

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

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Ellsworth supporters to study Pentagon report

The Associated Press
May 21, 2005

A Pentagon report on Ellsworth Air Force Base gives it higher scores than Dyess Air Force Base in three of four criteria used to rate a base's ability to carry out its mission.

Ellsworth, near Rapid City, is one of 33 major bases the Defense Department has recommended be closed. The Pentagon recommended that Ellsworth's 26 B-1B bombers be transferred to Dyess AFB, where the rest of the nation's B-1B fleet is stationed.

In the Mission Capability Index, Ellsworth was rated ahead of Dyess on its hangars, fueling facilities, munitions storage and runways; its ability to quickly grow to support additional forces, and its cost of manpower and operations.

But in a crucial category dealing with weather, geography and other conditions affecting the operating environment of the bases, Dyess scored 51.2 to Ellsworth's 32.52. That category

accounted for 46 percent of the Mission Capability Index (MCI).

Dyess had an overall MCI score of 56.70 to Ellsworth's 50.81.

Ellsworth proponents are trying to determine exactly where the numbers came from, what they mean, and how they can be used to convince the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to remove Ellsworth from the base closing list.

"That's going to be an important piece of the analysis," Pat McElgunn, head of the Ellsworth Task Force, said of the documents. "We don't have any indication yet how it was created, what their logic was."

The nine-member BRAC, which visits Rapid City on June 21, will evaluate the Pentagon's recommended closure of 33 major military installations and realignment of 29 more to determine whether the Pentagon deviated significantly from its criteria in making those decisions.

In its report, the Pentagon described an evaluation method it characterized as completely analytical and objective.

Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D., said that as Ellsworth proponents go through the documents supporting the decision to close Ellsworth, "we are going to be looking at everything as closely as we can," including whether the process was truly analytical.

Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., said perhaps it wasn't.

"It seems to me, and I draw this as a generality, they gave an awful lot of weight to dollars and cents," he said.

Thune bases that assessment on a hearing he attended Tuesday when, he said, Acting Air Force Secretary Michael Dominguez told the BRAC commission that in closing Ellsworth and transferring its bombers to Dyess, the Air Force would realize "\$2 billion in savings, and we couldn't walk away from it."

BRAC returns Idaho Air Force mission to traditional role

The Associated Press

May 21, 2005

After 14 years of hosting many different types of aircraft with a multitask mission, a Pentagon plan would trade most of the older F-16 and F-15 fighters currently stationed at Mountain Home for about half as many newer F-15E Strike Eagle aircraft.

The government hopes to save money by making a more homogenous flight line. Aircraft maintenance officers could order spare parts by the baker's dozen. If one plane can't fly, there would be 49 others available.

But critics argue the "efficiency model" recommended under the latest round of Base Consolidation and Realignment plan hurts training opportunities and unit cohesiveness when it's time to go to war.

"It is absolutely cheaper," said retired Col. Chester "Soapy" Walborn, who served as base commander for the 366th Wing in the mid-1970s. "It's also a hell of a lot dumber."

There is no indication on the base itself that 569 military and civilian employees may be shipped elsewhere, if the planes are reassigned to other units in Nevada, Florida and South Carolina.

The runway at Mountain Home remains a bustling hub of activity. The steely gray jets thunder overhead, forming tight flying formations and peeling off to practice touch-and-go landings.

The flight line is the heart of the base - 310 acres of solid concrete between the runway and the hangars. Blue delivery trucks whiz among the jets, dropping off and picking up people and parts.

In the huge wooden hangars, several aircraft mechanics said they haven't paid attention to the list of proposed base realignments and closures.

"Most of them are so wrapped up in their job, they're not paying attention to BRAC," said 1st Lt. Erin Tindell, a spokeswoman for the base.

The proposed BRAC plan released by the Pentagon on May 13 would in many ways return Mountain Home to the type of mission it had in the 1970s and 1980s, when the F-111 Aardvark fighter-bomber patrolled the skies above southern Idaho.

From 1972 to 1991, F-111s - and later, converted EF-111s, a specialized electronics warfare aircraft - were the only fixed-wing aircraft assigned to Mountain Home. They had a dual mission - to train new pilots and navigators and to be ready to pack up and fight in a war.

The mission started changing in the late 1980s, when a new concept called "Air Expeditionary Wing" was being developed, 366th wing historian Master Sgt. Yancey Mailes.

"It was designed to be a task force to go anywhere in the world to quell any uprising," Mailes said.

The plan called for five strategic air bases around the country to become self-contained fighting units made up of air-to-air and air-to-ground fighters, bombers and refueling tankers.

Select bases around the country started building these types of wings. In 1991, Mountain Home started flying F-16C models and the F-15E models. The following summer, a squadron of B-52 bombers arrived.

