Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY BIRD

August 30, 2005

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Commission Wraps Up BRAC Decisions

American Forces Press Service
Donna Miles
August 29, 2005

WASHINGTON, Aug. 29, 2005 – The Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission wrapped up four days of deliberations in final actions Aug. 26 and 27 by voting to turn Pope Air Force Base, N.C., into an Army airfield and recommending sweeping recommendations to revamp the Air National Guard and consolidate its operations.

The nine-member commission deviated significantly from the Pentagon's proposed plan to realign the Air Guard, passing a recommendation that would ensure every state with an existing Air Guard unit would retain at least some Guard aircraft.

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Specific details of the plan, including charts used in the deliberation, are expected to be released today, and DoD officials were reviewing the votes earlier today to assess their full impact, if implemented.

The panel also approved moving almost 15,000 U.S. troops from Germany to four stateside bases as part of the Army's modernization initiative. Gaining posts under the plan will be Fort Knox, Ky.; Fort Bliss, Texas; Fort Bragg, N.C.; and Fort Riley, Kan.

The decisions, made over the course of four days in Arlington, Va., will be reflected in a final report to be sent to President Bush by Sept. 8. If he concurs, the president will send the final list to Congress, which can accept or reject it in its entirety, but not change it.

The votes follow months of hearings around the country regarding DoD's proposal to reshape the military infrastructure and eliminate excess capacity by closing 33 major bases and realigning 29 others.

Defense officials had estimated the plan would save some $49 billion over the next 20 years, although that figure is expected to alter dramatically based on the BRAC decisions.

In major actions since Aug. 24, the BRAC commission voted to close:

Walter Reed Army Medical Center here and moving most of its mission to the new Walter Reed National Medical Center in nearby Bethesda, Md., current site of the National Naval Medical Center;
Wilford Hall Medical Center, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, consolidating medical operations for the region at a new San Antonio Regional Medical Center at nearby Fort Sam Houston;
Fort Monmouth, N.J.;
Fort Gillem, Ga.;
Fort McPherson, Ga.;
Fort Monroe, Va.;
U.S. Army Garrison, Selfridge, Mich.;
Naval Station Pascagoula, Miss.;
Naval Air Station Atlanta, Ga.;
Naval Station Ingleside, Texas;
Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, Texas; and
Brooks City-Base, Texas.
Onizuka Air Force Station, Calif.;
Galena Airport Forward Operation Location, Alaska; and
Almost 400 Army Reserve and Army National Guard facilities, creating joint centers.
The panel voted to keep open:
Submarine Base, New London, Conn.;
Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Maine;
Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D.;
Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., until at least 2009, and urged DoD to find a new mission for the base, if possible;
Hawthorne Army Depot, Nev.;
Defense Language Institute, Monterey, Calif.; and
Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, establishing a governing board to coordinate education programs between the school and the Air Force Institute of Technology at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.
The panel also voted to:

Wait until March 31, 2006, to decide whether to close Naval Air Station Oceana, Va., giving local and state authorities time to make proposed changes to limit residential encroachment on the base;
Consolidate operations at Fort Dix, McGuire Air Force Base and Naval Air Engineering Station Lakehurst in New Jersey, creating a single joint base under a central commander at McGuire;
Consolidate 26 Defense Finance and Accounting Service offices into five: in Cleveland, Ohio; Limestone, Maine, at the former Loring Air Force Base; Rome, N.Y., at the former Griffiss Air Force Base; at the Defense Supply Center-Columbus, Ohio; the Bean Federal Center in Indianapolis, Ind., at the former Fort Benjamin Harrison; and in Alexandria, Va.;
Move the dental training school at Sheppard Air Force Base, Kansas, to Fort Sam Houston as part of a new consolidated medical center;
Realign rather than close Red River Army Depot, Texas;
Keep the Night Vision Lab at Fort Belvoir, Va., instead of moving it to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md.; Order a study of the practicality of converting a chemical weapons incinerator to

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incinerate conventional munitions before deciding whether to close Deseret Chemical Depot, Utah.
Realign Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, by moving its undergraduate navigator training to Naval Air Station Pensacola, Fla.;
Transfer the Army's 4th Infantry Division from Fort Hood, Texas, to Fort Carson, Colo.;
Keep the Army Logistics School at Fort Eustis, Va., rather than moving it to Fort Rucker, Ala.;
Block the move of active-component combat aircraft from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska;
Move thousands of defense jobs from leased space in Northern Virginia to Fort Belvoir, Va., Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., and Fort Meade, Md.; and
Stop the move of about 1,000 jobs to Hanscom Air Force Base, Mass.

National News Articles

Rumsfeld Critical of Some BRAC Decisions
The Washington Post
John J. Lumpkin
August 30, 2005

FORT IRWIN, Calif. -- Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld has reservations about the base closure commission's decision to spare several high-profile installations, saying the commission focused on the economic impact of some bases instead of their military usefulness.

Rumsfeld said he was uncertain whether he would recommend to President Bush that he accept the proposed closures as modified by the commission. An unfavorable opinion from the White House could send the matter back to the panel.

"We've got our people analyzing what they have proposed," the defense secretary said. "Some of it is difficult to understand."

Rumsfeld, speaking to reporters Monday en route to a meeting with soldiers at this training base in the California desert, said the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission's sparing of several bases proposed for closure would reduce the savings to the government by at least 15 percent.

He said the commission had substantially different priorities than the Pentagon.

"They seem to have put a much heavier weight on economic impact, (rather) than military value, than we did," he said.

In May, the Pentagon proposed closing or consolidating a record 62 major military bases and 775 smaller installations to save $48.8 billion over 20 years, make the services more efficient and reposition the armed forces.

