

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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Inside Missile Defense
28 September, 2005

While questions loom over how well the United States could defend Taiwan if China attacked the island nation, a number of analysts are saying that economic and military buffers already in place would make such a showdown unlikely.

Government officials and China analysts gave testimony Sept. 15 at a U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission hearing to discuss the U.S. military preparedness against a Chinese attack on Taiwan.

James Keith, adviser for East Asian and Pacific affairs in the State Department, noted that the economic interaction between Taiwan and China would make conflict imprudent for either country. Taiwan is among the countries that have made the largest direct investments in China, said Keith. Further, Keith said that Taiwan goods accounted for 12 percent of all Chinese imports in 2004 and that China's

exports to Taiwan have increased 170 percent since 2001.

Commissioner Patrick Mulloy said the considerable interdependence of the Chinese and Taiwanese economies coupled with threats of war and independence gives a quality of "schizophrenia" to the situation.

Naval analyst Norman Polmar told sister publication Inside the Navy last month that China's investment in the United States would also make war unlikely because if conflict broke out, the United States would confiscate all of China's U.S. assets.

Retired Rear Adm. Eric McVadon, director of Asia-Pacific studies at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, said during the hearing that another significant deterrent is the simple fact that the People's Liberation Army could not win against the U.S. military.

"There is, in my view, no expectation that the PLA could in the foreseeable future prevail in an all-out, head-to-head war against the U.S. military," McVadon said in his prepared statement.

While China's military has become significantly more advanced in recent years, the PLA could not compete with more experienced U.S. troops and more advanced U.S. command and control capabilities, he added.

Commission Chairman Richard D'Amato had a similar opinion of China's operating capabilities. He said that China is apparently seeking ways to outmaneuver the United States in a conflict with Taiwan, but added that while China may be rapidly acquiring submarines, the country still lacks a capability to coordinate an effective submarine attack.

"I think it takes a long time for a service to develop effective capabilities in the subsurface environment," D'Amato said.

McVadon said the United States could prevent war by reminding China that conflict would not serve the interests of the country.

"We must convince the Chinese that [war] does not serve their interest, that they probably will not get Taiwan back, and that China will be the country hurt the most in this foolish undertaking," he said.

Assertions of greater independence from the mainland country could trigger a war between the United States and China. Tensions have existed between China and the island since 1949, when Nationalist leaders fled to Taiwan and established residence there during China's Communist takeover. Since the 2000 election of President Chen Shui-bian, some political groups in Taiwan are pushing for extra steps toward greater independence from the mainland such as creating a new flag and changing the official name of the country.

China has threatened to use military force to gain control of the island and passed "anti-secessionist" legislation aimed at Taiwan in March 2005. Meanwhile, President Bush has said the United States will defend the island country if China launched an attack.

Many individuals at the hearing expressed concern that conflict with China was imminent and that the United States was unprepared for a military engagement with the country.

Rep. Rob Simmons (R-CT) said that China's rapid acquisition of submarines troubled him because an effective submarine force would be the key to winning a conflict over Taiwan. Simmons said that China has 55 attack submarines, slightly more than the U.S. Navy's 54. Further, China has at least 25 submarines under contract and 16 are under construction now, he said.

Additionally, China is developing four different types of submarines -- three fast attack classes and one ballistic missile "boomer" that could fire at the continental United States from the Chinese coast, the lawmaker said.

"Today, China is buying new submarines literally by the dozen," Simmons said in his prepared testimony. "Current trends will give

China at least a 2-1 numerical advantage over the U.S. submarine fleet by 2025 -- probably sooner."

Simmons had earlier pointed to the important role of submarines in the future force when trying to save the New London Submarine Base in Connecticut from closure. Inside the Navy reported in August that Simmons tried to convince the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to remove the installation from the Navy's list of closure recommendations by emphasizing the importance of the base's work. The BRAC panel ultimately decided to keep the base open.

Simmons also noted that China is gradually moving its naval forces along the South Sea in what could be interpreted as better positioning to take Taiwan.