Two years later, the lumbering B-52s were replaced by newer B-1B bombers, along with several KC-135R tankers.

The wing that took a decade to build lasted a decade by itself. But in 2002 - with a new presidential administration - the deconstruction began.

Although the composite wing at Mountain Home saw many squadron-level deployments,

the base was never deployed en masse, as the original plan envisioned.

"I don't think we ever used it the way it was intended," Walborn conceded.

In 2002, the bombers and tankers were reassigned to other bases.

If the 2005 BRAC recommendation goes forward, the 366th Wing would be left with 28 of its own \$31-million two-seater F-15Es, plus it would receive 18 more F-15Es from Elmendorf Air Force Base in Alaska.

The recommendation for Mountain Home would "streamline the operations at a location that is well suited for air-to-ground, low-level and air-to-air flight training."

Some political heavyweights are skeptical of the move. Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, said the base seems to be drifting.

"What concerns me as much as the economic impact on Mountain Home is that the mission has been changed twice now in the last five years," Craig said. "Stability is critically important to the future."

Col. Bill Richey, a retired staff director at the base and currently Gov. Dirk Kempthorne's military liaison, said the decades the Air Force spent on being a composite wing were not wasted.

Parts of the wing saw service in southwest Asia in 1991 and 1993. In 2001, the base's B-1B bombers flew important missions over Afghanistan, while other fighters deployed to the Arabian Peninsula and Qatar.

"The training that the aircrews went through was a tremendous benefit," Richey said. "They went out to the rest of the Air Force, where they were used to training and flying with all the kinds of missions."

But there also comes a time when the Air Force has to tighten its belt and react to new world threats, he said.

"They have the data to show the BRAC will save so many millions of dollars," Richey said. "As the world changes, the services have to change with it."

University president chosen to articulate Eielson cause

The Associated Press
May 21, 2005

University of Alaska President Mark Hamilton has been chosen as the local voice to champion the cause of Eielson Air Force Base.

Hamilton will make the state's case next month before an independent commission in charge of reviewing the Department of Defense's list of recommended reductions and realignments.

Hamilton will share the spotlight with Sen. Ted Stevens, who plans to make a special trip to Fairbanks on June 15 to testify before the commission.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission Chairman Anthony Principi and two other commissioners are expected to attend the June 15 meeting. Congress appointed the commission to review Pentagon recommendations.

BRAC representatives will visit a total of 16 cities. In addition, an analyst will visit each city ahead of the commission to gather information. A date for that visit has not been scheduled.

In addition to Hamilton and Stevens, Gov. Frank Murkowski and his daughter, U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, are expected to attend.

Hamilton was chosen at a meeting called Friday by Fairbanks North Star Borough Mayor Jim Whitaker. Also Friday, the borough hired The Lundquist Group to lobby on behalf of the Fairbanks area.

Whitaker has been spearheading the response in Fairbanks to the Defense Department's plan to reduce Eielson to "warm status," along with Fairbanks businessman Jim Dodson. Gov. Frank

Murkowski recently named Dodson chairman of the statewide task force he created to help with Alaska's proposed losses. The local and state groups are coordinating their efforts, Dodson said.

The mayor has called on a number of Alaska's prominent retired military personnel to advise the borough. Retired Gens. Joe Ralston and Pat Gamble have volunteered their time, as has Joe Beedle, UA vice president of finance.

The Pentagon proposal would reduce troop strength at Eielson by nearly 3,000 airmen. The Pentagon contends realigning most of Eielson's personnel would save nearly \$230 million a year. More than 1,700 additional jobs would be lost in the community because of the reductions, estimates show.

Five of the nine BRAC commission members would have to approve any effort to remove Eielson from the list. The challenge will be to convince commissioners the Pentagon made a mistake in its assessment of Eielson's strategic importance to defense.

"I don't think they have a full appreciation for the importance of Alaska," Ralston said

Ralston called Hamilton the right choice to address the commission.

"He's the most articulate spokesman that I have known in uniform," Ralston said.

Hamilton completed two tours of duty with the Army in Alaska and served as chief of staff under Ralston on the joint Army and Air Force Alaska Command in 1992-93. Hamilton retired from the military in 1998, the same year he became president of the statewide university system.

The Borough Assembly has approved spending \$500,000 to lobby the BRAC commission. The state Legislature has proposed contributing an additional \$1 million to a statewide effort.

Kerry states to take bigger hit from BRAC plan

Pentagon officials say that legislation was written to keep politics out of the equation
Winston-Salem Journal (Winston-Salem, NC)
James W. Crawley
May 22, 2005

Many "blue" state residents are seeing red, thanks to the Pentagon's base-closure list. Some "red" state politicians are seeing red, too.