The commission last week overturned the Pentagon's recommendations and spared a naval shipyard and submarine base in the Northeast and a bomber base in South Dakota, among others.

Still, Rumsfeld said, the changes amount to only 15 percent to 20 percent of the Pentagon's total proposals for closure. In previous BRAC rounds, commissioners changed roughly the same amount, he said.

At Fort Irwin, Rumsfeld spoke to hundreds of soldiers, including members of the 4th Infantry Division, based at Fort Hood, Texas, who are set to go to Iraq in December. He thanked them for their service and spoke to them of the importance of their mission.

"Each of you have volunteered to help make history," the secretary said, standing in front of 32 Purple Heart recipients. He also spoke to family members of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, a unit that usually plays the role of an adversary's force to train other soldiers, but was sent to Iraq to assist in security efforts there.

Rumsfeld suggested the situation in Iraq was better than portrayed by the news media.

"People who want to toss in the towel were wrong yesterday, they're wrong today, and they're wrong tomorrow," he said.

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His comments were met with repeated cheers from the troops.

About 17,000 troops from the 4th Division were part of the March 2003 invasion of Iraq and served there for first year of the war.

Roughly 40 percent of the soldiers sent over the first time are returning, military officials have said.

The division's first deployment was marked by high-profile successes as well as some problems.

It was lauded for capturing former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein near Tikrit in December 2003. Two melted-down statues of Saddam were recast and shipped to Fort Hood as a memorial to its 81 war dead.

But several members of the division's 3rd Brigade Combat Team, based at Fort Carson, Colo., have been punished for mistreating Iraqi citizens and later trying to cover up their misdeeds.

States Fight Closings of Air National Guard Bases

The Washington Post
Ann Scott Tyson and Bradley Graham
August 30, 2005

National Guard officials yesterday tentatively welcomed a decision by an independent base-closure commission to scale back the Pentagon's plan to consolidate Air National Guard bases around the country but said serious problems remain that are likely to lead more states to file lawsuits disputing the plan.

Connecticut yesterday joined three other states -- Pennsylvania, Illinois and Tennessee -- in challenging the Pentagon's authority to shutter Air National Guard bases or strip them of aircraft. Connecticut filed a lawsuit that is also directed against the commission, seeking a court order to block it from sending its base recommendation to the president.

"They got it wrong, and we're going to fight it," Connecticut Gov. M. Jodi Rell (R) said yesterday after the commission voted Friday to uphold the Pentagon's proposal to remove all 17 of the A-10 attack aircraft from the 103rd Fighter Wing at Bradley Air National Guard Base. Rell said the decision would mean "effectively closing" the base and would leave Connecticut as the only state with no Air National Guard flying mission.

Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney (R) is also considering legal action over the plan to remove all F-15s from Otis Air Force Base, his spokeswoman said by e-mail yesterday. "The governor is currently reviewing all options including legal options . . . to keep Otis open," said spokeswoman Julie Teer.

The Pentagon proposal to empty dozens of Air National Guard bases of fighter jets, refueling tankers, air cargo planes and attack aircraft has been one of the most controversial aspects of the military base closures proposed in May. The overall plan called for shutting or realigning more than 800 military installations nationwide to save an estimated $50 billion over 20 years. The commission's recommended changes to the plan, which reduced the estimated savings to $37 billion, will go to the president for a decision by Sept. 8.

On Friday, the nine-member Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission voted to curb an aggressive Air Force proposal to consolidate aircraft after National Guard officials argued it would create dangerous gaps in homeland defense and emergency response capabilities, while severely undercutting local air guard recruiting. The plan had shocked National Guard officials, many of whom expressed bitterness over the lack of consultation by the Air Force leadership.

"The Air Force piece of this was flawed from the very beginning," said Maj. Gen. Frank D. Vavala, adjutant general of the Delaware National Guard, echoing the sentiment of several top state guard officials. "They were afraid we

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might say no to some things, so they did not include us. That's why they screwed up so bad."

Guard leaders were encouraged by the commission's decision to overrule the Pentagon in many cases to keep smaller squadrons of aircraft than the Air Force had sought, and to distribute them more widely among the states.

"In general, we are pleased. The size of the units . . . was pretty much changed to reflect our desires," said Maj. Gen. Roger P. Lempke, president of the Adjutant Generals Association of the United States.

"We are absolutely elated" over the commission decision to keep C-130H transport aircraft at New Castle, Del., Vavala said, arguing the removal of the planes would have had "a devastating impact" on air support for the nation's capital and seriously harmed his ability to recruit. Without such a decision, Delaware would have sued, he said.

For their part, senior Air Force officers yesterday appeared largely satisfied with the outcome of the commission's decisions, not just on reshuffling the Air National Guard's aircraft but on the fate of active-duty bases as well.

"We got about 70 percent of what we asked for," Gen. John P. Jumper, the Air Force chief of staff, told reporters yesterday. "That's still a considerable amount of change, when you look at it from that point of view."

The Air Force failed to win commission approval to close two large bases -- Ellsworth in South Dakota and Cannon in New Mexico. But while keeping these facilities open will reduce the amount of savings that the service had hoped to achieve by $2 billion or more, the operational impact on the Air Force is unlikely to be very significant, several officers said.

The Air Force had argued that larger squadrons at fewer bases were necessary because the number of military planes will dwindle as newer, more capable F/A-22 and F-35 fighter jets replace F-15s, F-16s and A-10s.

The original plan had called for removing all aircraft from nearly three dozen of the Air National Guard's 89 bases. Instead, the commission decided to keep aircraft at 10 of the bases that the Air Force had wanted stripped.

