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BRAC Commission

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JAMES D. WATKINS

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The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman
Base Realignment and Closure Commission
2521 South Clark Street
Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Tony:

I noted with great interest the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's decision to explore possible realignment of the Naval Postgraduate (NPS) School in Monterey, California. NPS is a forward-looking transformational organization that offers unique educational programs to Navy, Army, Air Force and Coast Guard officers and international students from allied and friendly countries. Nowhere else in the world do so many U.S. and international officer and hundreds of expert faculty work together to study issues of immediate and future national security interest. These young men and women as well as their families study and live together under ideal conditions for advanced study, allowing them to forge professional bonds crucial for the coalition strategy of this nation at a fateful and critical moment in the evolution of war. NPS transfers learning, science, and technology to officers so that they can apply this knowledge in their jobs, helping to improve our ability to overcome threats to our security.

For years, people have suggested that it might be possible to privatize NPS by sending officers to traditional universities. This option has been explored repeatedly, and each time it has proven to be a red herring. If NPS did not exist, we would have to reinvent it because it makes a contribution to national security that cannot be met by civilian institutions.

The only mission of the Naval Postgraduate School is to conduct research and education in support of U.S. national security interests. No other research university in the country embraces this mission, which allows NPS to cultivate unique programs and opportunities. By bringing together government sponsors, dedicated faculty and energetic young officers, NPS has become a national center of military innovation and transformation. NPS, for instance, created a program in low intensity conflict that supports U.S. Special Operations Command long before counterinsurgency dominated headlines. It had the best area studies program in the nation (which utilizes language training offered across town by the Defense Language Institute), long before there were calls for officers to acquire more expertise about foreign lands and peoples. Its Center for Interdisciplinary Remotely Piloted Aircraft Studies (CIRPAS) officers a place for junior officers and

scientists to conduct experiments using robot aircraft and submarines. These types of Service orientated programs simply do not exist at civilian universities and were in part created by the unique synergies created when sponsors, faculty and students work together on emerging security and technical issues. One might privatize individual programs, but it is impossible to find a private sector substitute for the unique, creative environment that produces research and education of direct and immediate relevance to the needs of today's war fighter.

NPS also goes to great lengths to push education to officers wherever they are located, a task that is unlikely to be embraced by most schools. It sends teams of faculty around the world to educate officers and civilian officials in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo in the practices of democratic governance. Its programs help Marine, Army and National Guard units prepare for foreign deployments and its sends teams of faculty to all deploying Naval Battle Groups and Expeditionary Strike Groups to help them to better understand the current strategic setting in their operating areas. It has created a path breaking distance-learning program in Homeland Security and Defense, which brings together military officers and civilians to understand the problems that must be overcome to better protect Americans at home. By reaching thousands of students who are manning the front lines in the Global War on Terrorism, the Naval Postgraduate School makes a direct contribution to national security on a daily basis. NPS can undertake these unique initiatives, however, only because its research and educational programs sustain a core of faculty with the requisite expertise to deliver relevant education to the war fighter in nontraditional settings (i.e., as they enter combat). No other university has even attempted to offer these kinds of programs.

Practical problems also emerge as one delves into the details of privatization. Admission standards often prevent all but a few officers from attending elite schools, leaving open the possibility that the bulk of our officer corps might end up in substandard programs. Civilian universities generally offer degree programs only 9 months a year, leaving officers to scramble to take relevant courses during the summer. Few, if any, universities offer the specialized courses of study available at NPS. The best civilian universities are devoted to creating the next generation of scholars and educators, specialists that are not needed in any number by the Department of Defense. Universities are reluctant to invest in educational programs that are of primary interest to the military because it takes resources away from their traditional scholarly agendas. Classified research, which is essential to support the graduate studies of many student officers, cannot easily proceed on many college campuses. Students benefit enormously from the classified and sensitive government research conducted by faculty at NPS because it allows them to understand the policy, administrative and technical issues they will have to manage as they rise in rank. It is the link between sponsors, faculty and junior officers that makes NPS a truly unique educational and research institution. By contrast, during stressful times, many college campuses actually seek to reduce their involvement in national defense, making it difficult to sustain programs of interest to the military. For many on

today's college campuses, defense research simply takes time and energy away from more desirable kinds of research.

NPS is unique. It offers a place for U.S. and allied officers to work together in the study of issues directly related to national security, providing policymakers with a national asset in the international battle for hearts and minds known as the war on terror. It offers a myriad of government sponsors, faculty and students a place to work on technical and policy issues of defense interest, devising innovative programs that combine the latest battlefield experiences with technical and policy expertise. It is a university with a unique mission – to bolster U.S. military readiness and capability – a mission embraced by no other university in the nation. These unique curricula, research programs and educational environment cannot simply be outsourced, they would have to be replicated. It makes no sense to reinvent an institution that already provides our country with a unique and invaluable national resource.

Sincerely,

Jim

James D. Watkins
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)
Former Chief of Naval Operations

P.S.
Tony: We have gone through this same drill many times in the past. Cost analysts always say "it's cheaper at other universities." Of course it is, but that's not the issue. Navy professionalism in its officer corps demands a cadre in advanced educational fields focused on Navy-unique challenges, not esoteric academic studies. Navy will suffer in its officer quality significantly if this realignment is implemented. Please take it off the agenda. Prudence has prevailed over imprudent cost analysis in the past; let's let it do so once more. Thanks for the help.