Since the May 13 release of the Defense Department's recommendations for shutting down 33 major bases and reducing the staff at 29 other large installations, some political bloggers and pundits have noted that the military's base realignment and closure recommendations seemed to favor red states that voted for President Bush and punish blue states that voted for Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., the Democratic presidential nominee.

Tallied together, the blue states could lose more than 24,000 military and civilian jobs if the independent Base Realignment and Closure Commission approves the Pentagon's list.

Red states would gain nearly 12,000 positions.

Of the 19 states and District of Columbia that favored Kerry, 11 would sustain losses, including the three hardest hit - Connecticut, Maine and Washington, D.C.

Did politics influence the Pentagon's plan?

Military officials have steadfastly argued that "military value," not political clout, has been the overriding criteria for selecting bases. The BRAC legislation was written to remove political influences that had stalled earlier attempts to close excess bases during the 1970s and 1980s. The president and Congress can veto only the entire list, not specific facilities.

Most political and military analysts agree.

"While people are trying to make the red-blue case, I think it's circumstantial," said Chris Hellman, who monitors BRAC issues as an

analyst with the Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation.

The more likely reason for blue states' suffering is location and the shift from a Cold War military posture, he added.

The South would pick up thousands of jobs from Northeastern bases because much of the military is in such Sunbelt states as Virginia, Texas, Florida and North Carolina - all red states.

The South offers better weather, cheaper land and wages and a more pro-military culture, Hellman noted.

Though Democrats may suffer, some Republicans are squawking the loudest about the unfairness of BRAC.

A cadre of congressmen, whose districts had bases proposed for cuts, tried to cancel BRAC with an amendment Wednesday in a defense bill, but other House members defeated the effort in committee.

Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., introduced a bill last week to delay BRAC.

"The Pentagon was dead wrong to recommend closing a single base while we're at war," Thune said.

Others will fight for their local bases during hearings before the BRAC Commission, which plans to hold 16 regional hearings in June and July from Massachusetts to Alaska. Hearings in the South will be held in Charlotte, June 28; Atlanta, June 30; Baltimore, July 8; and New Orleans, July 12.

In past rounds, only about 15 percent of bases recommended for closure were kept open by the commission.

BRAC may have more effect on politicians, than politicians will have on BRAC.

During the 1995 base-closing round, President Clinton got a lift in California when he promised to keep military depot jobs in Sacramento by

privatizing the work at bases scheduled for closure.

"It helped transform the '96 race from 'Clinton in trouble' to an easy win," said Larry Sabato, a political analyst at the University of Virginia.

Using BRAC as a campaign issue can backfire.

Thune defeated Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, a Democrat, in November because he promised to use his influence to keep Ellsworth Air Force Base, the state's second-largest employer, off the BRAC list. However, Ellsworth and its 3,852 personnel made the list.

"It's always a risk to say you can deliver and you don't," said Thomas Mann, a political analyst with the Brookings Institution.

However, Thune has more than five years before running for re-election.

House members are not so lucky.

One such congressman is Rep. Rob Simmons, R-Conn., who represents the area around the New London submarine base scheduled for closure. In a largely Democratic state, Simmons always has stiff competition in the general election and last year he campaigned hard on his promise to keep the base open.

"If I had to pick the person in the most trouble because of BRAC, I'd pick Rob Simmons," Sabato said.

Local News Articles

Congressmen gather arguments to make case to BRAC commission

Asbury Park Press (Neptune, NJ)

Karen Sudol

May 22, 2005

TINTON FALLS — If Fort Monmouth closes, Robert Burger, a contractor who works at the post, said he won't relocate to Maryland as is

being suggested. He'll switch careers and become a full-time attorney.

If the fort closes, Eatontown taxpayers may see their school taxes rise and the district lose a long-standing partnership with the post, said Eatontown School Superintendent Jean E. "Nina" Hoover.

The seventh-grade students in Christine Specht's classroom in Oceanport will no longer benefit from lessons learned first-hand from soldiers about their lives, patriotism and loyalty, she said.

All three people expressed very different reasons for wanting to prevent Fort Monmouth's closure and shared the impact it would have on their lives and others if it occurs.

It was what Rep. Rush D. Holt, D-N.J., was looking for in sponsoring a town hall meeting Saturday at the Mahala F. Atchison School in Tinton Falls to discuss the Pentagon's recent recommendation to close the fort. Specifically, he said he wanted to hear from fort employees who would share their knowledge and experience.

Although the meeting attended by more than 100 people was organized to address other issues as well, most of the two-hour session centered on the recommended closure.

Fort Monmouth, home to the Army's Communications-Electronics Command, was one of 33 major military installations nationwide the U.S. Department of Defense included on a list recommended for closure. Nearly 10,000 people are employed directly or under contract by the fort. All told, the fort contributes an estimated \$3.24 billion a year to the state's economy.