"From there, China will be best positioned to use its long-range anti-ship cruise missiles to defend the normal U.S. approaches from the Pacific and Indian Oceans," he said.

McVadon argued that the most effective way for China to overtake Taiwan before the United States could help would be by using ballistic missiles, not submarines.

"Those [ballistic missiles] will allow them to completely get around our superiority in submarine warfare," he said. "You don't have to worry about submarines when you carry ballistic missiles."

McVadon noted that China has made significant achievements recently in ballistic missile development.

China has tested inaccurate short-range ballistic missiles carrying conventional warheads in mainland provinces opposite Taiwan, McVadon said. The CSS-6 and CSS-7 missiles have now grown in number and accuracy to become militarily useful, he said.

China now is capable of deploying for conventional use a medium-range ballistic missile called the DF-21C, he said.

"Being an MRBM with a much higher reentry velocity than SRBMs, the DF-21C is virtually invulnerable to any missile defenses Taiwan might contemplate for the foreseeable future," he wrote in his prepared testimony.

McVadon also said China possesses exceedingly accurate land-attack cruise missiles that are "virtually guaranteed successful impacts on their targets."

Further, the United States was not on a hair-trigger to protect Taiwan and that if China decided to attack, the island nation might surrender before the United States could intervene, he said.

Like the testimony from Simmons and McVadon, the Defense Department's July 2004 report on China's military power emphasizes the growing ballistic missile and submarine capability of the Chinese. The report indicates that the Chinese arsenal includes about 650 to 730 conventionally armed short-range ballistic missiles. Additionally, DOD reported that Beijing is producing domestic Song-class submarine, acquiring more Russian Kilo-class submarines and developing a new Yuan-class conventional submarine and the Type-093 nuclear attack submarine.

The DOD report also highlights China's improving anti-ship cruise missile capabilities. The Pentagon asserts that China's objectives for these weapons include improving closure speed and extending attack range.

"Beijing continues to see threat and possible use of force as integral to its policy of dissuading Taiwan from pursuing independence," reads the report. "Over the long term, if current trends persist, PLA capabilities could pose a credible threat to other modern militaries operating in the region."

The U.S. position on Taiwanese sovereignty is somewhat ambiguous. President Bush has said that the United States would defend Taiwan, but also that he opposes Taiwanese independence.

The Bush administration supports the status quo with a semi-autonomous Taiwan, but would also be in favor of peaceful reconciliation between the two countries, Keith said.

Commissioner June Dreyer said that Bush's opposition to Taiwanese independence is troubling because Taiwan would be then the only country for which the U.S. would not support self-determination.

"This is scary to me because the United States itself was born of a self-determining people and Britain was certainly a much nicer colonial power than the People's Republic of China would be," Dreyer said.

During a Sept. 19 speech at the Heritage Foundation, Liam Fox, shadow foreign secretary for the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom, hit on several factors that could lead China to pick a fight over Taiwan.

A rise in nationalism has accompanied a surge in the Chinese economy and China's growing power may encourage it to take action against Taiwan, according to Fox.

"Compared to reunification with Taiwan, no prize is too big to sacrifice," Fox said. "It is an issue which in the eyes of Beijing is a question of national pride."

Fox said that while China is enjoying a growing economy, the boom will continue only as long as the Chinese government allows free market growth. The Communist government may feel compelled to invade Taiwan to divert attention from a future economic failure, Fox said.

Additionally, Fox speculated that China might be reluctant to move against Taiwan while Bush, who has a history of taking military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, still serves in the White House. However, Fox added China might not be so hesitant if a Democrat took office.

"They'll probably look at the current White House and say than any question of dealing with Taiwan in a military way is out of the question with George Bush in the White House, but were

a rather less self-confident president, particularly probably a Democrat, in the White House, China might not feel as dissuaded," Fox said.

While hearing testimony focused on China's capacity to take Taiwan and what the U.S. response could be if China mounted an attack, witnesses also pointed out the many economic and military defenses already in place that would probably prevent conflict.

While debate continues on whether the United States and China could go to war, questions are being raised whether the United States even should intervene on Taiwan's behalf.

