

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

July 25, 2005

Department of Defense Releases

Texas BRAC hearing finds support for consolidation

Base closing proposals reflect overall shift to outpatient care

Groups want health plan unaffected by BRAC

States may have final say in closing Air Guard bases

As BRAC hearings loom, 'difficult decisions' ahead

National News Articles

White House: no BRAC delays

Local News Articles

A Tale Of Two Bases: Bearers Of Good, Bad Noise (Newport News, VA)

Former commanders: air base tied closely to airborne efficiency (Fayetteville, NC)

S.C. urged to prepare to fight future rounds of base closings (Columbia, SC)

Opinions/Editorials

Give base Homeland Security (Grafton, ND)

On Oceana, time to face reality (Hampton Roads, VA)

Additional Notes

N/A

Department of Defense Releases

Texas BRAC hearing finds support for consolidation

Air Force Times
Rod Hafemeister
July 25, 2005

SAN ANTONIO — The BRAC commissioner most familiar with operations at Wilford Hall Medical Center said she understands the rationale for converting it to an outpatient-only facility.

Pentagon recommendations to consolidate military medical training call for combining Wilford Hall's Level 1 trauma center with the facility at Brook Army Medical Center, also in San Antonio, and converting Wilford Hall to an ambulatory care center.

After the July 11 regional hearing here of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission, commissioner Sue Turner, a retired Air Force brigadier general who once was the chief nurse at Wilford Hall, sounded as if she would support the recommendation.

Turner, who lives in San Antonio, said she's received lots of calls and e-mails concerning the proposal. Most concerns, she said, stem from people not getting enough details about how San Antonio's large military community would be supported under the consolidation.

Turner's comments were one of few indications from commission-ers on where they might stand when it comes time to make final recommendations to the president.

In this case, there seems to be little controversy. San Antonio boosters at the hearing made it clear they don't object to the medical training consolidation, which would bring more jobs to the city.

Their only requests were that commissioners consider rejecting Pentagon recommendations to move the Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine and certain research programs, as well as the little-known Cryptologic Systems Group, out of San Antonio.

However, supporters of Sheppard Air Force Base, in Wichita Falls, Texas, argued that the first phase of medic training should remain there because moving the program would leave vacant 768,000 square feet of specialized classroom space.

Other witnesses argued against cutting Air Guard units at Houston and Fort Smith, Ark.

In most cases, opponents attempted to show that Pentagon recommendations were based on bad data that understated the value of units and installations.

By law, the commission can add, subtract or modify the Pentagon's recommendations, but its final recommendations must be either accepted in total or rejected by the president and Congress.

Base closing proposals reflect overall shift to outpatient care

Air Force Times
Deborah Funk
July 25, 2005

In developing proposals for revamping military hospitals and clinics as part of this year's base realignment and closure process, defense officials mirrored a broader shift in American health care by suggesting increased use of

outpatient services and same-day surgeries, a top official said.

At the same time, military health officials have sought to consolidate and increase the efficiency of inpatient services in a process that was "surprisingly collaborative," said Lt. Gen. (Dr.) George Peach Taylor Jr., the Air Force surgeon general, who chaired the Medical Joint Cross-Service Group.

That group recommended:

- Consolidating inpatient care in the Washington, D.C., and San Antonio areas.
- Combining medic training at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.
- Converting hospitals to outpatient clinics with outpatient surgery services at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.; MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.; Naval Station Great Lakes and Scott Air Force Base, Ill.; Fort Knox, Ky.; Keesler Air Force Base, Miss.; Naval Hospital Cherry Point, N.C.; and Fort Eustis, Va.
- Moving health care to Fort Lewis, Wash., from McChord Air Force Base.

Advances in medicine, including surgical techniques and anesthesiology, have changed the focus from inpatient care, the norm when the military medical infrastructure was built, to outpatient care and same-day surgeries.

While building its BRAC plan, the Medical Joint Cross-Service Group tried to focus on patients' access to and quality of care, and to make sure the staff at any given facility had a "full, well-rounded practice," Taylor said.

