enemy situation is often extremely fluid – locals friendly to us today may be tomorrow’s belligerents,” the manual continues. “Adversaries seek to blend in with the local population to avoid being captured or killed. Enemy forces who are familiar with the city layout have an inherently superior awareness of the current situation.”

Military training for combat in urban environments, like the Navy’s upcoming exercises in Washington, has [been ongoing at bases](#) around the country, with the goal of preparing soldiers for close-contact engagements [within urban environments](#). As recently as [March 2015 in South Carolina, Operation Vigilant Guard](#) saw large deployments of troops in civilian areas for training.

Sullivan sees these actions, and in particular the upcoming naval exercises across Washington State, in an insidious light.

“The real story here is the fact that kill teams in training will be conducting covert operations in and around residential communities and on public lands without our knowledge,” she said.

Sullivan believes the general public needs to be concerned about the Navy’s actions, along with the ongoing domestic military expansion as a whole, because they both present “an unprecedented and unlawful taking of public and private space for military activity.” She points out that there is no plausible justification for the Navy’s incursion into urban areas.

“The Navy has millions of acres of Defense Department land to train in,” Sullivan said. “Now they’re using and closing portions of our national forests. Why do they need to invade our neighborhoods, too?”

She also sees another threat from the Navy’s exercises in state parks and private lands: the normalization of military activity “in our lives and in places where it has historically never been.”

Like Gallant, Sullivan is not opposed to the military conducting trainings, in itself. She objects to the training happening in places where people live, work and recreate, and without the informed consent of the public.

“We object to the shell game that has passed for public process,” Sullivan said.

“We object to the Navy’s apparent contempt for the laws of the land, and to the fact that the military is steadily moving off the millions of acres of land the public has given it for training, in order to practice warfare among us, the very citizens it is supposed to protect.”

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His third book, [*The Mass Destruction of Iraq: Why It Is Happening, and Who Is Responsible*](#), co-written with [*William Rivers Pitt*](#), is available now on Amazon. He lives and works in Washington State.

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