Edward Ross, an official at the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, suggested the United States might not come to the aid of Taiwan if the country does not make a greater effort with its defenses. In a Sept. 19 speech at the U.S.-Taiwan Business Council-Defense Industry Conference in San Diego, Ross called upon Taiwan to approve a special defense budget to procure defense items from the United States.

"The U.S. ability to contribute to Taiwan's defense in a crisis is going to be measured against Taiwan's ability to resist, defend and survive based on its own capabilities," said Ross.

The special defense budget would allow Taiwan to procure arms from the United States in a purchase approved by Bush in his first year of office. In 2001, the administration approved a sale to Taiwan of eight diesel electric submarines and 12 P-3C anti-submarine aircraft, as well as 54 torpedoes, 44 Harpoon submarine-launched anti-ship missiles and Patriot Advanced Capability-3 systems.

Ross said that politics are holding up approval of the sale in the rules committee of the Taiwanese legislature. The procedural committee has rejected the sale 28 times, Ross said.

Ross argued that Taiwan should increase its military spending to take a responsible defensive stance against China, applauding the Taiwanese

president's decision to raise defense spending to 3 percent of the government's total budget.

Simmons also reprimanded Taiwan for failing to approve the U.S. arms purchases. Like Ross, Simmons suggested that the United States might not come to Taiwan's aid if the country does not make a greater defense effort.

"The American people have come to the aid of foreign countries in the name of freedom many times in our history, but Americans will not in good [conscience] support countries that are unwilling to defend themselves," Simmons said.

McVadon said that Taiwan might be reluctant to purchase the defense goods from the United States because they would have no effect in stopping a Chinese invasion.

"It will have almost no effect if China chooses to conduct an overwhelming attack of medium and short range missiles, all of which can defeat those systems very readily," McVadon said. "These people in Taiwan are not, as has been suggested earlier, ignoring their defenses."

McVadon said that Taiwanese who recognized that the American defense goods would not work for them have decided to build anti-missile capabilities of their own, which McVadon said is also a dangerous task for Taiwan to undertake.

The retired admiral added, however, that Taiwan should buy the U.S. goods for at least the semblance of defense against China. -- Chris Johnson

REG REFORM: Federal agency efficiency legislation may not move soon

Environment and Energy Daily
28 September, 2005

Rachel L. Gould, E&E Daily reporter
Legislation to review federal programs and departments for efficiency will likely be shelved as key officials struggle to find agreement over details, according to a House Democrat close to the issue. The House Federal Workforce and Agency Organization Subcommittee reviewed

two bills yesterday, H.R. 3276 and H.R. 3277, that would establish a "Results Commission" to review the efficiency of government programs and a "Sunshine Commission" that would establish a 10-year review of federal programs to determine their value. Both bills were introduced by the White House Office of Management and Budget and endorsed by President Bush. Rep. Danny Davis (D-Ill.), a member of the subcommittee, told reporters after the hearing he does not expect the legislation to end up on the House floor soon, "I think it's going to be some time," Davis said. "It's been sort of on the back burner." Issues likely to stir debate before the bills move forward include the distinction between the evaluation of government programs as opposed to agencies as a whole, the process for deciding which programs will be evaluated by the commissions and the nomination process for commission members. Currently, the bill says each commission will include seven representatives -- three nominated by the president and one each by the House and Senate majority and minority leaders. "The American people are demanding that we reduce wasteful spending," Rep. Jon Porter (R-Nev.), the lead sponsor on the Results legislation, said in the hearing.

Both Porter and Davis noted the issue could achieve more relevancy in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The commissions have been compared to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC). Like the BRAC commission, recommendations based on the findings would have to be approved by Congress as a whole, not piece by piece. Subcommittee members questioned Clay Johnson, deputy director of the White House Office of Budget Management, on the specifics of both provisions. Johnson described the bills as an interaction between the executive branch and Congress with a "primary focus on improved performance." The Results Commission would address the degree to which there is overlap among government programs and agencies, whereas the Sunset Commission would address a list of specific programs up for review to determine their effectiveness. Nearly half of states have a type of Sunset Commission to evaluate programs and spending, a model Johnson said officials used in writing the bill.

