28 June 2005

Inquiry Response

Re: BI-0079 (CT-0357) Regional Hearing Testimony by the Eielson Community

Requester: Kenneth Small, AF Team Leader
Frank Cirillo, BRAC Commission

Request: Please provide us (Commission) USAF comments and any specific rebuttal to the very detailed, seemingly compelling Regional Hearing testimony by the Eielson Community.

Response:

EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE

This response addresses testimony on Eielson AFB by addressing, in an "Executive Summary," assertions by General Gamble and General Hamilton that the Secretary of Defense deviated substantially from all BRAC selection criteria (1 through 8). We follow this section with a detailed explanation on why the AF recommended keeping most of Eielson as Cope Thunder central and the remainder in "warm" status. It also explains why Eielson's existing force structure better served Air Force Operational and Training requirements as distributed by the Secretary's recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
SPECIFIC ISSUES REGARDING SUBSTANTIAL DEVIATION FROM CRITERIA

-- Criterion 1: Gen Gamble states the Secretary violated Criterion 1 by ". . .grossly undervaluing the loss of joint training opportunities and the resulting loss of combat capability."

AF REPLY: Based on military judgment, the AF proposes placing A-10s at Moody AFB, GA, in proximity to the 3rd Infantry Division, the US Army infantry school, and the proposed US Army Armor Center Of Excellence, rather than adjacent to a Stryker brigade.

Gen Gamble states the AF undervalued Eielson's joint training opportunities and ". . . strategic importance by attributing military value only to peacetime training metrics without connecting them to training readiness, particularly in the Korean theater."

AF REPLY: The Air Force agrees with Gen Gamble that Eielson offers superb training opportunities. That is why the Air Force plans to expand the integrated, joint and combined training opportunities in the form of more Cope Thunder exercises. With regard to strategic importance, the Air Force specifically reviewed and considered the impact upon a possible conflict in Asia in its deliberations and assessed a minimal impact.

-- Criterion 2: Gen Gambles states the Secretary deviated substantially by not adequately assessing geo-locational factors.

AF REPLY: This is addressed under Criterion 1, not Criterion 2, in the weights of the Mission Compatibility Index. The MCI weight for fighters shows 46% of the overall score

Inquiry Response

Re: BI-0079 (CT-0357) Regional Hearing Testimony by the Eielson Community

relied on such geo-locational attributes as distance to airspace supporting mission, low levels and suitable auxiliary airfields, prevailing weather, and air traffic control restrictions. Criterion 2 addressed key mission infrastructure and operations area environments that describe the airfield. Both PACAF and the ANG provided information regarding "climate and terrain diversity" such as wetland constraints, arctic conditions, and others to the Base Closure Executive Group (BCEG) in capacity briefings. These were included in the MCIs, and the BCEG addressed them through military judgment.

-- Criterion 3: Gen Gamble states the Secretary ". . .failed to consider the advantage of response time to potential conflict hot spots. . ."

AF REPLY: This is false; the BCEG did discuss response times to potential conflicts, both for mobility and combat force deployments. Strategic location of installations was a consideration by the BCEG and thoroughly considered in its military value decision.

-- Criterion 4: Gen Gamble states the Secretary deviated substantially from Criterion 4 by ". . . failing to consider the resultant costs of attempting to support Cope Thunder without a host wing . . ."

AF REPLY: Contractor cost estimates are included in COBRA. The decision to operate a third of the base at less than full operational status was discussed at length. In order to allow for added, unexpected costs, the BCEG decided to increase the cost estimate to 25% rather than use the lower 15% DoD figure. The details of this concept will mature in the process of implementing this recommendation by PACAF. The opportunity to have an installation dedicated to realistically prepare Air Expeditionary Forces for deployment is key. This revised concept will exercise many wings and not just the 354th Wing.

-- Criterion 5: Gen Gamble states the Secretary ". . .deviated substantially from Criterion 5 by taking credit for military payroll savings at Eielson. . ."