To provide for the additional bases, the commission created somewhat smaller squadrons generally than the Air Force had sought. In the case of F-15s, for instance, there will be 18 jets per squadron instead of 24. Still, Air Force officers said yesterday, the new squadrons will in many cases be larger than existing ones and so should prove more efficient. Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum, director of the National Guard Bureau who has tried to mediate the conflict between state Guard leaders and the regular Air Force, played down the likelihood of a lasting rift.

"What's at stake is much too important for the nation to allow for any parochial rifts," he said in an interview yesterday. "It would be highly unprofessional and dangerous to allow that to occur."

Behind base votes: skepticism of Pentagon

A Desire to transform the military wasn't enough for Pentagon to win its bid to close some major bases.

Christian Science Monitor
Mark Sappenfield
August 29, 2005

By overruling almost all of the Pentagon's most controversial decisions last week, an independent commission may have made this round's list of base closings more palatable - improving its chances of passing Congress this autumn.

But it also indicated that the commission and members of Congress are less willing to trust the Pentagon's judgment, raising questions about the strength of the Pentagon's influence on Capitol Hill.

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In the end, the unwieldy Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process might have at last outgrown its original purpose.

No longer is the base-closure process a mechanism simply for getting rid of abandoned bases, as it was after the cold war, when the military was shrinking. Now it is a strategic tool, allowing the Department of Defense to shift its forces around the chessboard of American bases for the war on terror.

The Pentagon probably got enough of what it wants to deem this round a success. Yet the fact that this round began with talk of this being the "mother of all base closures" but is now nearing a comparatively humble conclusion indicates that there are limits to what the process will allow in the name of tactical tinkering.

"This base closure is the roar that moused," says Loren Thompson, a defense analyst for the Lexington Institute in Arlington, Va. "It started out being very ambitious, but ended up being modest."

From ambitious to modest

That modesty, however, could be its salvation.

Such was the controversy over the Pentagon's original plans that some experts felt it could well have been rejected by Congress - something that had never happened in the previous rounds.

But the revisions by the BRAC Commission - including the decision to keep open major installations such as the Naval Submarine Base in New London, Conn., the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine, and Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota - might have quieted many of the most influential critics.

"This round of base closures lost core people that carried BRAC in the first place," says Jeremiah Gertler, an analyst for the Center for Strategic and International Studies here, who once worked on the BRAC Commission. Now, he adds, the commission "has disarmed the bulk of those people."

The fact that the BRAC panel deviated from the Pentagon on almost every major base closure suggests that on the biggest decisions, where the most money and jobs were at stake, there are doubts about the Pentagon's wisdom.

Part of this could be politics - analysts suggest that this panel was particularly open to local concerns, and that local governments have learned how to lobby the panel more effectively. Others note that previous rounds have made all the easy cuts, leaving the Pentagon with only harder choices.

But there was also a clear shift in this round that holds significance for the future.

Since the military is no longer shrinking as rapidly as it did immediately after the cold war, it is less imperative to trim bases. Base-cutting and realignment, then, becomes a matter of prerogative, not necessity. The Pentagon hoped its desire to transform the military would be enough to carry the day, but with the biggest bases it was not.

To some, this is a sign that the Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's clout is waning as doubts over Iraq spread. "His influence is at a low ebb and the commission is one more example of that," says Dr. Thompson.

In truth, the BRAC panel didn't make an unusually high number of changes to the Pentagon's proposals, and the overall list should allow the Defense Department to continue recasting its military as a smaller, more agile force better suited to meet the unpredictable threats of the war on terror.

"This will pave the way for future transformation," says George Lauffer, who writes a newsletter about BRAC for Potomac Advocates, a Washington-based consulting firm.

The biggest remaining question centers around a lawsuit filed by the governor of Pennsylvania against the Pentagon. He argues that the Pentagon cannot take away airplanes from the state National Guard without consulting him, and a judge found in his favor Friday.

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The Pentagon is expected to appeal, but other governors disgruntled by plans to take away their state's National Guard aircraft might also sue.

The future of realignment

It points to the entanglements of reshaping the military. Yet in a time when there is no predominant threat to the United States, the Pentagon's mission could again shift dramatically as unforeseen events unfold - creating the need for another realignment.

With the political acrimony of this round, and the panel's apparent unwillingness to make tough decisions, however, some wonder how that evolution will continue.

"This round was more about realigning than closing, and that's going to be the case in the future," says Christopher Hellman of the Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation here. Noting that Congress often impedes the Pentagon's plans to move units, he adds, "What's going to be the mechanism for that?"

Final U.S. base closing list clears panel

The International Herald Tribune
David S. Cloud
August 29, 2005

The commission charged with closing U.S. military bases has completed its work, approving a huge retrenchment of the Defense Department's domestic installations after deciding in recent days to keep open more than a dozen sites that the Pentagon had said were no longer needed.

The Base Closure and Realignment Commission approved the revised list in a half-hour final session Saturday, attended by five of the nine commissioners, after marathon deliberations over the previous three days in which members reviewed more than 800 bases that the Pentagon wanted to close, shrink or assign new missions.

Much of the Defense Department's plan for closing or consolidating 62 major military bases and 775 smaller installations emerged from the review intact. But by opting not to close installations in Connecticut, Maine, South Dakota, Alaska and Michigan, and by saving Air National Guard units in other states, the panel cut into the savings that the Pentagon hoped to achieve in this round of base closings.

The changes were a relief to communities whose bases had been on the original list and will help ensure a smoother reception for the plan in Congress, officials involved said. Although it was rarely acknowledged by the commission members during their final deliberations, their decisions had sweeping political and economic implications.