D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D), the most outspoken opponent of the bills, asked members to consider the political implications of moving toward a system of "expedited procedures" where one political party can control the future of programs simply because it controls the presidency and Congress. "I think this is a radical assault on separation of powers," she said. "And I can't see Congress doing it."

CNO Holds All Hands Call at NAS Oceana

Federal Information and News Dispatch, Inc.
US Department of Defense Information
28 September, 2005
By Journalist 3rd Class John Michael Cokos,
Fleet Public Affairs Center Atlantic

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (NNS) -- Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Mullen visited Naval Air Station Oceana Sept. 27 and talked to Sailors about the future of the U.S. Navy in the 21st century.

"I'm blessed to be in a command position in a Navy this good," Mullen said. "The statistics look good and retention is high."

Mullen stressed the importance of the Navy's ability to adapt to change and future additions to the Navy mission, including increased participation in detainee operations in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and operations in Africa.

"We live in uncertain times and we need to be ready," Mullen said, referring to the Fleet Response Plan as an example. "There is no better example of the effectiveness of the Fleet Response Plan than the 19-ship response from the Navy after Hurricane Katrina."

Mullen briefly discussed BRAC issues and suggested officials would be closer to a decision in late November.

"We have to find out the right thing for the long run for Virginia, Virginia Beach and the Navy," said Mullen. I can't be predictive, but I will tell you what I know, when I know it. The BRAC

cycle is scheduled to happen from 2006-2011, so [changes] won't happen tomorrow, next week or next month."

Mullen said the Navy is studying options for the future of a master jet base on the east coast. The study should be completed by late November or early December.

He also discussed the roles individual Sailors play in the 21st century Navy.

"Every Sailor is a leader," said Mullen, "from the seaman recruit on up."

Following his comments, the CNO opened the floor to the Sailors for a question and answer session on various topics.

For more news from around the fleet, visit <http://www.navy.mil> .

Sen. Isakson Sponsors Legislation to Address Challenges of Energy Supply

US Fed News
28 September, 2005

The office of Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., issued the following press release:

Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) today announced that he is co-sponsoring legislation to help expand U.S. oil refining capacity and create job opportunities in the wake of the damage to U.S. refineries from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"Encouraging the creation of new refineries is one crucial step to addressing the challenges of our nation's energy supply and to creating jobs," said Isakson, a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. "With skyrocketing gas prices and the damage to our refineries from these two hurricanes, we must seek every way possible to increase U.S. refining capacity."

Specifically, the Gas Petroleum Refiner Improvement and Community Empowerment Act will provide incentives to build oil refineries at Base Closure and Realignment Commission sites through the Economic Development

Administration. This will expand our nation's refining capacity while creating job opportunities in areas where a military facility has been closed or designated for closure. The legislation was introduced by Environment and Public Works Chairman James Inhofe (R-Okla.) along with Sens. George Voinovich (R-Ohio), Jim DeMint (R-S.C.), John Thune (R-S.D.) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska).

The Economic Development Administration, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Environment and Public Works Committee, is the civilian agency that assists BRAC communities with the transition of the military base to private use.

The supply disruptions caused by Hurricane Katrina required EPA to issue fuel waivers to allow the use of conventional fuel in special or boutique fuel areas. The bill also allows for states to be held harmless under the law if they are acting pursuant to an emergency.

In addition, the legislation improves efficiency by requiring the EPA's Natural Gas Star Program to provide grants to identify and use methane emission reduction technologies and will also provide for the development of future fuels.

Local News Articles

Oklahoma's U.S. Senator Inhofe and U.S. Rep. Istook introduce refinery incentive legislation

The Journal Record (Oklahoma City, OK)
28 September, 2005

U.S. Sen. James Inhofe, R-Tulsa, and U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Warr Acres, have introduced legislation in light of the recent hurricanes and their effects on the oil and gas industry.

The legislation is aimed mostly at increasing the number of refineries.