AF REPLY: Area variations in operating costs were included in Criterion 4 metrics and included contractor cost estimates under Criterion 5. The annual sustainment, restoration, modernization and base support costs for this scenario are estimated to be $12.6M in payroll and $61.9M in non-payroll items. OSD policy dictated that manpower cost avoidance be included among BRAC savings.

Gen Hamilton suggests the Air Force believed it could " . . .save the salaries of every active duty person they moved from Eielson, even though they were not going to leave the service."

AF REPLY: USAF presented savings, as did all the Military Departments and the seven Joint Cross Service Groups, as OSD directed. The term "savings" in this case refers to the manpower positions that will be made available for realignment to fund other high priority requirements and emerging missions within the Air Force.

Inquiry Response

Re: BI-0079 (CT-0357) Regional Hearing Testimony by the Eielson Community

-- Criterion 6: Gen Gamble states the Secretary "deviated substantially from Criterion 6 ". . by failing to account for the loss in responsiveness that results from locally refined jet fuel no longer being readily available. . ." and that he expected business reaction of the local refinery transitioning to new products and customers creates the unintended consequence of jeopardizing Eielson's air bridge refueling potential during a short-notice contingency.

AF REPLY: In addition to those items already discussed, the current plan, using the Inventory Management Plan (IMP), is in place and will not change until the F-16 and A-10 aircraft leave. At that point in time, the IMP, which includes contingency/wartime taskings, will reflect the revised demand rates. Cope Thunder fuel requirements will be reflected in the IMP. War reserve fuel and storage levels will remain consistent with regard to IMP levels and will ensure quality aviation fuel is in-place when needed. Rotation and monitoring of fuel stocks by fuels personnel will keep JP-8 on specification within quality limits. Since there will be fuels personnel at Eielson at all times to continue supporting KC-135 operations, transient aircraft, and maintenance of facilities for exercises, the cost of additional monitoring is not significant.

-- Criterion 7: Gen Gamble states ". . . the Secretary also deviated substantially by failing to consider the consequence of diminished Air Force jet fuel production required to meet the demand of a wartime surge. . ."

AF REPLY: The consequences of base closure on a specific industry is not within the purview of the Air Force to assess. Gen Gamble suggested the reduction in fuel usage by Eielson Air Force base would negatively impact the refinery in North Pole, AK. Senator Stevens, in separate conversations, stated the pipeline that passes near Eielson, will be able to provide fuel directly to Eielson "when it is finished" a future capability the BCEG would not be presented as it was not a current, existing facility. By way of perspective, for FY04, Eielson AFB-based A-10 and F-16 squadrons consumed 8.5M gallons of fuel, which included the sorties these squadrons flew supporting Cope Thunder and less than a third of 25.8M gallons of fuel received by Eielson. Eielson's fuel storage remains a key asset under the proposed concept of operation.

-- Criterion 8: Gen Gamble states the Secretary erred in " . . .failing to consider the outcome of an expanded environmental impact study and an obligatory MOA [Military Operating Area] review. . ." This does not capture the issue accurately.

AF REPLY: In the case of Eielson, the ranges will remain open and well used. The Air Force does not anticipate an overall reduction in the amount of airspace required at Eielson. According to the Headquarters Air Force office that handles ranges and airspace, the accepted manner in which airspace use declines because of BRAC actions is as follows:

- Environmental analysis (NEPA) is not required on airspace when there is decrease in operations.

Inquiry Response

Re: BI-0079 (CT-0357) Regional Hearing Testimony by the Eielson Community

- NEPA is required if there is a significant increase or major change in operations, such as a new, louder aircraft (i.e. F/A-22).
- Unused airspace will be first offered to other Services for possible use.
- If no other users are identified, we will switch the effective times to "Use by NOTAM."
- If after a period of time (approximately 2 years) there has been no significant use, the airspace would be disestablished.

VISION

The Air Force vision is to retain two active Air Force bases in Alaska, Eielson AFB and Elmendorf AFB.

Eielson AFB will retain its capability to host large-scale exercises/deployments, support DoD continuing missions, and provide a platform for future contingencies in the Pacific and other eventualities such as force structure increases and/or return of forces from overseas. The Air National Guard refueling mission and forward deployed search and rescue detachment will remain to support PACAF and Alaska/NORAD operational missions. The AF recommendation was predicated on more fully using the Eielson training complex vice opening a third A-10 active operational location and a third F-16 operational location with a single squadron.