States where bases were spared could count on a continuing flow of federal money. States where bases would close have to think about new ways to generate economic growth.

Anthony Principi, the commission chairman and a former secretary of veterans affairs, said the panel successfully balanced "proposals to restructure military infrastructure against the human and painful impact of those proposals."

The revised plan now goes to President George W. Bush, who is expected to send it without changes to the U.S. Congress. Despite the sweeping nature of the Pentagon plan, Congress is not expected to block the panel's recommendations.

Among the controversial parts of the plan were proposals to shift Air National Guard units around the country, leaving some states without aircraft. Late Friday, the commission restored planes to some units, and in doing so, kept open some Air National Guard and Reserve bases that would have closed under the Pentagon plan.

Principi told reporters Friday night that changes in the Pentagon blueprint approved by the commission had cut the estimated savings over 20 years to $37 billion, from $48 billion, though he called the revised number "very preliminary."

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The nine-member commission voted 8 to 1 to overturn the proposed closing of Ellsworth Air Force Base, the second-largest employer in South Dakota, after concerted lobbying by the state's congressional delegation and the governor, who camped out in a hotel ballroom close to the Pentagon, where the commission was conducting its deliberations.

Connecticut is one of the states losing all of its National Guard combat planes. The Pentagon wants to move nine of the state's 17 A-10 Thunderbolts now based at Bradley International Airport near Windsor Locks to an Air National Guard base 30 miles away in Massachusetts. The rest of the planes would be retired, and 384 jobs connected with the squadron would disappear.

BRAC Commission Spares Army Depot, Upholds Most Pentagon Closings

Inside the Army
Glenn Maffei
August 29, 2005

A federal commission considering the Pentagon's plan to close or restructure hundreds of military bases across the country voted last week to spare an Army depot in Texas, but upheld dozens of other Army closings, including Ft. McPherson and Ft. Gillem, GA, Ft. Monroe, VA, Ft. Monmouth, NJ, and U.S. Garrison-Selfridge, MI.

The Red River Army Depot, which was targeted to close, became the lone major Army-only installation to be saved by the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission, with a ruling Aug. 24 that the installation instead should be decreased in size. The move was one of the commission's few departures from Defense Department's recommendations.

Ft. Monmouth bills itself as the "center of gravity for the Army's command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance programs." The commission upheld its closure but acknowledged potential problems in moving the base to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland.

"The commission finds that this change and the recommendation as amended are consistent with the final selection criteria," it said in approving Monmouth's closing. But the commission added to the recommendation language the following passage, "The secretary [of defense] may only proceed with the movement . . . after putting in place safeguards that will ensure that no ongoing program will be moved until redundant capability is established, or other mitigating factors are in place to ensure that no degradation of the program or its support to the global war on terror or any other military contingency operation will occur as a result of the movement of the program. Furthermore, the secretary must also put into place programs to maximize the retention of critical workforce personnel before, during and after any such move."

The commission, addressing bases used by multiple services, voted to reverse course on the Pentagon's proposal to close Hawthorne Army Depot, NV, and realign Lima Tank Plant, OH.

The commission's examination of the proposed closures for all services ended Aug. 27. It will send its recommendations to the president on Sept. 8. The process will continue, however, with President Bush having an opportunity to exercise discretion and make changes by late September. The recommendations are then sent to Congress which will have 45 days to accept in whole or reject them. Bush has said publicly he is inclined to accept the commission's recommendations.

Political fight looms over base closings

United Press International
August 29, 2005

Probable political fights -- a possible legal ones, too -- were reported likely Monday over the choice of U.S. military base closings.

An independent commission has completed its list of closings but a lot of questions remain about other defense facilities, the Wall Street Journal said.

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The commission's plan probably will be approved by President Bush and Congress but some recommended closings, particularly involving Air National Guard units, could wind up in court.

A number of states are watching the Air Guard realignment plan, which called for some units to lose their planes in an effort to slim operations and consolidate missions.

Illinois and Tennessee have sued the Pentagon over closing plans, and Missouri, Connecticut and Massachusetts are threatening similar action.

As the nine-member panel was finishing its work Friday, a federal judge in Philadelphia ruled that the Pentagon couldn't shutter an Air Guard unit in Pennsylvania without approval by the state's governor, who wants it left open.

Base closure savings seen lacking; Head of realignment panel predicts $37 billion in cuts instead of $50 billion

Wilkes Barre Times Leader
August 29, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Savings from closing or shifting the functions of many domestic military bases are likely to be far below Pentagon estimates, the head of the panel that hammered out the shifts said Saturday.

While the Pentagon had predicted a $50 billion windfall over 20 years, Anthony J. Principi, chairman of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, said the Pentagon would be lucky to save $37 billion.

The savings could drop to $14 billion if questionable personnel savings aren't counted, Principi said. The commission, which wound up its work on Saturday, had challenged the Pentagon's savings estimates repeatedly.

The commission's final session followed three days of often intense deliberations in which the panel accepted Pentagon proposals to close five major Army bases, two large Navy installations on the Gulf Coast and the Army's historic Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. The commission also consolidated or shut down hundreds of smaller National Guard and Reserve Centers across the country.

The commission reversed the Pentagon on several tough issues, by refusing to close a Navy shipyard in Maine and a submarine base in Connecticut. It also kept open the Red River Army Depot in Texas, and Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota.

The commission also voted to keep open Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico but went along with the Pentagon's recommendation to remove F-16 fighter jets from it. The panel stipulated that the base will close by 2010 unless the secretary of defense gives it a new mission.