Inhofe on Tuesday introduced the Gas Petroleum Refiner Improvement and Community Empowerment Act (Gas PRICE

Act), which would provide incentives to build refineries at Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) sites through the Economic Development Administration (EDA). It would expand refining capacity in the nation and would create job opportunities where military facilities have been closed or designated for closure, Inhofe said.

Istook co-sponsored legislation that would ease restrictions that have blocked construction of new oil refineries. HR 3836 - also known as the Fuel Supply Improvement Act (FSIA) would help those interested have the opportunity to build a refinery, Istook said. No refinery has been built since 1976.

Also, U.S. Rep. Tom Cole, R-Moore, was appointed to the Gas Price Task Force by House Majority Whip Roy Blunt, R-Mo. The panel will look at the fuel supply crisis and prices.

Inhofe said back-to-back hurricanes have necessitated a change.

"The devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita further emphasizes the need to address the weaknesses in our nation's energy policy," Inhofe said in a statement. "This bill embraces President Bush's proposal for building refineries on BRAC sites and will provide incentives through EDA, which will, in turn, provide high paying jobs to the people who need them most. This is a win-win solution to a serious need."

Istook said the Fuel Supply Improvement Act, like Inhofe's plan, would help alleviate any shortages.

"Allowing energy companies to expand by building additional refineries elsewhere will make gas more affordable and have a huge economic impact," Istook said in a statement.

Istook cited Cushing, a town about 75 miles northeast of Oklahoma City, as an example of a place willing to put in a refinery. He said Cushing is the "hub" of oil pipelines and added that three-fourths of all crude flows through the community.

Istook said Cushing has space for 23 million barrels of oil.

"Common sense says we should build more refineries in Oklahoma, especially near Cushing," he said. "The town already has the infrastructure in place and land available for a huge plant. It would be a perfect fit. And it doesn't hurt that Oklahoma is far away from the Gulf Coast, where the hurricanes have disrupted refineries."

Istook's bill would "dramatically" speed the process for oil companies to get refining permits and allow "risk insurance that pays for the costs of delays from frivolous litigation, bureaucratic red tape and other events that are out of the applicants' control."

Cole said the Gas Price Task Force will keep an eye on rising prices.

"I am looking forward to working with this task force to better understand the sharp increase in gas prices and find practical solutions that will ease the prices at the pump," Cole said.

Flight-pattern changes sought; MARCH BASE: At issue are discrepancies over the routes German-based shipper DHL would use.

Press Enterprise (Riverside, CA)
28 September, 2005

Local public officials said Tuesday that they will seek federal permission to modify the flight pattern at March Air Reserve Base amid disclosures that the developer of a DHL distribution center circulated an inaccurate map.

Riverside Councilman Frank Schiavone said private developer GlobalPort provided him and other public officials with a map erroneously showing DHL would not be flying over the populated Mission Grove and Orangecrest neighborhoods. The actual flight route goes over those areas.

"There was a misrepresentation to us and consequently to the public," said Schiavone, one

of eight commissioners on the March Joint Powers Authority, a public agency charged with redeveloping surplus property at the joint-use military base.

Assemblyman John J. Benoit, R-Palm Desert, said he supported the DHL project because of the GlobalPort map indicating planes would not be flying over rooftops.

The GlobalPort map was often displayed at public meetings, where hundreds of area homeowners turned out to oppose the DHL project because of concerns about noise and pollution.

"I join the public in feeling disappointment over discrepancies in the map," said Benoit, pledging to back any flight-pattern modifications that would lessen the impacts of airplanes on the surrounding communities.

GlobalPort's managing partner Greg Diodati said in a voice message late Monday that he does not know why the map is an issue now that the DHL project has gone through public hearings and won approval from the March Joint Powers Commission.

The German-based, express-delivery giant is set to begin flight operations Oct. 7 at March.

In his message, Diodati said GlobalPort has consistently maintained DHL would use the Federal Aviation Administration-approved arrival and departure route of other aircraft flying into March, including the 1,200 civilian airliners used to transport military personnel during the war in Iraq.

But the map distributed by GlobalPort showed a different route.