A main goal for the BCEG was to right-size squadrons for all platforms and focus resources, capturing operational efficiencies by locating aircraft in larger squadrons on single platform installations. Military Value was the BCEG's predominant focus. Both the A-10 and F-16 squadrons at Eielson are only 18 PAA whereas 24 PAA is the optimum. Moving elements of these squadrons to robust other squadrons allows the Air Force to improve crew ratios, maintenance operations, and the way the Air Force operates.

WHY THE AIR FORCE WANTS AND NEEDS TO KEEP EIELSON

Eielson AFB currently has a tremendous capability to conduct Air Force, joint and coalition exercises. These exercises provide a valuable tool in the final preparation of all Air Force units for their AEF rotations. The use of Eielson AFB as a large-scale exercise location supports the growing United States engagement strategy in the Pacific Rim. In a region of the world with rapidly expanding strategic importance and growing engagement strategy demands, access to this base is critical to the effective execution of future cooperative Cope Thunder critical to Air Force, joint, and coalition readiness. Cope Thunder is the largest air combat exercise in the Pacific. Recently Cope Thunder hosted Australia, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and Japan during a two-week exercise.

Two to three exercises per year are currently scheduled. The DoD recommendation will provide the opportunity for more participants in each exercise, and more exercises per year, potentially increasing the revenue that exercises bring to the local economy. (In 2001, the three Cope Thunder exercises poured more than $2 million into the Alaskan economy.)

Inquiry Response

Re: BI-0079 (CT-0357) Regional Hearing Testimony by the Eielson Community

Eielson AFB can and will be used for deployments to train Expeditionary Combat Support units, Battlefield Airmen, etcetera. For 360 days a year there is a rescue detachment forward deployed with one HH-60 helicopter and 10 personnel. During exercises that rescue detachment is increased to two HH-60 helicopters and twenty personnel. Eight ANG KC-135's are slated to remain at Eielson AFB. Due to recruiting concerns conveyed to us by the ANG, we did not increase this force structure.

HOW WILL THIS HAPPEN?

Aircraft realignment is planned to start no earlier than 2008, but that can be adjusted to meet a number of requirements. The Air Force plans to stay in the Fairbanks area for many years to come. We want to work closely with the local community to minimize any impact of this proposal.

-- Ramp space made available by departing fighter squadrons will provide additional room to host an even more diverse array of Cope Thunder participants to facilitate a move from a Cold War mentality to an agile, joint, and coalition-savvy expeditionary force. As Gen Gamble and Gen Hamilton highlighted, with so much of the industrial world within nine hours of Eielson, coalition training will become more robust with training opportunities that more closely match the way we fought the last four military wars in Kuwait/Iraq, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and the mission to free Iraq. A measure of this shift from training to deployment preparation: all FY05 Cope Thunders were flown as mission readiness exercises prior to deployment to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Freeing the base should allow the Air Force to continue hosting training exercises for those units that do not deploy.

-- Gen Gamble and Gen Hamilton suggested "exercise training is important, but not at the expense of ignoring completely the defense of our homeland."

AF REPLY: The Base Closure Executive Group worked to support the nation's air sovereignty alert mission in full coordination with NORAD/NORTHCOM. In his letter dated May 4, 2005, Admiral Keating, Commander, NORAD and USNORTHCOM, confirmed the BRAC recommendations satisfied this objective when he stated: "Following a thorough review, we find that they (*the draft 2005 BRAC recommendations*) do not create an unacceptable risk to the accomplishment of our homeland defense or defense support of civil authorities." Eielson AFB, part of the Alaska-NORAD Region (ANR), is under PACAF's 11AF, and is subordinate to the NORAD/NORTHCOM commander. Nothing in the recommendation detracts from Eielson's ability to host alert fighters from another location, a common practice at five alert locations in the CONUS. The BCEG was cautious to ensure no homeland security priorities would be abridged by its recommendations.