Principi said the commission "did not flinch from tough decisions" to close bases when it agreed with the Pentagon's recommendations, but "neither did we flinch" from keeping open other installations the Pentagon sought to close.

The panel's recommendations must be on President Bush's desk by Sept 8. He has 15 days to accept or reject the list, although he can send it back once for revisions. Once Bush accepts the list, Congress has 45 days to accept it or reject it, but it can't make any changes.

Lawmakers endorsed four prior military realignment plans and are expected to approve this one.

Local News Articles

Connecticut Sues to Block Loss of National Guard Jets

New York Times (New York, NY)
William Yardley
August 30, 2005

Hartford- Connecticut sued on Monday to stop the Pentagon's planned transfer and retirement of fighter jets from the Air National Guard base at Bradley International Airport, saying the move would exceed the federal government's authority

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and leave the Guard without a "flying mission" in the state.

The state's arguments parallel those made in other states' lawsuits saying the federal government cannot close or realign National Guard bases without the consent of governors.

On Friday, a federal judge in Pennsylvania declared illegal the Pentagon's plan to transfer some of that state's National Guard planes. Later that day, Connecticut announced plans for its suit.

On Saturday, the Massachusetts attorney general, Thomas F. Reilly, said the state would sue to prevent the transfer of F-18 fighters from the Otis Air National Guard Base on Cape Cod to a base at a municipal airport in Westfield, Mass.

The ruling in the Pennsylvania case came on the same afternoon that an independent federal commission upheld the Pentagon's plan to transfer 9 of the 15 active A-10 Warthogs at the Bradley base to bases in other states. The other six Warthogs would be retired.

The commission, the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, made the decision as part of a review of the Pentagon's proposal to close hundreds of military bases nationwide.

Earlier in the week, the commission overruled a Pentagon plan to close the Navy's submarine base in Groton, which employs about 8,500 people. That decision won the commission statewide praise as officials expressed relief that one of the region's largest military bases and an economic anchor would stay in place.

But the move to transfer fighter jets, which could reduce the Bradley base's work force by nearly 400 employees, amounted to what Attorney General Richard Blumenthal called "a power grab that we must meet head to head." He said Connecticut would be the only state where an Air National Guard unit had no flying mission.

"There is an important principle here that goes back to the first days of the republic," Mr. Blumenthal said. "The National Guard is the successor to our militia. We are guaranteed a militia by the United States Constitution and, equally important, by the statutes of our nation."

Mr. Blumenthal, a Democrat, announced the suit with Gov. M. Jodi Rell, a Republican, in a news conference at the Capitol that also included Brig. Gen. Thaddeus J. Martin, the adjutant general of the state's National Guard, which includes the 103rd Fighter Wing at Bradley, in Windsor Locks.

"We're going to court to protect my authority and that of future governors and future commanders in chief," Mrs. Rell said. "The men of the 103rd Flying Yankees have been protecting us since 1917, and today we're stepping up to protect them and to defend them. It's going to be an all-out fight, and I expect to win."

Mr. Blumenthal said Connecticut's case was stronger than Pennsylvania's because Connecticut would lose all its active aircraft, while Pennsylvania would lose only some. A spokesman for the Department of Justice, Charles Miller, said Monday that the department had not decided whether to appeal the Pennsylvania ruling.

The lawsuits underscore the blurry lines of authority over the Guard, several lawyers said Monday. The federal government has the authority to activate Guard units to federal service, as in the war in Iraq, but governors control the Guard when units are not in federal service, according to the lawsuit.

"Does that mean that the governor has the authority to control the weaponry?" said Edward S. Hershfield, a Boston lawyer who has worked on base-closing cases, noting one unresolved question.

A section of federal law dealing with the organization and command of the Guard and cited by the Connecticut suit says, "No change in the branch, organization, or allotment of a

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unit located entirely within a state may be made without the approval of its governor."

Mr. Hershfield said conflict over control of the Guard might have increased since states have become more concerned with defending themselves against terrorism.

Mrs. Rell and Mr. Blumenthal said transferring the planes without the state's consent would undermine the governor's authority as well as recruitment and retention efforts in the Guard. General Martin said the transfer would include losing as many as 384 of the base's 926 employees, hurting the state's ability to respond to emergencies.

The 103rd Fighter Wing is not currently active in combat. Christopher Hellman, a senior analyst at the Center for Defense Information, a group in Washington that researches global security, said the A-10 jets were "worth their weight in gold" for their role supporting ground troops by attacking tanks and artillery. They have played that role in Bosnia and the Gulf War.

The suit is the second in a week that Connecticut has filed against the federal government. Last week, the state filed suit saying the federal No Child Left Behind education policy demanded changes in student testing without paying for the changes.

PA Governor Rendell Calls on Department of Defense to Maintain Flying Operations at Willow Grove

PR Newswire US (Harrisburg, PA)
August 29, 2005

HARRISBURG, Pa. -- PA Governor Rendell today called on the Department of Defense (DoD) to maintain flying operations at Willow Grove after a Defense Base Closure Realignment Commission (BRAC) decision to move Willow Grove A-10s on Friday.

A Federal Court judge ruled on Friday that the BRAC decisions with regard to the 111th Fighter Wing at Willow Grove, its aircraft and associated equipment were "null and void," just hours before the Commission struck the DoD recommendation to deactivate the 111th and maintain the unit's current manpower and budget levels. The Governor called the commission's subsequent vote to remove the 15 A-10 fighter planes currently at Willow Grove assigned to the 111th short-sighted. Moreover, the commonwealth believes that the BRAC decision with respect to the 111th are meaningless given that it considered recommendations that the court ruled were illegal.