Even in places that would close inpatient units, such as Keesler, military doctors will still admit patients to hospitals when needed; they'll just admit them to a civilian facility, as is already done at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., Taylor said.

"They're just another group in town asking for privileges at that facility," Taylor said in a July 6 interview.

Groups want health plan unaffected by BRAC

Air Force Times

Deborah Funk

July 25, 2005

While the Pentagon has proposed closing relatively few military bases with health care services, advocacy groups want to ensure that defense officials continue to operate the low-cost managed care option called Tricare Prime for people living near clinics that may shut down.

“What we would hope they would say is, ‘Yes, we’re going to keep Prime service areas where we’re closing bases,’ “ said Joyce Raezer, government relations director for the National Military Family Association.

So far, the Defense Department has not committed one way or the other. But the companies that manage Tricare and are responsible for building the system’s provider networks are looking ahead at possible needs, and are making plans to continue offering Prime.

Air Force Surgeon General Lt. Gen. (Dr.) George Peach Taylor Jr. chaired the joint service committee that recommended how to realign medical services.

Speaking only for the Air Force, Taylor said commanders at Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., and Cannon Air Force Base, N.M. — both recommended to shut down under the base realignment and closure process — have been working with Tricare managers in their areas and believe that primary care will be continued through the civilian network in South Dakota and New Mexico.

David McIntyre Jr., president and chief executive officer of TriWest Healthcare Alliance, which manages Tricare near Cannon and Ellsworth and elsewhere in the Tricare West region, agreed. Some 1,935 retirees and their family members are enrolled in primary care at Cannon; at Ellsworth, the figure is 3,341.

“We’ll probably have to add some providers ... we don’t have a problem with that,” McIntyre said. “We believe that we have a responsibility to continue Prime in areas where BRAC occurs,” if Prime already is available there.

TriWest is collaborating with the military, and is using a sophisticated modeling tool the company developed several years ago to determine demand.

Similarly, Humana Military Healthcare Services is assessing how BRAC could affect its Tricare South region and plans to continue offering Prime.

“We certainly assume that’s part of our commitment,” said Richard Mancini, Humana’s director of network management.

The greatest impact in the South region would be on retirees enrolled at Fort McPherson, Ga., and Naval Air Station Atlanta. But there is ample capacity in the area’s civilian network to absorb the primary care business now provided at the military clinics, Mancini said.

As of July 11, some 3,978 retirees were enrolled in Prime at the McPherson clinic and assigned to a military health care provider.

“BRAC, as it relates to Fort McPherson, is merely a phenomenon of finding a new primary care manager,” Mancini said. There are 838 civilian primary care managers in the Tricare network within a 20-mile radius.

Officials of Health Net Federal Services, manager of the Tricare North region, are meeting with individual military hospital and clinic commanders to determine supply and demand, and to plan for any changes that might be needed in the civilian network if particular bases close.

States may have final say in closing Air Guard bases

Memo sets up federal, local debate

Air Force Times

Gordon Trowbridge

July 25, 2005

The Pentagon lacks the authority to dissolve Air National Guard flying units without states' permission, according to a legal memo written by an attorney for the Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

The memo bolsters state arguments that Air Force plans to remove about 15 percent of the Air National Guard's flying wings would violate federal law.

The memo, prepared by the deputy counsel for the nine-member independent panel, may not be binding on commissioners. But the panel has expressed concern about this issue since its first hearings in May. Anthony Principi, its chairman, has asked Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to defend the Pentagon's position, and has asked Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez for a legal opinion.

The issue is among topics that will come up during July 18-19 hearings in Washington, D.C. Rumsfeld, responding to Principi's inquiry, has said an Air Force panel will respond specifically on that issue.

In a July 1 letter, Principi asked Rumsfeld if state adjutants general and governors were consulted on the Air Guard changes. Rumsfeld's response says adjutants general and National Guard Bureau officials were briefed, but makes no mention of seeking approval from governors.