The list has been submitted to the Base Realignment and Closure commission, an independent panel that will review and make recommendations to President Bush. It is part of an effort to streamline and restructure the military to face 21st-century threats.

A Pentagon report has said Fort Monmouth had "little capacity to be utilized" for other functions beyond its research and development missions, and that those functions could be transferred to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. Officials have also said Aberdeen offers more space to test the technology than Fort Monmouth.

On Saturday, Holt said the Pentagon has estimated it would cost about \$822 million to transfer the work from Fort Monmouth and would save about \$144 million annually once the move is complete. The closure would occur in a period of two to six years, he said. He suggested the move's costs are underestimated and the savings would be much less.

"It's not just about the cost. It's about what Fort Monmouth provides and whether that can continue to be provided under the proposal of the Pentagon," he said.

Although the Pentagon estimated 75 percent to 80 percent of the work force would move, invited speaker Rep. Frank J. Pallone Jr., also D-N.J., said historically speaking, he believed only 5 percent to 15 percent of the civilian force would relocate. That would hamper the Army's ability to develop and deploy its technology to soldiers while in the process of getting it up to speed elsewhere.

Holt's district includes Fort Monmouth, while Pallone represents many of those who work at the fort.

Burger is one civilian worker who will not move. The 51-year-old, who works for Shonborn-Becker Systems Inc. of Rumson, was part of a team that has designed an electronic mapping program allowing troops to plan missions and view locations of all forces. After working with Fort Monmouth for 23 years and establishing himself here, he said he will not uproot his family. Already a part-time attorney, he said he would become a full-time lawyer if the fort closes.

"It would be a disruption in the my life . . . not one I can't recover from, but I don't want to see it move," said Burger, of Eatontown.

He said he attended Saturday to learn more about the arguments legislators are preparing to use and be of any assistance.

Hoover, Eatontown's superintendent, said 229 students from Fort Monmouth attend the district's schools. Because of that, the district receives about \$500,000 in federal aid. Taxpayers would have to bear the brunt of that cost if the fort closes. Educational partnerships with the post, including military and civilian employees who tutor students, would also suffer.

Specht also spoke to Holt and Pallone to reveal a different impact. Fort Monmouth soldiers periodically visit her seventh-grade students at Maple Place School in Oceanport, and letters are exchanged with soldiers overseas and at the fort, she said. Without the fort, that invaluable interaction would be gone.

Other audience members also discussed the technology testing, saying it was a small component of the overall plan to develop technology and that much of the testing can be performed at the post.

Base realignment threatens to worsen ills linked to sprawl Lacking mass transit, workers will add to traffic

Baltimore Sun (Baltimore, MD)
Timothy B. Wheeler
May 22, 2005

While officials in Maryland have publicly welcomed the prospect of gaining 6,600 federal jobs through the military base realignment proposed by the Pentagon, independent planners and activists say the move threatens to worsen the ills of suburban sprawl in the Greater Washington area, which includes Baltimore.

"This is a region that's already grappling with crushing traffic congestion and all of the associated problems, air pollution and other

issues," said Don Chen, executive director of Smart Growth America, a national growth-management advocacy group based in Washington. "This would make it much more difficult for local governments to get control over those issues."

The Pentagon's proposal would move tens of thousands of jobs from the District of Columbia and its inner suburbs to outlying bases such as Fort Meade and Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland - to communities far less accessible by public transportation and already straining to cope with the growth they are experiencing.

Moreover, there is unlikely to be much federal aid to accompany the shifts. In previous base realignments, the Pentagon has given affected communities \$280 million in aid, and other federal agencies have provided \$3 billion. But the bulk of the aid in the past has gone into helping to clean up and redevelop bases that are closed.

The costs of accommodating base expansion are generally left to local and state government. In Maryland, the cost of expanded roads and mass transit alone could easily be tens of millions of dollars.

The nation's capital and its neighboring states have weathered base closings and expansions before, but this one is potentially more disruptive because many job shifts are being made to satisfy new Pentagon regulations requiring that military workplaces be set back from streets, with secure parking areas, to shield them from potential terrorist attacks.

More than 20,000 jobs are being moved out of the district and its inner suburbs - away from offices readily accessible by the Washington area's Metro rail network, which transports 700,000 riders every weekday.

It's clear that the number of military and civilian jobs beyond the Capital Beltway would grow, where workers are less able to commute by mass transit, said David Robertson, executive director of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, a regional planning agency.

"The federal government primarily is looking for what enhances the security of Department of Defense facilities and what's the most cost-effective solution for the federal taxpayer," Robertson said. "I don't think the BRAC [Base Realignment and Closure Commission] process considers other issues like affordable housing, air quality and transportation."