Schiavone said the civilian airliners have come and gone from the base with no public complaints about noise.

Although Schiavone said elected officials are unhappy to learn they were provided an inaccurate map, he contends the DHL planes would also come and go unnoticed.

Area residents who launched a failed legal effort to halt the DHL plans said elected officials had an obligation to know what they were voting to approve.

"It's such an outrage that they would lie to us," said Murrieta resident Catherine Barrett Fischer, who leads the Riverside grass-roots environmental group, Community Alliance for Riverside's Economy and Environment.

Fischer said her group is reconsidering its legal options now that the FAA has confirmed the GlobalPort map was inaccurate.

FAA officials have said DHL would need FAA approval to fly the path represented on the widely circulated GlobalPort map, and no such application has been made.

The March Joint Powers Authority is made up of elected officials from Riverside County and the cities of Moreno Valley, Perris and Riverside.

The authority's executive committee meets Oct. 5 and is poised to recommend approaching the Air Force and the FAA for a modification in the flight pattern at March, said Commissioner Richard Stewart, Moreno Valley's mayor.

Stewart said the JPA believed the flight patterns at March would likely be redrawn at the conclusion of the latest Base Realignment and Closure round, which will conclude later this year.

Stewart said there were fears that the realignment process would close or radically scale back March even as the DHL proposal went through the public hearing process.

"We felt that as long as the BRAC process was going on, the less said about noise the better. We didn't want to hurt March," he said.

Stewart and Phil Rizzo, executive director of the JPA, denied any intentional attempt to deceive the public. Stewart said trying to mislead people who live under the flight path makes no sense and only creates ill will among DHL's neighbors.

"Why would you want to exist in an environment where people are hostile to you?" Stewart said.

Riverside County Supervisor Bob Buster, the only joint-powers commissioner to vote against the DHL project, said he wants an analysis of how the GlobalPort map was drawn and widely circulated.

"I think I am going to find out why the (JPA) staff is still defending this whole thing. The rules are pretty plain and it is very clear the map was wrong. It's not even marginal," Buster said.

Panel puts hex on BRAC, hopes bill dies in House

San Antonio Express-News

28 September, 2005

By Gary Martin, EXPRESS-NEWS
WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON -- A last-ditch effort to block the base closure recommendations from becoming law cleared a legislative hurdle Tuesday when a panel voted to move the bill to the full House for consideration.

The House Armed Services Committee voted to send the base closure rejection bill to the full chamber, but with a message urging lawmakers not to stop the process.

Congress never has rejected base closure recommendations, and legislative leaders in the House and Senate predict approval for a list to close or realign 55 installations, including Brooks City-Base and Ingleside Naval Station.

San Antonio would see big gains under the recommendations, which would locate combat medical training at Fort Sam Houston and transform Brooke Army Medical Center into one of two military mega-centers for health care.

The bill, introduced by Rep. Ray LaHood, R-Ill., and Rep. Harold Ford, D-Tenn., would scrap the process and reject recommendations by the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, commonly called BRAC.

Those recommendations would close 22 major installations and realign 33 others for a savings of \$37 billion over 20 years.

"It is wrong that we are closing and realigning bases while we are at war," said LaHood, who would see an Air National Guard unit moved from his congressional district under the BRAC proposals.

Rep. Solomon Ortiz, D-Corpus Christi, is urging the House to reject the base closure recommendations, citing the lack of military presence on the Gulf Coast if Ingleside is closed.

Large gains at Fort Bliss prompted Rep. Silvestre Reyes, D-El Paso, to vote to move the

bill to the full House with a negative recommendation for its passage.

President Bush approved the BRAC list Sept. 15.

By law, Congress has 45 days to reject the closures, a measure that lawmakers failed to take in four previous base closure rounds in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995.

The BRAC law allows lawmakers to file legislation to block the process. The full House has 20 days to act on the action by the committee.

Texas National Guard sets up Houston field hospital

San Antonio Express-News
28 September, 2005

By Sig Christenson, EXPRESS-NEWS
MILITARY WRITER

HOUSTON -- The Texas National Guard set up a field hospital Tuesday on Ellington Field as local disaster officials prepared for the possible transfer of patients from medical facilities bulging with evacuees from Hurricane Rita.