The July 18 hearing will include testimony from defense officials in response to the commission's July 1 proposals to add more bases to the Pentagon's list for review and possible closure.

The next day, commissioners will hold their first votes on whether to formally make those additions.

Among the panel's tasks are to:

- Consider adding a handful of bases to the Pentagon's proposed list of 33 major closings. The additions include a shipyard at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; Naval Air Station Oceana, Va.;

Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego; and three military graduate education institutions.

- Sort out questions about the Pentagon's cost-savings estimates, which a Government Accountability Office report says could be overstated by billions of dollars.
- Resolve a controversy over the decision to move thousands of workers, mostly civilians, out of leased office space, which one architect of base-closure legislation has declared illegal.

While most experts believe Principi and his fellow commissioners have dropped few hints on how they would answer those questions, they warn against easy acceptance of the Pentagon's recommendations.

"They're determined to take an independent look, not just at the results but the governing strategy behind them," said Kevin Beeks, vice president for policy for Business Executives for National Security, an organization that favors closing more bases.

Pennsylvania, which would lose the Willow Grove Joint Reserve Base, is the first state to file suit. The commission has asked Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez for a legal opinion on the issue; commission spokesman Robert McCreary said that is not expected until late July.

Though Army officials had extensive discussions with the states about National Guard changes, the Air Force apparently gave the issue little consideration: Minutes from this year's meetings of the Air Force's top base-closings committee do not contain a single mention of the word "governor."

Feeling left out

Opponents of the changes got support from Army Lt. Gen. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, who told defense reporters the Air Force should have consulted with the states. "I don't know why the Air Force chose to do it the way they did," he said.

Commissioners also may struggle with Sen. John Warner's declaration during July hearings that the Pentagon's focus on leased office space violates the base-closure law he helped write.

Warner, R-Va., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, is fighting a shift of more than 20,000 workers out of leased offices in the Virginia suburbs of Washington. Defense officials say the buildings don't meet security needs. Warner told commissioners the Pentagon's focus on office space violates a law requiring all defense facilities to be treated equally.

Officials elsewhere took heart from Warner's comments. But some analysts said Warner is unlikely to oppose the plan when it comes before Congress.

"Any senator is going to be strident in protecting the political base within his jurisdiction," said Stephen Sorett, a Washington attorney who has worked on base-closing issues.

But Keith Ashdown of Taxpayers for Common Sense, a budget watchdog group that supports closings, said Warner's opposition could be significant, given his longtime support of base closings.

"If I'm the commissioners, I'm going to have to listen to him," Ashdown said.

As BRAC hearings loom, 'difficult decisions' ahead

Air Guard likely to take center stage at hearing
 Army Times
 Gordon Trowbridge
 July 25, 2005

After two months of listening, the independent base-closing commission now must speak — and on a variety of thorny legal issues. The nine-member panel's first deliberations — on whether to add a handful of bases to the closings already recommended by the Pentagon — are scheduled for July 18 and 19 in Washington, D.C. After nearly two dozen hearings across the nation, outside experts say,

the panel has a surprising number of difficult issues to deal with.

"If the presentations [from communities opposed to closings] are uniformly as good as the ones I saw, they're going to have some difficult decisions," said Christopher Hellman, an analyst for the Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation who argues in favor of base closings.

The July 18 hearing will include testimony from defense officials in response to the commission's July 1 proposals to add more bases to the Pentagon's list for review and possible closure. The next day, commissioners will hold their first votes on whether to formally make those additions.

But the Air National Guard is likely to take center stage. At issue is whether the Air Force, which plans to remove aircraft from nearly two dozen Guard bases across the country, requires state approval for the changes.

Pennsylvania, which would lose the Willow Grove Joint Reserve Base, is the first of what could be a rush of states to file suit, arguing the Pentagon can make such sweeping changes in Guard units only with approval from governors.

An internal memo drafted by the commission's legal staff suggests the states have the law on their side — an opinion that, if followed, would unravel much of the Air Force's base-shuffling plan.

