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BRAC Commission

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2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission
2521 S. Clark St., Ste. 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Commissioners:

As an active researcher and a member of National Academy of Engineering (NAE), I am seriously concerned with the DOD BRAC recommendation to move ARO to Bethesda, MD. For fifty-four years, the Army Research Office (ARO), in North Carolina, has served the Army and the Nation by initiating and supporting basic research to arm and protect America's soldiers. The recent DOD BRAC recommendation would severely compromise ARO's ability to continue to provide revolutionary technological advances to the Army. I ask you to review and reverse the recommendation.

I have seen that the research programs in our country are best served by the diverse arrangements of DOD program managers with service specific representation. In 2005 the DOD commissioned the National Academy of Science (NAS) to examine DOD basic research. Their report, "Assessment of DOD Basic Research", states that "A variety of management approaches in the DOD is appropriate to the widely diverse missions and motivations for basic research." In my judgment, this diversity and focus on individual service needs makes the DOD research portfolio broad enough to fund transformative research that is also responsive to mission, agency, and national needs and maintains the competitiveness of this nation.

The BRAC recommendation calls for a consolidated DOD extramural research agency. This would reduce the number of experienced program managers, narrow the scope of programs created and supported, cause remaining programs to retreat into a more conservative and less transformative posture, and hamper innovation by the best scientists in the US. In addition, it is estimated that the move of ARO away from North Carolina, where the program managers are also active research scientists at leading research universities, to Bethesda could cost the Army 70% of its experienced basic research program managers. This will happen at a time when they are vitally needed to help the Army in its mission to help defend the Nation.

The NRC assessment also reported on the "6.1 creep" issue, that is, the increasing use of basic research dollars within DOD to support applied or developmental research. On the long

term, this could inhibit the revolutionary scientific and engineering advances that are needed for this country's future military technology. It was comforting that the NRC study found no evidence for substantial creep, but it also reinforced a need for continued vigilance on this matter. More tightly coupling the DOD extramural programs could significantly increase this risk, especially for the Army. Its program would be vulnerable to being subsumed by the much larger programs of the Navy and DARPA, both of which are dominated by applied research.

Over its fifty four year history in North Carolina, ARO has initiated and supported research by Nobel Prize winners and other outstanding scientists and engineers across the United States. It has a proven track record of supporting the best and of operating at a high level of efficiency. I ask you to make the recommendation to keep ARO in North Carolina and allow it to continue to excel in its critical mission.

Sincerely,



Tatsuo Itoh