The hospital, established in a vacant building on the base, will be a way station for evacuees moved from overcrowded medical facilities in a 31-county area surrounding Houston.

In all, 624 residents of areas hit by the storm checked into some of the 92 hospitals in a nine-county area around Houston, said Frank Michel, spokesman for Mayor Bill White.

"The situation is fluid," said Michel, who did not know how many evacuees were admitted into area hospitals Tuesday. "It was worse yesterday, it's better today, and we expect it to be even more improved tomorrow."

The Texas Guard field hospital, staffed by about 70 airmen from nine states -- including units in San Antonio and Houston -- aims to relieve pressure on area hospitals that have taken in

extra patients from East Texas and the Gulf Coast.

Some hospitals are closed, while others run with skeleton crews. The Guard will send patients by helicopter to less-crowded facilities once they are stabilized.

The mini-MASH unit is part of a beehive of activity at Ellington, marked for downsizing in the year's BRAC round, but today the nerve center for Texas' response to Hurricane Rita recovery operations. Army and Coast Guard Helicopters took off and landed, while F-16C Fighting Falcons scrambled twice, once for President Bush's aerial tour of the region. Air Force One landed without Bush, refueled and left.

Ellington has been a hub for Texas' response to Rita since Sept. 18, and had supported relief operations for Hurricane Katrina. Teams here coordinate recovery operations around the clock behind a locked blue door. A sign announces, "Warning. It is unlawful to enter this area without permission of the installation commander."

"One of the biggest learning points about these two operations, Rita and Katrina, for the Houston area is the need for a robust military presence somewhere in Southeast Texas along the western Gulf Coast that has the capability to respond both on surface air and water," said Col. Lanny McNeely, chief of the Texas Guard's 147th Fighter Wing.

The wing's 17 F-16Cs fly combat air patrols over a larger stretch of coastline now that the Louisiana Air National Guard's 159th Fighter Wing no longer flies out of New Orleans. Its pilots and ground crews have just returned from a tour of Iraq, but are helping with Rita recovery duties.

"The problem was Iraq, and now the problem is just hurricane relief," said Lt. Col. Sherrill Daugherty, 42, the commander of the 111th Fighter Squadron.

CW3 Kevin C. Franks, 37, of San Antonio marked his 17th anniversary in uniform by sitting on a broiling tarmac late in the afternoon preparing for a flight to Buna, west of the Texas-Louisiana state line. He took a call from his wife, Kathryn, and got some advice for dealing with the media.

"Say something nice," she said.

Back at the hospital, the emergency room took shape. Far from being new and shiny, it's in a modest 20-year-old building a little larger than a convenience store and bears signs of its past use. One section of the building is marked "Electronics," while another says "Toyland."

Portable dividers separate 10 cots in the patient care ward from six litters mounted on wheels, three to be used for initial examinations and three others for intensive care. Plastic sheets are taped to the floor in the ICU, a bank of life-support monitors behind the litters.

Lt. Col. Craig Manifold, a 42-year-old San Antonio ER doctor leading the small hospital, called it an "austere environment" but noted it works. It also can expand to the 147th Fighter Wing's clinic.

"We don't know when to anticipate the arrival of the first patient, but it would certainly be OK with us if no patients were required to come through here," he said.

BRAC plan, and Oceana's fate, move forward

Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, Virginia)
28 September, 2005
By Dale Eisman

WASHINGTON -- Hopes that Congress might overrule a base closing commission's demand that Virginia and the city of Virginia Beach roll back development around Oceana Naval Air Station all but disappeared on Tuesday, as a House committee signed off on the plan.

The House Armed Services Committee's 43-14 vote set the stage for floor action as early as next

week on the base restructuring plans of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission. With the Bush administration and the House Republican leadership -- plus a substantial number of Democrats -- backing the plan, opponents conceded they can do little to stop it.

The commission recommended closing nearly two dozen major bases and restructuring more than 30, including Oceana. It estimates that the moves will save taxpayers about \$ 15 billion over 20 years.