"Any effort to strip this unit of its aircraft is an outrageous waste of taxpayer resources and the talents of more than 1,000 highly trained men and women," said Governor Rendell. "The high cost of training personnel alone makes this decision foolish at best, but coupled with this unit's exceptional experience - more than 75 percent have served in Iraq and Afghanistan - we believe DoD will agree that the best course of action is to keep these planes in Pennsylvania."

The Governor noted the BRAC decision to move the A-10s to units that have never flown these aircraft will also mean major retraining costs.

Working with the community, the Pennsylvania congressional delegation and the DoD, the Governor pledged to determine the best possible use of the military base at Willow Grove and the 111th Fighter Wing. Under the DoD and BRAC recommendations, Willow Grove will maintain one Air National Guard unit and add an Army enclave that will support the addition of six area Army Reserve units to the base.

The Air National Guard's 270th Engineering Installation Squadron will stay at Willow Grove and Army Reserve units from Chester, Philadelphia, Horsham and Norristown will join the base.

"We are all disappointed by the loss of Navy, Marine and Air Force units at Willow Grove, but I am confident that this base will continue to have a strong military presence in the future," said Governor Rendell. "With a continued bi-partisan effort, this high-performing fighter wing

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will continue to protect the American people and remain an important part of Pennsylvania's military operations."

Stronger Bonds urged Between base, Community

New London Day (New London, CT)
Robert A. Hamilton
August 30, 2005

New London— Backers of the fight to save the Naval Submarine Base in Groton jumped right back into the fray Monday, saying both state and local groups need to redouble their efforts to make the region more responsive to the Navy and base personnel.

In particular, members of the Subase Realignment Coalition want to resurrect a Military-Community Council that had been dormant for several years before the base battle.

John C. Markowicz, chairman of the Subase Realignment Coalition, said the state, and southeastern Connecticut, should learn how to replicate the relationships that exist in other regions with a large Navy presence, particularly the area around Norfolk, Va., which provides a lot of support to sailors.

Those who led the effort to keep the base open also urged the state to follow through on the $10 million in bonding that was promised at the height of the fight, perhaps to improve energy efficiency at the base.

Rich Harris, a spokesman for Gov. M. Jodi Rell, said she is still working out details of how that money will be spent, but the governor “is not going to let up at all in protecting the submarine base and ensuring the jobs and economic engine it brings to the region are safeguarded.”

“It absolutely remains a priority with the governor,” Harris said.

The coalition, the governor and the state's congressional delegation have been working since May 13 to overturn a Pentagon recommendation to close the Groton base.

Supporters of the “save-the-base” movement were relieved when the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission voted last week to take it off the list, but said the battle must continue to make the state friendly to the military, in case there is ever another base closure process.

U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, noted that boosting the base has been a bipartisan effort, with Sens. Cathy Cook, R-Mystic, and Andrea Stillman, D-Waterford, among the most active members of the group.

Simmons said the Navy has complained about energy costs at the base, and Cook and Stillman have been investigating the use of the state funding to perhaps pay for a modern gas turbine that could generate a large share of the electricity used there, or the use of fuel cells as a demonstration project, which would not only help the base, but would boost a fledgling industry in the state.

“The technology is expensive right now, but if we don't continue to push the technology, we're not going to make any progress,” Simmons said.

In addition, he noted that the state Department of Environmental Protection has been cooperating with the base and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on a phased cleanup of the base, which has been cited as a model for cooperation between state agencies and the military.

When the Military-Community Council was re-started last year, the base was limited in how much it could participate because it did not want to undermine any Pentagon recommendations.

But Norbert V. “Bud” Fay, one of the council's organizers and advocates, said the committee continues to work to smooth relations between the base and local organizations. For instance, one sailor's family who was having a problem with a local school recently brought the matter to the attention of the council, which acted as an intermediary to get the issue resolved.

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Fay said the group will start meeting regularly again next month, hopefully with members from various military organizations. In the past, the Navy, the National Guard and the Coast Guard have sent representatives to the meetings.

Markowicz said it might also help if there was a comparable organization statewide, which could either augment or replace the local council.

“The mechanics of how it would happen at the state level, I'm not ready to make any recommendations, but it could be helpful to have it at that level,” said Markowicz, adding that it would show that the state stands behind the effort.

In addition, he said the state needs policies to retain and expand defense manufacturing businesses, not just Electric Boat in Groton, but Pratt & Whitney Aircraft in East Hartford, Sikorsky Helicopter in Stratford and other smaller firms, to send a signal to the Defense Department that Connecticut supports the military and its industrial base.

“We need to learn from this process so it never happens again,” Markowicz said. “I think the Subase Realignment Coalition has a role in that going forward, but we'll see how it evolves.”

Groton Win could Boost home Port advantage

Some Argue Local Base Could House All Attack Subs On East Coast

New London Day (New London, CT)
Robert A. Hamilton
August 30, 2005

New London— Supporters of the Naval Submarine Base in Groton say the federal base closure commission's vote to spare the base might strengthen a proposal to make Groton the sole attack submarine home port on the East Coast.

Early in its base closure review, the Navy considered and abandoned a plan to move attack submarines out of Norfolk, Va., and consolidate them in Connecticut, but backers of the Groton base say that decision was based on some flawed data.

Since then, the Subase Realignment Coalition has run a computer model with corrected data that shows as much as $260 million would be saved over 20 years if all attack submarines were in Groton.

“We certainly will make that information available to any interested parties in the Department of Defense if they're interested in the efficiency and savings,” coalition Chairman John C. Markowicz said during a meeting Monday.