Though Army officials had extensive discussions with states about National Guard changes, the Air Force apparently gave the issue little consideration: Minutes from this year's meetings of the Air Force's top base-closings committee do not contain a single mention of the word "governor."

"I'm proud to wear a blue uniform. But I think many of us are disappointed with the way the Air Force conducted this process," said Air Guard Maj. Gen. Bruce Tuxill, Maryland's adjutant general. "The Air Force, Air Guard and Air Force Reserve have had a great relationship

over the years. ... I hate to see our wonderful relationship come to this point.”

Among the commission’s other tasks beginning the week of July 18 are to:

- Consider adding to the Pentagon’s proposed list of 33 major closings. The additions include a shipyard at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; Naval Air Station Oceana, Va.; Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego; and three military graduate education institutions.

- Sort out questions about the Pentagon’s cost-savings estimates, which a Government Accountability Office report says could be overstated by billions of dollars.

- Resolve a controversy over the decision to move thousands of workers, mostly civilians, out of leased office space, which one architect of base-closure legislation has declared illegal.

While most experts believe Chairman Anthony Principi and his fellow commissioners have dropped few hints on how they would answer those questions, they also say not to expect easy acceptance of the Pentagon’s recommendations.

“They’re determined to take an independent look, not just at the results but the governing strategy behind them,” said Kevin Beeks, vice president for policy for Business Executives for National Security, an organization that favors closing more bases. “If they don’t see good reasons, they’re prepared to go further” to close bases.

Staff writer Joseph R. Chenelly contributed to this report. Gordon Trowbridge can be reached at (703) 750-8641 or gtrowbridge@atpco.com.

More bases could close
Hearings in Washington on July 18 and 19 will consider possible additions to the Pentagon’s list of recommended base closings. Among them:

- Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego.
- Naval Shipyard Pearl Harbor.

- Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine.
- Navy Broadway Complex, San Diego.
- Naval Air Station Oceana, Va.
- Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D.
- Navy and Air Force graduate schools at Monterey, Calif., and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.
- Army, Navy, Air Force and Defense Department medical headquarters in Washington, D.C., and Northern Virginia.

National News Articles

White House: no BRAC delays
The Bush administration is warning Congress that the president will veto the \$441.6 billion defense spending bill if any member inserts a provision to fiddle with the base closure and realignment process.

Pacific Business News
July 25, 2005

The threat is contained in a "Statement of Administrative Policy" not yet made public by the Office of Management & Budget but reported in the Monday edition of the publication Congress Daily.

This appears to head off any changes that could adversely affect Hawaii, which has managed, working within the Base Realignment and Closure Commission process, to save all its major military bases including, in a decision last week, the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard.

As described by Congress Daily, the administration also warns members of Congress not to try to make deep cuts in spending for certain satellite and telecoms research and development projects which are believed to involve some Hawaii-based military technology contractors.

Meanwhile, the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii, which lobbied to save Pearl Harbor as is, savored the victory.

Chamber President Jim Tollefson, in his Monday Report newsletter to members, said the chamber's military affairs council, which includes both business and military leaders, was able to mobilize quickly because business and military officials are already working cooperatively on other things.

"This was only possible because of the strong ties the MAC has established and nurtured over the last 20 years between our military, our government and Hawaii's citizens," Tollefson said. "The solid relationships between all these groups made it possible to create an effective and powerful team to represent Hawaii and defend the shipyard closure."

Tollefson also sounded a note of caution after hearing criticism of the shipyard as slow. "This was a wakeup call for all of us in the business community and here in the state," he said. "We are still at risk. The shipyard is not considered to be functioning at the level it should. The business community must get involved and help support the shipyard in correcting those inefficiencies so we are prepared for the next BRAC."

Local News Articles

A Tale Of Two Bases: Bearers Of Good, Bad Noise

Newport News Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

Jim Hodges

July 24, 2005

The difference between Langley Air Force Base and Oceana Naval Air Station on the base closure list is a case of sound and fury.