-- Senator Stevens suggests "Instead of using this airspace for 320 days each year, training would take place, as I'm informed, only 12 weeks of the year." Gen Hamilton paraphrased

Inquiry Response

Re: BI-0079 (CT-0357) Regional Hearing Testimony by the Eielson Community

Maj Gen Heckman's 17 May 2005 Commission testimony, asserting that Gen Heckman "…described Eielson's ranges as superb airspace, magnificent training areas. I agree. But of course, when he gave me a plan that utilizes these ranges only 12 weeks per year..."

AF REPLY: The AF BRAC office is unaware of such a plan. The Air Force plan is to expand the training well beyond 12 weeks in keeping with the testimony of Gen Jumper before the commission, 17 May 2005:

> " In the case of Eielson, what we expect is that the operation -- the exercise Cope Thunder, which they host up there now and take advantage of those ranges, will be able to accommodate more -- actually more people … because the hanger space that was normally devoted to the permanent squadrons will now be able to accommodate guest squadrons that come in there. So, the mission, in addition to the Guard tankers that stay there, will accommodate, we think, a more robust exercise activity and allow us to take better advantage of the ranges, the magnificent ranges, that exist up there."

OTHER STATEMENTS

-- Gen Hamilton states, "Another of Eielson's current missions, tankers, was also poorly considered in the MCIs. The Air Force BRAC team actually considered increasing the Eielson National Guard tanker squadron to an acceptable size, moving it from 8 to 12, which makes a lot of operational sense, but they said that the base could not support 4 additional aircraft. This is absolutely preposterous. They said there were land constraints."

AF REPLY: It is important to understand Military Value judgments and decisions did not rely solely on the MCIs. The responsible MAJCOMs briefed the capacities for each of its installations, and in Eielson's case, the capacity of the installation was briefed to the BCEG twice: by PACOM and the ANG. Both agreed: Eielson can accommodate more KC-135s. The ANG, however, voiced concern over its ability to recruit enough maintainers and aircrew to support more aircraft. Additionally, Eielson AFB *is* land constrained due to wetlands that cannot be mitigated.

-- General Gamble states he was "very familiar with the process" because "he worked in the front office of the Chief of Staff in 1990, 1991 and watched the '91 BRAC come together."

AF REPLY: The 2005 process was unlike any previous process. Unlike previous BRAC processes that excluded some installations from consideration, BRAC 2005 considered all installations against all MCIs in order to remain as fair and impartial in its deliberations as possible. The Air Force developed "imperatives" that did not focus on installations, but rather on specific essential missions such as mobility, space launch, and Presidential support. Only after all 154 installations were evaluated against every Mission Compatibility Index were they then compared against imperatives to ensure essential installations were retained.

28 June 2005

Inquiry Response

Re: BI-0079 (CT-0357) Regional Hearing Testimony by the Eielson Community

General Gamble goes on to claim ". . . BRAC is built by programmers."

AF REPLY: While this may have been the case in '91, the BRAC 2005 process, led by SAF/IE, carefully and deliberately limited programmer participation on the scale Gen Gamble suggests. Yes, there were a handful of programmers who participated, but planners developed the force structure that was the foundation for BRAC, as required by the law. This was done to preclude budget concerns from skewing the analysis. Military Value remained the primary focus of the Air Force decision process.

-- Gen Gamble interpreted the imperatives differently than the intent of the Air Force. Presidential support focused on keeping primary installations used by POTUS such as Andrews AFB, not the occasional mission. All installations support POTUS missions on demand. Eielson AFB support to the START mission for COBRA BALL and seismic monitoring won't be impinged because the field remains open and those missions supported. Air bridge support is still key, which is why KC-135s will remain to support fighters, bombers and airlift crossing the Pacific. Having ramp space available to stage tankers in such an event makes Eielson even more important.

-- Gen Hamilton implied the TransAlaska Pipeline will be left unprotected should A-10s and F-16s leave Eielson.

AF REPLY: The Alyeska Pipeline Company patrols the pipeline, using their helicopters. Any requests for fighter support would be handled by Elemendorf's alert capability.

Approved

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