In addition, with the closure of surface-ship bases in Texas and Mississippi, the Navy might need pier space in Norfolk for surface ships, particularly as its new class of planned Littoral Combat Ships begins to enter the fleet, he said.

“I'm going to go back and look at the scenario again,” said U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District. “Groton can accommodate any kind of attack submarine, and from the numbers, it looks like it would be able to accommodate all of them in the Atlantic before too long.”

Officials in Kings Bay, Ga., have said the Navy base there could also accept attack submarines, but the base, built to accommodate ballistic missile submarines, would require considerable investment in new infrastructure, Simmons said.

Originally, the Navy had recommended closing Groton and moving two squadrons of submarines there to Norfolk and one to Kings Bay. But it would have had to build two new piers in Norfolk and extend one in Kings Bay to accept the boats.

Markowicz said that under current Navy plans, Groton could soon accommodate all submarines in the Atlantic fleet with minimal new construction — at most a new barracks building, and possibly not even that, he said.

That's because the Navy is in the final stages of planning to move its three Seawolf-class attack submarines to a base in Bremerton, Wash. The

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USS Jimmy Carter, which joined the fleet last year, was scheduled to move there because the high-security base is designed for the type of spy-submarine missions the Carter will perform. So it makes sense to base the other two Seawolf-class submarines there for logistic and support purposes, Navy sources have said.

In addition, the Navy plans to move at least two Los Angeles-class submarines from the Atlantic to San Diego, and possibly a third to Guam to replace the USS San Francisco, which was badly damaged in a collision with a seamount this year, the Navy sources have said.

Currently, Groton is home to 18 attack submarines and Norfolk is home to 11, for an Atlantic force of 29. But the move of at least five submarines to the Pacific and the planned decommissioning of others could drop that to 20 in the next five years, Markowicz said. Groton has been the home port for as many as 22 submarines.

“We're not advocating moving Norfolk's submarines, because we're not into poaching anyone's assets,” Markowicz said. “We're just responding to the declining size of the submarine force, the shift of submarines to the Pacific and what might make the most sense in that environment.”

Sub Base Is Getting More Funds From Navy

Construction Money Hints BRAC Decision Will Not Be Appealed

New London Day (New London, CT)
Robert A. Hamilton
August 30, 2005

Groton — The Navy has released $54 million to restart critical construction projects at the Naval Submarine Base, a clear signal it has decided not to appeal the decision to keep the base open, a congressional source said Monday.

The Commander for Naval Installations has given the base the go-ahead to proceed with construction of a $28 million pier, a $17 million escape trainer, $5 million in security improvements at two entrances and a $4 million weapons-storage area, the source said.

“It's wonderful good news, because it means we can get on with the future of the base,” U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, said upon learning of the news. “We can put all this difficulty and delay behind us and get on with investing in the base.

“Getting this construction restarted was top on my agenda last week, after we got off the list,” Simmons continued, though he acknowledged he thought it might take longer. “I commend the Navy for being so responsive to our interests.”

The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, which voted 7-1 last Wednesday to take Groton off the Pentagon's closure list, sends its report to President Bush Sept. 8. Bush has until Sept. 23 to decide whether to forward it to Congress or send it back to the commission for more work. Once Congress gets the list, it has 45 days to reject it or it becomes law.

The president has said he will approve the commission's recommendations, and Congress is expected to approve the final report as well.

“I think they understand that once we're off the list the chances we will be put back on are very slight, so why tie up the people and projects any longer? Let's get on with it,” Simmons said. “I welcome that decisiveness.”

John C. Markowicz, chairman of the Subase Realignment Coalition, a grassroots group that worked with the governor and the congressional delegation to oppose the Groton shutdown, echoed Simmons' comments.

“That's great news, particularly for the companies that hold the contracts for those projects,” he said.

Even better, Markowicz said, is that it indicates the base is likely safe from any politicking by the Pentagon, which could have sought to get the commission to reconsider its decision.

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“It's unlikely that a single department within the Department of Defense would make this kind of decision without consulting up the chain of command,” Markowicz said.

But he said the coalition and others involved in the “save-the-base” fight won't relax until the final list passes into law and Groton is not on it.

“I'm still worried, and I acknowledge I'm a worrier,” Markowicz said. “I didn't think we were going to be on the list May 13. My attitude got recalibrated that day.

“But from an economic development perspective, this is great news, and it will be greatly appreciated by the community. It's important to the region, and even more important to the sailors, that we get on with these improvements.”

The Navy had suspended several major projects following the announcement in May that the Pentagon was recommending closing the Groton base. Some of the entrance-gate work has already been completed, but additional security improvements that were part of the contract were put on hold. In addition, the Navy had suspended work on a modern Tomahawk cruise-missile magazine in a compound at the north end of the base.

The Navy also had been prepared to award a contract as early as April to build a new pier for modern submarines, under a “pier-every-other-year” replacement schedule, and an escape trainer was supposed to have a groundbreaking in August.

Some of the older piers do not have the electrical and communications services that modern submarines require, and can't stand up under the weight of modern weapons. The Navy will have to renegotiate the starting date for the pier construction to cause minimal environmental disruption.

M.A. Mortenson Co. of Minneapolis has won the contract to build the trainer, which is scheduled to be in service by April 2007. It will include a 30-foot water tower with escape chambers similar to those on Los Angeles- and Virginia-class submarines at the bottom of the tower, allowing sailors the experience of escaping from a disabled submarine. There will also be administrative, classroom and medical offices.

The Navy operated a 127-foot dive tower on the base from 1920 until 1982, but it was torn down in the late 1980s.