The Washington regional planning agency is racing to get a handle on the traffic shifts and other potential impacts of the base realignment so that local officials there can attempt to influence it before it's completed.

The regional planning counterpart for Baltimore apparently hasn't given the issue much thought yet.

"It's so fresh and new, we really haven't played that scenario out," said Harvey S. Bloom, transportation director for the Baltimore Metropolitan Council.

Dru Schmidt-Perkins, executive director of 1000 Friends of Maryland, a group that advocates development in and around cities to reduce traffic and the loss of open space, said: "What we've done is take those people who are largely on transit and move them to nontransit spots. That's not going the right direction."

Washington and Baltimore are already among the most traffic-clogged cities in the country. Capital-area residents had the third-longest commutes, and Baltimore the 17th-longest, in the latest survey by the Texas Transportation Institute. Both areas also suffer from unhealthy levels of ozone air pollution in summer, much of it from automobile emissions.

"It's one thing to close a base and try to find a way to reuse it, but it's another to reshuffle the employment and put it into places that aren't prepared to take it," said Arthur Nelson, associate director of Virginia Tech's Metropolitan Institute, a development research center in Alexandria.

One of those places is Fort Belvoir in Virginia, about 16 miles south of the district, which would receive 18,000 relocated workers under the Pentagon plan. With 24,000 already working there, the base is the largest employer in Fairfax County. Elected officials representing the county have said the roads serving the base are already inadequate.

The Metro rail system might be able to extend its Blue Line five to eight miles south from Springfield to serve Fort Belvoir, a transit agency spokeswoman said. But the projected cost, based on a study done a few years ago, was \$600 million to \$800 million.

In Maryland, James F. Ports Jr., deputy transportation secretary, said the state is working on plans for road widening and other upgrades to improve access to military bases.

Ports said state officials would work with local representatives to address the congestion that might come from increased traffic at Fort Meade, which is projected to add 5,361 jobs, and Aberdeen, which is expected to gain 2,176 jobs.

But transit is likely to be more limited at both bases. Though Aberdeen and Fort Meade lie along Maryland's MARC commuter rail line from Perryville to Washington, the state-run service is straining to handle only a fraction of the riders Washington's Metro network does, according to Eugene Peterson, president of the Transit Riders League. Trains are crowded and breakdowns too frequent, he contends.

"You start adding a few more bodies to a service that's already taxed, and you've got a problem," said Peterson, who predicted that the jobs shift would add to the region's traffic gridlock if MARC and other transit options are not beefed up to serve the bases.

Gerrit Knaap, director of the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education at the University of Maryland, College Park, said that while the base realignment no doubt disrupts the plans local officials have made to manage their communities' growth, it doesn't have to be disastrous.

"It just highlights the need for regional planning," Knaap said. "And the sooner we prepare ourselves to meet that need, the better off we're going to be."

Ellsworth strategy

Look to future, develop a plan to save base, or just move on

Sioux Falls Argus Leader (Sioux Falls, SD)
May 22, 2005

Let's all step back and grab ahold of reality, before this talk spreading through the state gets out of hand.

The talk is this: That Ellsworth Air Force Base never would have even made it to the closing list if we'd kept Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle in office, instead of electing John Thune.

That's not just wrong-headed, it's counter-productive. We need to deal with what is, not what might have been.

In fairness to the critics, Thune set himself up for this. He's the one who said he could protect Ellsworth because he had the president's ear. And Daschle said he could protect Ellsworth because he was minority leader. In the previous Senate election, Johnson also said he could protect Ellsworth.

If Rep. Stephanie Herseth had been in office a little longer, she likely would have made the same claim.

But we need to separate campaign rhetoric from reality. And the reality is this: Congress established a process for base-closings specifically designed to divorce it from political influence.

The Pentagon gives a list of suggested closings to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. The commission reviews that - adding or subtracting bases - and submits a list to the president. The president accepts the entire

list, sending it on to Congress, or rejects it - sending it back to the commission. Ultimately, the list goes to Congress - which can accept or reject it but can't pick and choose among the bases.

So far, the system has worked well. Anyone can point to powerful members of Congress who's states or districts seem to have fared well. But we also can easily point to powerful members of Congress who have failed in their lobbying to save bases important to their constituents.

This isn't a political game. At least in this first phase we're going through, it's specifically designed to be apolitical.

A constant drumbeat of criticism, ongoing finger-pointing and incessant whining about an election six months ago gets us nowhere. We've got to focus on the future.

And here's the future:

Thune, Johnson and Herseth all are backing a bill that would delay any decision on base closings until most troops are home from the Iraq war and the Pentagon releases its Quadrennial Defense Review, which will lay out future defense strategy. Other members of Congress, worried about bases in their home states, are interested in the bill.

