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**BRAC Commission**

**AUG 17 2005**

**Received**

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

It has recently come to my attention that the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) recommendations contain a provision that, if implemented, would incorporate the physical plant and facilities of the Naval Research Laboratory (NRL) into a new entity that would also include Bolling Air Force Base and the Naval Station Anacostia.<sup>1</sup> I served as the Director of Research of the NRL from 1982 through 2001 and am intimately familiar with the operations of this major national research laboratory. The purpose of this correspondence is to provide an informed perspective regarding the inclusion of NRL into the proposed new entity.

NRL's mission is the performance of military R&D with a focus on long-term science and technology. Its physical plant and base operations support (BOS) functions (e.g., facilities, supply, procurement, finance, and personnel) exist solely to support this mission. The issue of having Naval District Washington (NDW) assume control of the NRL physical plant has come up before. In 1997, the NDW proposed assuming control of NRL's physical plant as part of a proposed consolidation of Washington area Navy facilities. The matter was referred to the Secretary of the Navy. The Honorable John Douglass, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition (ASN [RDA]) at the time, recognized that control of laboratory buildings, structures, and other physical assets were essential to NRL's research mission, and that no world-class research institution could exist without them. The ASN(RDA) rejected the proposal and stated<sup>2</sup>:

"NRL is a Secretary of the Navy corporate activity that has been assigned unique Navy-wide and national responsibilities...Real property and BOS functions integral to the research and industrial functions at NRL will remain with the Commanding Officer."

NRL is qualitatively and quantitatively different from the other bases: Bolling Air Force Base and Anacostia Naval Station. These bases have extensive Air Force and Navy family housing complexes, intelligence agencies, office buildings, and hangar facilities and landing pads for Presidential helicopter support. NRL, on the other hand, is a major complex of highly sophisticated laboratories conducting some of the most advanced research in the world.

Advancing Science and Technology (S&T) depends on the use of state of the art, costly, high-precision equipment and facilities. Maintaining these facilities at the state of the art level is made difficult by rapidly changing technology. Delays in modernization can translate into increased costs and mission setbacks, and can jeopardize the viability of the laboratory. NRL's R&D facilities are sound and current, but the nature of the business requires their constant modification, funded largely by overhead dollars, in an order of priority best determined by the scientific managers of the Laboratory. The management of the research facilities can not be separated from the management of the research program. If NRL is included in the proposed amalgamation, then NDW has been placed into the business of the management of S&T. This does not seem reasonable.

Furthermore, under the proposed system, NRL's S&T needs will be in direct competition with requirements for operating forces, housing, recreation, and headquarters functions. History demonstrates that long-term R&D needs do not fare well when in direct competition with short-term requirements; they are considered deferrable. With regard to establishing priorities for work, it should be noted that the senior military official at NRL is a Navy Captain, while the other tenant commands on the proposed consolidated base are run by two and three star Admirals and Generals.

The concerns to which I am speaking involve the ownership and management of the NRL research facilities. These constitute the great majority of the NRL facilities and are crucial to the laboratory's mission as are the other management functions that directly affect the research program. The more routine facilities management functions such as grounds, transportation, food service, recreation, power plant, chilled water plant and so forth, are of lesser concern.

The BRAC Commission must decide whether the long term health of NRL is an issue that is important enough to warrant special attention. In this regard I offer the following observations. NRL probably ranks among the world's top ten multi-disciplinary research laboratories. Its contributions to the Navy and the Nation are legendary. Among these are:

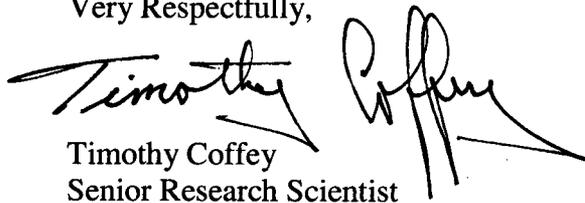
- Invention and development of Navy radar in the U.S. during the 1920s and 1930s.
- Contributions to the war effort in the 1940s.
- Leading role in creating the Nation's space program in the 1950s and 1960s.
- Development and launch of the world's first reconnaissance spacecraft in 1960.
- Development in the 1960s and 1970s of the TIMATION space system that became the Global Positioning System.
- Awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1985.

- Invention and development of fiber-optic sensors in the 1970s and 1980s.
- Invention and development in the 1980s and 1990s of Specific Emitter Identification technology.

These are but a few of thousands of scientific and technical outputs that have enabled the great Navy that we have today. There are few institutions, public or private, that can claim such a sustained record of accomplishment and contributions to the Navy and the Nation. NRL is widely viewed as one of the great success stories in the federal laboratory system. In recognition of its accomplishment and stature the NRL staff currently includes eight members of the National Academies. Individuals of this stature come to and remain at NRL because it is a place where important science and engineering gets done. My experience with NRL and with NDW leads me to believe that the inclusion of NRL in the BRAC proposal would put that at risk.

The chemistry associated with running a great research laboratory is very delicate. NRL has clearly mastered this chemistry. However, changes in the chemistry can rapidly turn a great research laboratory into just another research laboratory. Why would one take the risk of jeopardizing the productivity of what many experts believe is the "crown jewel" of the in-house laboratory system and an organization that contributes so much to the Navy and the Nation? This is a special concern at a time when the nation's technological dominance is seriously challenged by global developments. My conclusion is that the inclusion of NRL in the proposed new base would be unwise.

Very Respectfully,



Timothy Coffey  
Senior Research Scientist

1. HAS-JCSG-D-05-326, p. 44.
2. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Memorandum for Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, "Installation Claimant Consolidation", 2 October 1997.

CC: Charles Battaglia, Director, BRAC Commission staff (C.Battaglia@wso.whs.mil).