Every nine minutes or so, an F-15 or F/A-22 comes in over Back River at about 245 mph on a path that's gradual and shallow and which leads to the softest, quietest touchdown possible.

Col. Tom Tinsley calls it a "don't-spill-the-coffee-on-the-guy-in-first-class" landing.

The pilot cuts power, works the brakes and eventually coasts to a stop on an adjoining concrete parking lot.

Langley Air Force base has received five complaints this year from people who say their lives are disrupted by the noise. Two came from western Virginia, where there wasn't an Air Force plane within 100 miles at the time.

To the southeast of Langley, 26 miles as the Hornet flies, every two and a half minutes, an F-18 comes in at a hard angle over Virginia Beach Boulevard and slams down hard on the concrete runway to dissipate energy. The pilot then pours on the afterburner, raw fuel spilling into jet exhaust to push the plane back into the air with a roar that makes a rock concert in an arena sound like "shuush!" in a library.

Oceana Naval Air Station is under assault from Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise, a citizens group that claims 5,000 members who complain constantly, both to the base and to Washington.

The difference in how they fly their airplanes offers insight into why Langley is on the military's favored roll and Oceana was added to the Pentagon's Base Realignment and Closure list on Tuesday.

"We do have noise complaints, but you have to remember that our base has more water around it than over there," says Tinsley, deputy commander of the First Fighter Wing at Langley, adding that he could not speak for Oceana. "When we're taking off on a heading of zero-8 over an eastbound runway, as soon as we break ground, we're over water."

When they take off to the west, the pilots quickly turn north, then east, heading back over the airfield and out over the Atlantic. For a while, they're over populated areas -- including Bethel Manor and the Tabb school district -- but they're gaining altitude as quickly as possible to cut back on the noise. At Oceana, the F-18s are over houses in any direction.

Frequently, they're over Hal Levenson's house in Great Neck Meadows.

"They're at 400 to 500 feet and very loud," says Levenson, a founding member and spokesman for the jet noise group. "You can't go outside. You can't hear anyone speak, you can't listen to the TV. I have headphones to listen to the radio."

He adds that the noise occasionally reaches 107 decibels over his home, 1.5 miles north of the end of one of four Oceana runways.

That's as loud as an automobile horn from three feet away.

Their missions, even the nature of the services themselves, are other reasons Langley can peacefully coexist with Hampton while Oceana and Virginia Beach seem constantly at odds.

Langley offers a 10,000-foot runway and a wide expanse of buffer zone, both wet and dry.

Oceana's longest runway is 12,000 feet, but the naval aviation's mission is predicated on being able to land an airplane on that part of it which corresponds to the flight deck of a ship.

"They paint an aircraft carrier on the runway over there," Tinsley says.

"As soon as they touch down they go to full power, just in case (they miss the arresting cable) on that short runway they have on the ship."

It's a safety maneuver for the pilots, but even when they cut off afterburners at Oceana's edge, the sound carries into neighborhoods.

The existence of those neighborhoods is the primary threat to Oceana's continued use by the Navy. That existence involves two acronyms that are in vogue these days: AICUZ --air installation compatible use zones -- and APZ -- accident potential zones.

One has much to do with noise, the other everything to do with danger.

The BRAC Commission has been told that the Virginia Beach City Council approved rezoning requests opposed by the Navy 73 percent of the time in recent years.

Most of the time that has involved noise, primarily in the 65-decibel range.

That's about the same amount of racket your vacuum cleaner makes.

Two Lynnhaven elementary schools, Brookwood and Parkway, are in the 65-decibel zone.

At Langley, "I look at every Hampton city plan for development," says Vic Johnston, the base's director of community services. "If there is input needed, we give it."

In one case, Johnston says, a Langley engineer suggested to a developer that more insulation be added to new houses to muffle jet noise.

"They do their business, we do ours," Johnston says of Oceana. "We know that land over here is at a premium and developers want to make money."