There's already some support on the base closing commission for Ellsworth and other bases on the list. Former Nevada congressman James Bilbray, a member of the commission, is worried that some of the proposed closings might be short-sighted. He mentioned specifically Ellsworth Air Force Base and New Mexico's Cannon Air Force Base.

Talks already are underway with the Defense Department about what aid might be available to help South Dakota recover, if Ellsworth eventually is slated for closure. And there are discussions about how best to use the base's facilities and 5,500 acres.

Nothing will happen overnight. Before the commission submits its final list to President Bush, there will be visits to all the bases and regional public hearings. Plenty of time for lobbying.

Our focus now must be on the future - keep Ellsworth open, if we can, and if we can't - develop a solid plan to blunt the financial impact of its closure.

Blame Thune and the others for making Ellsworth a campaign issue. That's fair.

But to blame any of our politicians for Ellsworth making the initial list is foolhardy and counter-productive.

Thune touts new base bill

Rapid City Journal (Rapid City, SD)

Celeste Calvitto

May 22, 2005

RAPID CITY -- Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., said Saturday that his legislation to delay closings of military installations is gathering support.

"It would have been harder if we came out with a proposal just to block it," Thune, who was in town for the Pennington County Republican Party Lincoln Day event, said. "But it is a reasonable, responsible approach, which imposes conditions, and people said, 'This makes sense.'"

Three Democrats are among the co-sponsors of Thune's legislation, introduced days after the announcement that Ellsworth Air Force Base is on the Department of Defense list of recommended base closings. They are Sens. Joe Lieberman and Christopher Dodd, both of Connecticut, and John Corzine of New Jersey.

Sen. Tim Johnson of South Dakota and Sen. Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico are the other Democratic co-sponsors of the legislation. Republican senators who are co-sponsors are Sens. Trent Lott of Mississippi, Pete Domenici of New Mexico, Susan Collins and Olympia

Snowe of Maine, Judd Gregg of New Hampshire, John Sununu of New Hampshire and Lisa Murkowski and Ted Stevens of Alaska.

The bill calls for the current BRAC round of base closings to be delayed until recommendations on overseas base closings are analyzed, the Quadrennial Defense Review, or QDR, is received, and major combat units deployed in Iraq have returned.

Thune said the bill is being offered as an amendment to the defense authorization bill, which cleared the Armed Services Committee the day before the base-closure list was announced on May 13.

Thune also said he may introduce legislation to require the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to hear from "uniformed personnel."

"In 1995 (BRAC hearings), there were two people who testified, and it ended their careers," Thune said. He said his bill would seek to protect people from those kind of consequences.

"It seems to me that this process is flawed in not having them testify at hearings, particularly when getting into criteria about operational capabilities," Thune said. "I don't know how a bunch of bean counters at the Pentagon can make those decisions."

He said: "You ought to have uniformed personnel, officers and enlisted soldiers testify about the capabilities. There isn't anybody you talk to out here who doesn't think that Ellsworth hasn't done an extraordinary job of supporting their mission."

Thune said he would attempt to get the legislation introduced before BRAC's regional hearing in Rapid City on June 21.

Opinions/Editorials

Base-closings reflect changes in the world

Toledo Blade (Toledo, OH)

David Shribman

May 22, 2005

Here's a handy rule you can live by: The government reacts to change far more often than it causes change. So when you apply that guideline to this month's base-closing controversy, you can pretty much be sure that the changes the government is causing - closing nearly three dozen bases and realigning both regional economies and home economies as a result - reflect changes that have been long under way in the wider world.

This is no consolation to thousands the domestic military realignment will put out of work, nor to the communities who now must pick up the pieces. But military forces are designed to respond to changes in the world, and one generation's national-security concerns cannot be allowed to warp the next generation's security preparations.

Nowhere does this cruel reality hit harder than two places that, for decades, have stood as symbols of America's defense profile: Ellsworth Air Force Base in Rapid City, S.D., and the United States Submarine Base New London in Groton, Conn.

The losses in these two places are almost beyond calculation: more than 3,800 jobs in South Dakota (where Ellsworth is the second-largest employer) and more than 8,400 jobs in Connecticut (which will lose more military jobs than any other state). But the raw numbers tell only part of the story. Each military family accounts for thousands of dollars of spending beyond the base. And the bases themselves have been the spine of these communities' identities for decades.

But the air base and the sub base in two very different parts of the United States stand, together, as symbols of a very different military profile the U.S. is taking in the years after the fall of Soviet communism and the beginning of the 21st-century age of terror.

