

DEFENSE BASE CLOSURE AND REALIGNMENT COMMISSION
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MEMORANDUM OF MEETING

DATE: July 12, 2005

TIME: 9:30 AM

MEETING WITH: General Michael Loh (USAF Ret.)

SUBJECT: Ellsworth Air Force Base

PARTICIPANTS:

General Michael Loh

Senator Thune (attendee by conference call)

Bob Taylor/Legislative Director, Senator Thune's Office/202-228-5385

Matt Zabel/Chief of Staff, Senator Thune's Office/202-224-2321

Steve Moffitt/Principal, WHD Government Affairs/202-851-1428

Barry Rhoads/TRG/202-632-0040

Pat McElgunn/Director, Ellsworth Task Force/605-348-6317

*Murray Feldman/Counsel to Davis Mountains Trans Pecos Heritage Association,
Holland & Hart LLP/208-342-5000*

*Kaare Remme/Chairman, Davis Mountains Trans Pecos Heritage Association/
512-396-4828*

Commission Staff:

Frank Cirillo, Director of Review & Analysis

Bob Cook, Interagency Issues Team Leader

Ken Small, Air Force Team Leader

Dan Cowhig, Deputy General Counsel

Art Beauchamp, Senior Air Force Analyst

Tim MacGregor, Senior Air Force Analyst

Dave Combs, Senior Air Force Analyst

Craig Hall, GAO Analyst, Air Force Team

*** Tanya Cruz, GAO Analyst, Air Force Team**

Justin Breitschopf, Air Force Associate Analyst

MEETING SUMMARY:

We met with Gen. Loh as well as other officials to discuss the recommended closure of Ellsworth Air Force Base (AFB). Unless specifically mentioned, all information contained herein can be attributed to Gen. Loh or other non-BRAC officials participating in the meeting.

Gen. Loh is currently the unpaid mentor and advisor to the QDR team (Gen. Jumper requested his help). In the past, he has been very involved in the closure of several bases. Based on his experience, those bases recommended for closure were closed because the force structure at that base went away (e.g. B-52s). Therefore, he does not understand why the SecDef's recommendations call for closing bases where the force structure is staying around. Whereas it makes sense to close Cannon because F-16s would be retired under DoD's recommendation, it does not make sense to close Ellsworth.

Therefore, he wanted to help in this instance because the B-1s are not going away and he believes consolidating them all in one location is the wrong thing to do.

Our subsequent discussion is summarized below under the following broad topics:

Points to consider

- Gen. Loh's guiding principle for B-1s calls for no more than 36 bombers at one base. According to Gen. Loh, the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP) has nothing to do with this principle. Instead, it is based on a logistical, operational, and quality of life point of view. For example, if coordinating both logistics and training at one base, you reach a point of diminishing returns in terms of operational readiness. However, maintaining 24-36 B-1s at one base keeps logistics and operations in balance. Gen. Loh questioned why DoD would break up efficient operations at two bases to create inefficient operations at one base.
- The shifting of the National Security Strategy. Putting all the assets on one base makes it a very visible and inviting target. DoD needs to get serious about looking at the Western Pacific from a national security perspective. This issue calls into play the value of the long-range strike assets such as the B-1s and the caution necessary when tinkering with such a combat ready fleet.
- Gen. Loh believes there would be increased training opportunities and thus more opportunities for Command if more than one B-1 base exists. He said that if the Air Force was going to build 67 new bombers, they would, in all probability, put them on three bases as they have done in the past.

Speculation as to the reason for DoD's recommendation

- The B-1 is significantly undervalued in the military. The B-1 does not get as much attention as the fighters despite the fact that it is the backbone of the Air Force and was responsible for 34% of the weapons delivered in Iraq.
- DoD's cost analysis beat out its operations analysis. This is problematic given that some of the cost savings are not legitimate. For example, personnel savings are elusory because overall DoD is not cutting end strength.
- USAF's principle that consolidating like aircraft produces efficiencies.

Dyess Litigation

- As a result of a class action lawsuit, there are currently training range restrictions at Dyess. Dyess' primary low-level training route (IR-178) and the Lancer MOA, together known as the Realistic Bomber Training Initiative (RBTI), is controlled by a District court order. For example, flying is only allowed at 500 ft. or above for low-level routes. According to Gen. Loh, low-level training is necessary. Specifically, low-level entry training (at 100 ft.) to avoid detection is still very important.
- The litigation was likely brought forth because of noise complaints, environmental problems, and structural problems. As a result, the training assets mentioned above are subject to such court imposed restrictions until the USAF prepares a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- Officials claim that DoD's deliberative documents do not include information regarding the Dyess AFB litigation. Such an omission calls into question Dyess AFB's military value scores related to proximity to Airspace Supporting Mission and Low Level Routes under the Current and Future Mission category. According to a summary document provided by officials, "the over-inflation of Dyess' assessed military value in this category – in comparison to Ellsworth AFB – was a principle determining factor in placing Ellsworth on the closure list. Therefore, DoD substantially deviated from its evaluation of military criteria and the recommended consolidation of the B-1 fleet at Dyess AFB should be rejected."
- Senator Thune added (via phone) that should the operating restrictions remain in effect for some time, Dyess AFB's missions would have to be flown at Ellsworth's Powder River Training Complex. Over time, such a commute would add significant costs.
- In 50 years, the difference between Ellsworth AFB and Dyess AFB boils down to federal land at Ellsworth versus private land at Dyess. According to officials, there is a certain amount of risk accepted on federal land that is not accepted on private land.

Encroachment

- In terms of encroachment, Gen. Loh said that DoD should be projecting 50 years into the future. If that were done, according Gen. Loh, Ellsworth would outrank other bases. Gen. Loh said he did not understand why Luke AFB or Oceana were not on the closure list given their encroachment issues.
- Gen. Loh said that if DoD wants to put all of the B-1s at one base, a better move would have been to put them at Ellsworth. He said Ellsworth has good ranges, great facilities, and is a tremendous base for new missions. He believes Ellsworth was ranked #1 for the UAV mission. In addition, officials said that according to severe weather reports (provided), tornadoes and damaging winds are more likely to occur at Dyess AFB in Texas than at Ellsworth AFB in South Dakota.

* Denotes individual responsible for completing the memorandum