At Langley, too, flights are more consistent because it's an operational base. And there are only about 60 F-15s and four F/A-22s, with more on the way.

Oceana has both operational and training roles for its 254 fighters.

"We are going combat training every day," says Tinsley, "so we take off over water into Area 386 (in the Atlantic) and fight out there anywhere from 1,000 feet above the water to 60,000 feet above the water. We go supersonic out there and make all the noise we want 15 miles from the coastline. "When we come back in, we come back in to land and that's it."

Flights are from 6 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Oceana's planes also fight offshore and at a North Carolina range. But more important to critics is aircraft carrier landing practice.

Often called "skip landings," they are conducted well into the night and frequently at Oceana's auxiliary airfield at Fentress in Chesapeake. About 140,000 "skip landings" a year are made at Fentress.

When a carrier deployment is approaching, the exercises -- and resultant complaints -- increase. And they are a 24-7 operation. "Pilots train like they fight," says Troy Snead, public affairs officer at Oceana.

At Langley, the future is bright, with a new airplane, the Raptor.

"I was asked ... 'Are you worried about noise complaints?' " Tinsley said.

"I said, 'No. I'm worried about people driving up and down Armistead Boulevard running into each other to see what that airplane is doing.' "

Four BRAC commissioners are due at Oceana on Aug. 1 to look things over with a vote by September that could determine how long the base remains in the Navy inventory.

"The question is, what is perception and what is reality about Oceana?" says George Foresman, Gov. Mark Warner's chief adviser on BRAC. "To me, the real crux is whether a Navy pilot isn't able to do the maneuvers they need to do to get the job done."

LANGLEY AIR FORCE BASE

Part of what keeps the airfield on the good side of the area:

- * Fighters: 64 (60 F-15s, four F/A-22s)
- * Takeoffs/landings: About one every 10 minutes
- * Runway: 10,000 feet
- * Takeoff/landing path: East-west (Back River to the east)
- * Hours of operation: 6 a.m.-10:30 p.m.

OCEANA NAVAL AIR STATION

Some reasons the facility has trouble with Virginia Beach:

- * Fighters: 254 (194 F/A-18s, 60 F-14s)
- * Takeoffs/landings: About one every 21/2 minutes
- * Runways: 3 of 8,000 feet, 1 of 12,000 feet
- * Takeoff/landing path: North-south, east-west (houses in each direction)
- * Hours of operation: 24 hours a day

Former commanders: air base tied closely to airborne efficiency

The Associated Press State & Local Wire (Fayetteville, NC)
July 24, 2005

Former commanders say airborne soldiers at Fort Bragg can do their jobs if aircraft assigned to an adjacent air base are moved elsewhere, as is being proposed, but they say the paratroopers' performance will suffer.

Under a proposal by the federal Base Closure and Realignment Commission, cargo planes now based at Pope Air Force Base would be sent elsewhere so two Army commands could be brought to Bragg. The Army would take ownership of the field and airplanes from reserve units would be stationed there.

Last week, the commission voted to put Pope on a list for closer study before it makes recommendations in September to the president.

"Certainly they can operate without a permanent Air Force presence there, but the teamwork that is built up - not just by the permanent presence but by the familiarity with the people you are dealing with - goes a long way," said Retired Col. Daniel E. Sowada, who commanded Pope's 317th Tactical Airlift Wing during the Panama invasion in 1989.

Retired Brig. Gen. Paul Dordal, a former wing commander at Pope now working with the Cumberland County Business Council to keep Pope open, said keeping planes stationed at Pope makes for better teamwork between the paratroopers and those who transport them.

The 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg trains to be able to deploy rapidly by air when they are notified and keeps a brigade ready at all time, with one company prepared to deploy within a few hours. The commanders said teamwork between the Army and Air Force is important when the country needs to get paratroopers to trouble spots quickly.

"If you don't work together and train together on a daily basis, then when it comes to combat operations you haven't developed the relationships or the procedures or techniques required to make the operation a success," Dordal said.