These bases go back into history, Groton as far back as the Ulysses S. Grant days (it became a sub base a year before the nation entered World War I), Ellsworth as far back as the first month of World War II (it became a missile base as the

Cold War deepened). The first nuclear submarine was built at Groton, an important arm of the American nuclear force in the Cold War was based at Ellsworth.

Indeed, it was in the Cold War that both these bases came of age and came to the forefront. Air and sub power were at the heart of the American military effort during that long twilight struggle, years in which the phrase forward projection had a meaning that was at once comforting and menacing. Ellsworth and Groton were the places where that forward projection - of long-range bombers, of wide-ranging quiet subs - was based. America slept better because of the aviators and sailors whose families slept in South Dakota and Connecticut.

But this is a different time, with different challenges, requiring different responses.

There still are threats to American security, but not ones that likely require as big a submarine fleet or intercontinental ballistic missiles. There still is a role for long-range bombers and submarines, but not for as many.

"Generally we don't need the same military we needed 20 years ago," says Andrew J. Bacevich, a retired Army colonel now teaching at Boston University and director of the university's Center for International Relations. "We can maintain supremacy with a radically different kind of force. We still need long-range bombers, but we can do more with less. We still have a role for subs, but mostly as land-attack platforms."

In the Cold War, the notion was that the last bomber from places like Ellsworth would be in the air before the first Soviet warhead detonated. That notion from the strategy of mutual-assured destruction crumbled with the Berlin Wall.

In the Cold War, the submarine fleet was designed to trail Soviet subs behaving mysteriously in places they shouldn't be. Today almost the entire Russian fleet is tied up and rusting, and despite the worries about the emerging Chinese navy, there is no sub fleet besides the American with any meaningful military capacity in the seas today.

Today submarines are well-suited to search for mines, to land SEAL teams into hostile territory, to undertake surveillance activities, and to fire Cruise missiles. But the size of the sub fleet is substantially smaller than it was only two decades ago. And the operations of submarine bases can be consolidated with the operations of other naval installations.

Community and political leaders in both South Dakota and Connecticut are mobilizing for battles of their own: the effort to reverse the decision of the base realignment and closure commission whose decisions prompt painful change only because they reflect geopolitical and strategic changes long in train. Sometimes these efforts win modest success, but no one in Rapid City or Groton can reverse how the world has changed - even though both bases themselves have changed with the threat over the years, even though the Ellsworth bombers were involved in the battering of Afghanistan after Sept. 11, 2001, even though Groton evaded a less draconian cutback a dozen years ago.

Amid the grief and the worry it is hard to remember what bases are for. They're for protecting American security, not for protecting American jobs. That's a tough reckoning, and a tough verdict, but military men and women pride themselves on their toughness. They've shown it many times before, at Ellsworth and Groton and at so many other places, where this month it is almost impossible, and very bitter, to remember that in the real mission of the military they have succeeded beyond measure.

Unwarranted complaints about new base closures

Chicago Tribune (Chicago, IL)
Steve Chapman
May 22, 2005

It's officially called the Department of Defense, but to many politicians, the label misstates its function. Judging from their reaction to proposed base closures, they'd like to rename it the Department of Jobs, Pork, Community Uplift and Incumbent Protection. That way, no one

would get distracted by the petty business of protecting America.

Recently, the Pentagon released a list of proposed realignments in U.S. military facilities, from Maine to Hawaii. The plan calls for shutting 33 major installations and shrinking 29 others, which would streamline operations and save nearly \$50 billion over the next 20 years.

But elected officials representing areas that would be adversely affected showed little interest in whether the changes would reduce costs, improve operations or cure cancer. They preferred to focus on the overriding issue: Their states or districts would lose federal jobs and dollars that they assumed to be a birthright.

From Capitol Hill came piteous lamentations and promises to resist. Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.) said he and others in the state's congressional delegation would "push every single button we can to get the right decision." Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) accused the Pentagon of deciding "to dramatically neglect the northeastern United States." Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) said the proposed closure of a submarine base in his state "is cruel and unusual punishment that Connecticut does not deserve and our national security cannot afford."

But if Connecticut doesn't deserve it, two questions arise: 1) What state does? and 2) Who cares? This is not a task on the order of cutting a birthday cake for 6-year-olds, where fairness demands that everyone get an equal share. Fairness should be irrelevant when it comes to national defense.

Suspicious arose that politics, not security, may have determined which states get the shaft. But if the administration is trying to reward its friends and punish its enemies, it's going about it in a strange way. True, Texas would gain jobs in the realignment--but not as many as Maryland, a true-blue state with two Democratic senators that President Bush lost by 13 percentage points in 2004. Massachusetts, home of John Kerry, also came out ahead.

Plenty of people in Republican states must be wondering what happened to the spoils of victory. Alaska, which is more consistently Republican than the Bush family, would lose more than 4,600 jobs. Red states like Mississippi, Kentucky and North Carolina are among those slated for sizable job cuts.