"We knew it would be difficult," said Rep. Thelma Drake, R-2nd District, one of only three committee members to speak against the commission plan. Drake assailed recommendations that she said could force Virginia Beach to either give up a base that has been a vital part of the community for generations or evict thousands of residents, including some who have held their land since before Oceana opened in the 1940s.

The commission plan "defies every statement that was made by the Navy," Drake added. Navy leaders complained that the city has gone too far in permitting residential and commercial development along Oceana's flight paths but told the commission they could find no practical alternative for their East Coast "master jet base."

The commission decided otherwise, ordering more than 200 Navy fighters moved from Oceana to Cecil Field, a former naval air station near Jacksonville, Fla., unless Virginia Beach agrees to spend at least \$ 15 million annually to clear homes and businesses from around the base. While the armed services panel rejected a "resolution of disapproval" on the BRAC Commission's plan, even some who supported the recommendations assailed the closing process.

The commission's \$ 15 billion savings estimate amounts to less than \$ 1 billion annually, relatively little in a defense budget that now approaches \$ 500 billion. "If the best estimate of savings is less than \$ 1 billion per year, how can

we justify going through with this?" asked Rep. Neil Abercrombie, D-Hawaii.

Rep. Ike Skelton, D-Mo., a supporter of the BRAC process, said the Defense Department distorted the BRAC law to advance its vision of a reshaped military rather than using the law as Congress intended -- to shed excess facilities.

"Unfortunately, the missteps of this round will be long-lasting and I doubt we will see another round," Skelton said.

Texas Roadhouse asks for approval to open Watertown, N.Y., restaurant

Watertown Daily Times
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The place for Texas steaks is outer Arsenal Street.

Texas Roadhouse, Louisville, Ky., a steakhouse chain with more than 200 locations across the country, plans to open a restaurant adjacent to Pioneer Plaza, home of Kmart and Hannaford SuperStore.

"We started looking at where we could expand in New York, and we had a good broker in Syracuse who said he had a good piece of dirt with good stores around it," said Peter J. Brooks, senior real estate manager for Texas Roadhouse. "The people up there looked like our kind of customers, regular Americans."

Mr. Brooks said the Fort Drum expansion was not the primary reason for selecting Watertown as a site for a new restaurant -- the city has a dense population and is close to a major highway -- but he said having the Army post nearby helped.

"We would have been a little leery if the BRAC commission pulled the plug on that base," he said.

According to the company's Web site, Texas Roadhouse is a family restaurant that serves hand-cut steaks, ribs and freshly baked bread.

Dale L. Van Epps, director of retail operations for Pioneer Companies, which is selling the Arsenal Street property to Texas Roadhouse, would not disclose the sale price. He said he hopes to have the deal closed in the next month.

The Jefferson County Planning Board reviewed the Texas Roadhouse site plan Tuesday. The town of Watertown Planning Board will review the site plan next week.

Turning from dinner to movies, the county Planning Board on Tuesday also reviewed the site plan for a proposed drive-in in the village of Black River. John F. Nagelschmidt and partner Loren E. Knapp, both of Fulton, want to rehabilitate the Black River Drive-In in the town of LeRay on Route 3.

Mr. Nagelschmidt said he bought the property 10 years ago and would have started operating the drive-in then, but he needed municipal water and sewer service, which were not available at the time. The two men have already cleared the site of debris and have had an architect begin designing a larger bathroom facility and concession stand.

"Drive-ins are a lot of fun," he said Tuesday. "I've been in the business for 44 years, and I've always enjoyed the business."

Mr. Nagelschmidt owns Midway Drive-In Theater, Minetto, and Mr. Knapp is a technician at the theater.

They hope to start projecting films by July 4, depending on how quickly the plan is approved by the county Planning Board and the town of LeRay Planning Board, and weather conditions.

Mr. Nagelschmidt said the theater will concentrate primarily on family-oriented movies.

"I'm not saying we won't run a few R movies, but the main customers at drive-ins are usually families," he said.

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes