

**OVERSEAS BASING COMMISSION
TESTIMONY**

**BEFORE THE BASE REALIGNMENT
AND CLOSURE COMMISSION**

JULY 18, 2005

Testimony of the Chairman, July 18, 2005

Good afternoon Chairman Principi and distinguished members of the BRAC Commission. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you.

My name is Al Cornella, and I serve as the Chairman of the Commission on the Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States, more commonly known as the Overseas Basing Commission (OSBC). I serve with five other Commissioners, three of whom are present today, Anthony Less, Vice Admiral, United States Navy (retired); Pete Taylor, Lieutenant General, United States Army (Retired); Keith Martin, Brigadier General, Pennsylvania Army National Guard (Retired). Unable to be with us today are the Commission Vice Chairman, Lew Curtis, Major General United States Air Force (Retired); and Dr. James Thomson, the CEO and president of RAND Corporation. I would also like to introduce the Commission's Executive Director, Ms. Patricia Walker.

By way of background, Congress created the Overseas Basing Commission in November 2003 to serve as an independent, unbiased entity to produce a report that advises Congress and the President on the current and future overseas basing structure of U.S. military forces.

Since it began its work in May 2004, the Commission consulted with current and former senior military leaders and other national security experts. We conducted public hearings where we received testimony from former military leaders, defense analysts, and experts on military family issues. We have engaged in briefings from the Department of Defense, the State Department, the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and other entities. We visited military installations in many countries spending two months abroad meeting with U.S. forces, embassy representatives, foreign military officers, and local officials. We met with the overseas Combatant Commands and Transportation Command, and in most cases with the commanders, as well as their staffs. In total, we have interacted with several thousand personnel at all levels on this important matter. The vast majority of these people were uniformed and civilian members of the Department of Defense. The Commission learned a great deal from these discussions, both here and abroad, and as a whole is both admiring and grateful for the good work done by all who are striving to put the overseas basing plan into effect.

We find the rebasing plan to be only one part of a significant reordering the United States has been undertaking of its security posture in recent years. While engaged in a global war on terror and continuing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, our military forces are shifting their basing posture overseas, bringing tens of thousands of service members and

their families home from permanent station abroad, reorganizing military units to reflect a fully integrated expeditionary force, designing and fielding major intelligence, communications, and supply systems, modernizing weapons systems and their platforms, and otherwise resetting and transforming themselves. The cumulative affect of all of this change means an altered alliance system abroad, a shift to basing the vast majority of combat power to the continental United States, and a fundamental redesign of the security apparatus of the nation. In its totality, this reorientation represents a watershed in national security on a scale last seen in the years immediately following World War II.

The Commission found that the overseas basing structure cannot be viewed as only of military consequence. The basing structure itself impacts upon a myriad of other security related considerations including alliance structures, foreign policy, trade and energy policies, and so on. In consideration of such broad implications, the Commission believes that the global rebasing plan would benefit from broader input from all relevant agencies and interests, such as the Departments of State, Energy, Justice, and Homeland Security, the intelligence agencies, and others.

The Commission is also concerned about the sequence of events. For example, we are already seeing stresses on recruitment due to the high probability of repeated deployments into Afghanistan and Iraq. As we move to cyclic rotations to new operating bases abroad, we put additional strains on service members and their families. For active duty members, up to 6 peacetime deployments overseas for up to a year at a time could occur within a 20 year career; for National Guard members it could be 4 rotations over a similar time span, with additional time away from home station for the necessary train-up and stand-down. Moreover, by shifting forces back to the continental United States, we are relying heavily on strategic and intra-theater lift and pre-positioned stocks to enable us to move forces into action wherever they might be needed. We note that although lift platforms are already over-stressed and pre-positioned stocks are being depleted by ongoing operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the budgetary plans to replace and upgrade them are, in the opinion of the Commission, insufficient. In several instances training complexes have not been established abroad, bilateral agreements remain uncompleted and in some cases new found allies are already asking us to leave. Studies and analyses such as the 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review and the current Mobility Capabilities Studies are uncompleted. We must question, therefore, what strategic imperatives exist for moving forward at the pace that we are.

We do not say to stop the process. The timetable should be determined by taking the following action: Ensure that the infrastructure—at least for the most basic needs of housing, schools, and medical facilities—is in place at receiving domestic locations before forces are moved from overseas. And, maintain the same level of quality of life at Overseas locations until the last units are moved. Next, have the necessary air and sealift

capabilities, plus prepositioned stocks in place before moving to a primarily continental United States-based force. In addition, have the Status of Forces Agreements, Access Agreements, and Article 98 Agreements in place at new overseas locations before leaving locations where such agreements already exist.

What we are putting in place today will have to serve our strategic needs for decades to come. At the same time, we must ensure that as we move through successive stages of change that we do not find ourselves at some point weaker than we were at the preceding stage. History has shown that such vulnerabilities can prove costly in blood and national treasure.

While we can admire the dedication and courage it has taken to put in motion the massive amount of change now being implemented, we are reminded that in the end the decisions already made are not written in stone. At times, they may be made before all elements of information have been considered or were even available. In the end, such monumental decisions are made by individuals. As such, decisions made rapidly can become, if we fail to adequately review them, mistakes made rapidly.

The Commission, therefore, recommends a wider policy discussion accompanied by broader oversight and guidance, closer Congressional oversight, and a reconsideration of the pacing and sequencing of the many interrelated activities. Not to do so puts our national interests at stake, makes the hard choices between budgetary allocations more problematic than they have to be, and may unduly strain the well being of service members' and their families and with that the sustainability of a volunteer armed force.

We are, by and large, complimentary of the energy and skill that we have seen brought to bear in its implementation and believe that the endeavor is well founded and should not cease its forward movement. However, we note that none of our traditional allies have asked us to leave, that we are free to move at our own pace and that no strategic imperative dictates that we carry out the entire effort within the proposed time frame. Nor are we convinced by the notion advanced by some that the optimal time to affect such massive transformation is when we are in the midst of war. The order of magnitude of the strategic repositioning we are now undertaking occurs only once every several generations. Its consequences will affect America's position in the world well into the 21st Century. We would do well to get it right at the outset.

The Commission believes itself honored to have been asked to take on this review of the overseas basing plan. Commissions such as ours operate with a certain degree of independence and others may not always like or agree with the findings. Nonetheless, I believe that commissions—certainly as this one has—try to do what is best for the nation and not carry forth the agendas of any individual or entity. We serve above all in the interests of our nation. For that we are grateful, and appreciate the generosity of the BRAC Commission for allowing us to testify before you today.