Missouri, which twice went for Bush, would be one of the big losers. Residents may be reflecting on the insight of their own Mark Twain, who wrote, "If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog and a man."

Last year, Senate Republican Leader Bill Frist went to South Dakota and pledged to use his influence to save Ellsworth Air Force Base if voters would replace his Democratic counterpart, Tom Daschle, with Republican John Thune. South Dakotans did as requested. But when the closure list came out, Ellsworth was on it.

The apparent subordination of political concerns doesn't mean all the changes are sound. But it at least means the people drafting the list were asking the right questions. And as a general matter, the military has a better sense of what it needs to do its job than, say, a random member of Congress, who is likely to be motivated by narrow concerns like getting re-elected.

It would be too much to expect politicians to defer to the expertise of the Pentagon. But it shouldn't be too much for them to hold their fire until they hear why the department made the recommendations it did, instead of rushing to the microphones to spew denunciations. It would also have been refreshing to hear even one member of Congress say that her constituents would stoically accept these sacrifices in the interest of national security. Instead, 11 senators, led by Thune, are co-sponsoring a bill to delay the closures.

At the risk of belaboring the obvious, national security is what the base-closing process is about. Contrary to the prevailing impression on Capitol Hill, the only criterion is whether the

changes will make us safer while economizing tax dollars.

If the plan achieves that goal, it will be an excellent thing for all Americans--something most of them probably know, despite what their elected representatives say. Even in the dramatically neglected northeastern United States, I suspect, staying alive is the highest priority.

Two Off-Base Closures

New York Post
May 22, 2005

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has proposed permanently shutting 33 facilities, including historic Fort Monmouth in New Jersey and the U.S. Navy Submarine Base New London in Groton, Conn.

While closing obsolete facilities is a painful necessity — particularly for local communities that have come to rely on them for economic stability — closing these two particular installations would be a serious mistake.

Indeed, the independent Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRACC) overruled the Pentagon in the early '90s, when closing Fort Monmouth and Groton was first proposed. Shutting them down now — and moving the jobs they provide down South — would be an even bigger mistake.

True, the Navy is scaling back its submarine fleet to a target of 41 ships from what was once 100. But Groton, the nation's oldest sub base and once the largest, has what others lack: the ability to handle nuclear-powered craft.

It has the best ready access to deep water and the critical polar ice cap route to the Pacific Ocean, giving it unrivaled "surge capacity" — the ability to quickly move personnel, vehicles and weapons around the globe.

And it is just a few miles from the headquarters of Electric Boat, the dean of global submarine builders.

The Navy wants to keep just two sub bases on each coast; Groton's jobs and facilities would go primarily to the base in Kings Bay, Ga., and Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia. Much of the closings would move facilities and personnel away from the Northeast to southern and western bases.

That's a mistake on two counts: For one thing, it would lead to unwise "clustering" of assets that would place the entire fleet at risk if two ports in the same general region are incapacitated due to, say, a military attack like Pearl Harbor, or some other reason.

For another, it would lessen daily contact between the armed forces and those who live in the Northeast — not a terribly swift idea as the country fights a War on Terror that has already seen a part of the Northeast (i.e., New York City) as a battleground.

Closing down Fort Monmouth and moving its facilities southward — in this case, to the Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland — also would contribute to these trends.

Plus, there is no denying that shuttering these facilities will have enormous economic repercussions. This is particularly true of Groton, where closure will cost the local economy 8,600 jobs. Indeed, Connecticut state economists estimate that fully 31,500 jobs are linked to the sub base.

On the flip side, the expected transfer of 3,200 of those jobs to Kings Bay would increase the workforce of the nearby town of St. Mary's by 21 percent — and officials have raised serious questions about its ability to handle such a major infusion.

It would also cost \$238 million to make needed physical improvements at Kings Bay — raising the question of why the Pentagon feels the need to spend such a huge sum to build facilities that already exist elsewhere.

Doubts also have been raised about the accuracy of the Pentagon's estimates of the cost of

shutting down Groton and the amount to be saved by moving its facilities south. The Navy figures environmental cleanup at Groton would cost just \$29 million, an absurdly low sum for a facility that includes 16 federally mandated Superfund sites.

BRACC officials are now touring the targeted bases to determine whether they will endorse the Pentagon plan. It takes a majority of the nine commissioners to remove a site from the list — which is what happened with both Groton and Monmouth in 1993.

Then President Bush must accept or reject the entire plan, not the individual sites.

BRACC acted prudently more than a decade ago when it determined that Groton and Fort Monmouth were critical to the nation's security.

Despite deep changes in the armed forces and warfare, that conclusion remains true today.

Additional Notes