Retired Lt. Gen. George A. Crocker, commander of the 82nd Airborne from 1994 to 1996, echoed Dordal.

"The more you keep an Army-Air Force team together, the better they get at it," he said.

Two BRAC commissioners - retired Adm. Harold Gehman and retired Gen. James T. Hill - will visit Pope on Aug. 2. The nine-member commission starts making final decisions Aug. 22.

The commission, which is the only body that can change the proposal, must report by Sept. 8. The president and Congress can only accept or reject the entire package.

Cumberland County officials say it would be most effective and efficient to keep the 25 C-130s of the 43rd Wing at Pope.

Dordal said the Army does not have the specially trained personnel to operate an Air Force runway, such as firefighters trained to respond to aircraft fires, munitions handlers to load Air Force aircraft and fuel management specialists.

"It would be all new and have to be built by the Army," Dordal said.

BRAC analysts say the Army operates large strategic airfields, but Dordal said those installations aren't operated for short-notice operations like those coming from Fort Bragg.

S.C. urged to prepare to fight future rounds of base closings

The State (Columbia, SC)
Chuck Crumbo
July 24, 2005

Leaders of S.C. military communities say the state needs to prepare for future base-closing efforts.

Vigilance is necessary, they say, because the 2005 round of base closings was not as extensive as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had predicted.

Rumsfeld had indicated up to 25 percent of the military's 425 major installations -- or more than 100 -- would be closed under the Base Realignment and Closure Act, commonly known as BRAC.

But the final count proposed by the Pentagon was only 63.

Because the number of proposed closings was not as drastic as feared, observers think another base-closing round could happen in the next five to 10 years. That means the state needs to be ready, they said.

"I would hope that there's a decision to keep some form of statewide focus on the military," said Donald "Ike" McLeese, chief executive officer of the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce. "It's too much a part of our economy not to do so."

About 120,000 S.C. jobs are dependent on the military, which pumps about \$7.2 billion a year into the state's economy, according to a study by

the Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina.

To prepare for this year's BRAC, Gov. Mark Sanford created a statewide military task force, co-chaired by Comptroller General Richard Eckstrom.

State and congressional leaders knocked on Pentagon doors and talked with top military officials. The state's military communities also made their own cases for keeping open their bases.

That approach worked. South Carolina stands to gain 700 jobs if Rumsfeld's plans win approval from the BRAC commission, President Bush and Congress.

Looking ahead, state Sen. Phil Leventis, D-Sumter, has introduced a bill that would establish a state military commission. The panel's duties would include advising leaders on military policy as well as economic and industrial development.

Zoning requests near military bases and sprawl are key issues facing installations along the coast.

Because the military is continuing to transform and reshape itself to fight future wars, the state needs someone to stay on top of the issues, said Tom Mikolajcik, one of Charleston's BRAC leaders.

"I'm not suggesting a new cabinet agency that the taxpayers will have to pay for," said Mikolajcik, a retired Air Force brigadier general and former commander of Charleston Air Force Base. "I think it can be done through volunteers and community support."

Regardless of what the state does, leaders of South Carolina's military communities said they need to continue to work with their local bases.

"What we want to concentrate on in the future is doing the kind of things that make this a more attractive place for the Navy and Marine Corps

to do business," said John Payne, a retired Marine colonel and spokesman for the Beaufort Military Enhancement Committee.

Opinions/ Editorials

Give base Homeland Security

Grand Forks Herald (Grafton, ND)

Ralph Kingsbury

July 24, 2005

Recently, the Herald reported that the federal government was looking to buy land in Grand Forks to build a new Homeland Security facility.

The facility would house the Border Patrol's regional office, as well as U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials.

At the same time, we continue to read about the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's decision to keep Grand Forks Air Force Base open and in particular use it as a major basing facility for the new unmanned aerial vehicles.

It's hard for any layman to know all of the factors that must be considered, especially when it comes to national defense and homeland security. However, there seems to me to be a natural fit between the base and the Homeland Security department that suggests that instead of spending taxpayer money on expensive property and a large building or buildings, the Homeland Security project should be located at the base.

I would think that one of the base's big hangars would hold all the Suburbans, Tahoes, and Excursions that the Border Patrol has, not to mention any airplanes. There has to be a lot of office space available, too.

Whatever the near-term use of the base is, the Air Force support would dovetail nicely with the Homeland Security requirements in terms of mechanical, communications and every other conceivable need. Security assets such as fences, alarms and trained personnel are also there. Imagine the money that would be saved on snow removal alone.

And if the Air Force decides to bring the new generation of tankers back to Grand Forks and needs the buildings back, there still would be more than enough property to build any Homeland Security structures on the base.

As much as most of my neighbors, I would hate to see the base close, but as a taxpayer, I know we have to justify our arguments based on sound economic and military logic.

I think that the Grand Forks people involved in the Base Realignment and Closure hearing, as well as our governor and congressional delegation, proved to the visiting BRAC members serious errors made by the Pentagon in its initial decision. By that I mean things such as the fact that Grand Forks is closer to the Middle East than is Florida and that the original decision-makers didn't know about the new runway being built this year (a very important factor in the Pentagon's rating system) or the new housing just now being built.

Imagine if, in the future, there was another BRAC round - but by then, the base had not only its own military value but also was the mid-American center for homeland security. It certainly would make Grand Forks Air Force Base much more important to both national defense and homeland security.

Kingsbury, a former member of the State Board of Higher Education, owns Kingsbury Applied Economics in Grand Forks, a financial consulting firm.

On Oceana, time to face reality

The Virginian-Pilot (Hampton Roads, VA)
July 25, 2005

If Oceana Naval Air Station's mission can't be saved, if the next generation of thunderous fighters must indeed take off from runways someplace else, Virginia Beach would be arguably better off with a quick military retreat instead of a prolonged campaign of attrition.

According to a letter and to testimony before the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, the

Pentagon sees decades of commercial and residential encroachment as eventually making the base's mission impossible in the Beach.

Though it could survive this BRAC go-round, this may well be Oceana's last reprieve. The Navy hopes to eventually replace the 6,000-acre master jet base with a new, bigger facility elsewhere, one on a plot so large that surrounding development will never be an issue.

That's a very tall order. It has been decades since an airfield of that magnitude, civilian or military, has been erected on the East Coast.

If Oceana were to leave Virginia Beach under BRAC, it would take thousands of jobs and billions of dollars with it, not to mention the military families that for 60 years have helped make the city what it is. But, under BRAC, there would be some federal help to minimize the economic blow from loss of the base, money for purging it of safety and environmental hazards, and some advice on figuring out what to do with the property.

Painful as that would be, there are worse alternatives.

The Pentagon could turn Oceana into a different kind of military facility that would attract neither the money nor the people a master jet base does. The Beach would still have thousands of acres of prime real estate out of commission and off the tax rolls, and far less economic benefit to show for it.

Or the government — conceivably — could just shut it down. City Councilman Richard Maddox, who worked on an agreement between Virginia Beach and the Navy to protect Oceana, calls that the "nightmare scenario," one that includes a huge plot of land lying waste behind a high fence, not generating any taxes, or providing any room to roam.

"If the handwriting is on the wall, prudence would dictate that we should be looking at a number of different scenarios," Maddox said in a Pilot story last week.

For the first time in memory, discussing such possibilities is something more than front parlor speculation. It's self-defense. And it's simply prudent governance.

“To put your head in the sand and say it will never happen is not realistic,” Councilman Peter Schmidt said. “We need to look out for the best interests of Virginia Beach in the long term, with the potential of Oceana not being there.”

If the jets can't fly, if Oceana won't be the city's largest employer, Virginia Beach must start now to consider life without the base, and — just as crucially — how to say farewell in a way that best protects what the military will leave behind.

Additional Notes