“I hope to be at every one of the groundbreakings,” Simmons said.

Gains at other bases soften blow of BRAC closing of Fort Monmouth

Asbury Park Press (Asbury Park, NJ)
Ledyard King
August 30, 2005

WASHINGTON — Military posts in northern and southern New Jersey did quite well during this latest round of base realignments, although their gains were overshadowed by the decision to close Fort Monmouth.

Picatinny Arsenal in Morris County would gain up to 600 jobs and solidify its status as a national munitions research center. Fort Dix in Burlington County would add more than 350 jobs as a regional headquarters for reservist operations. And McGuire Air Force Base, which gained more than 30 aircraft from Pennsylvania, would become the hub of a joint base that includes Dix and Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Station.

Much of that has to do with the work of a congressional delegation that has steered hundreds of millions of dollars to New Jersey bases since the last base closure round a decade ago. Dix, Lakehurst and McGuire combined have received more than $1 billion since 1993 for projects designed to make them indispensable to the military.

"For over 10 years, we've been strategizing on how to keep the base open," Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J., said about Picatinny, a base in his district that analysts thought faced

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closure. "New engineering labs, modern facilities, upgrade of testing and evaluation (equipment) — there's a lot of good investment that's going to be put to better use."

Next stop: Bush's desk

Last week's recommendations from the Base Realignment and Closure commission must be forwarded to President Bush by Sept. 8 for his review. White House spokesman Ken Lisaius said Monday that the president would "carefully consider" the report once he sees it.

Bush can send it back to the commission once with suggested changes, but after that, he and Congress must accept or reject the list in its entirety.

The commission approved the large majority of the 67 major recommendations and hundreds of minor ones it reviewed. The goal of this round of military restructuring is to save money and get the military better positioned to fight terrorism and other modern threats.

New Jersey would lose about 3,000 jobs overall under the plan, largely due to the elimination of Fort Monmouth and its more than 5,200 workers. Jobs being lost at some bases, including Earle Naval Weapons Station and Lakehurst, would be relocated to other bases in the Garden State.

The man who headed a state commission fighting to save New Jersey military installations said much good came out of the process.

"When you do the absolute arithmetic, it was a net loss. But we gained thousands of people and the opportunity for the joint base and Picatinny is limitless," said retired Vice Adm. Paul Gaffney, who is president of Monmouth University.

Although the BRAC panel overruled the Pentagon by voting to keep several high-profile bases open, the vast majority of the Pentagon's proposal remained intact, including the proposed closure of Fort Monmouth.

"I don't know what else we could have done," Rep. H. James Saxton, R-N.J., said Friday as he watched the panel complete its work.

If the president and Congress adopt the plan this fall, the Defense Department has up to six years to implement the changes. Fort Monmouth supporters hope it takes much longer.

The BRAC panel added a caveat to Monmouth's closure, requiring that the Pentagon make sure the vital communications and electronics work the fort conducts for soldiers in the field is not disrupted during the relocation of its primary research and development mission to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland.

The panel stopped short of requiring that Congress "certify" those safeguards as Rep. Christopher H. Smith, R-N.J., and other New Jersey lawmakers wanted. But Rep. Frank J. Pallone Jr., D-N.J., thinks that congressional oversight in any form could slow the fort's shutdown.

"BRAC-proofing" megabase

Monmouth's closure would affect 5,272 base employees, according to the Pentagon's numbers, not to mention thousands more who supply goods and services to the fort and its workers. That loss, though, would be softened a bit by the gaining of several hundred jobs each at McGuire and Dix, both of which escaped closure in earlier base-closing rounds.

Saxton said uniting Dix, McGuire and Lakehurst under one central command, the kind of "joint" activity the Pentagon has been advocating, would help make it "BRAC-proof" whenever the Pentagon once again decides to consolidate its installations.

Picatinny, an Army base, would gain between 500 and 600 workers, mostly from Navy installations around the country that develop weapons and ammunition. In a last-minute switch by the BRAC panel, the arsenal would also retain its "energetics" mission developing the propellants and explosives used to fire weapons.

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Frelinghuysen said Picatinny's growth could be an opportunity for some Monmouth workers who want to continue working for the Army but don't want to leave New Jersey.

Opinions/ Editorials

Congratulations to those who protected Alaska base from closure

Anchorage Daily News (Anchorage, AK)
August 29, 2005

The Base Closure and Realignment Commission has spoken. Eielson Air Force Base, the biggest Alaska target on the closure list, will remain open, although it will lose 18 A-10 jet aircraft.

Clearly commissioners were unconvinced by the Air Force's argument that reducing Eielson to a milk-toast "warm" status would save money and better serve defense interests. Their skepticism was obvious at times during the panel hearings in Fairbanks, Alaska, and prior to the vote Thursday.

Eielson survived on the merits, but a lot of hard work went into making the merits known to the commissioners. Sen. Ted Stevens, Gov. Frank Murkowski, Sen. Lisa Murkowski, community leaders in Fairbanks, and various hired consultants in Alaska and Washington made sure - repeatedly - the commission understood Eielson's value. This was a job well done, a powerful example of the triumph of the facts over assertions.

Since 1988, four bipartisan commissions have closed 125 major facilities and 225 minor bases and installations. During that time, the commission has been reluctant to overrule the recommendations of military planners at the Pentagon. Not last week. The commissioners did not hesitate to reject the closure of Eielson. Nor did they hesitate to preserve other large, expensive facilities, notably Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota and the Naval Submarine Base at Groton, Conn.

Military planners often did a poor job of proving that the closure and realignments would save money. Commissioners repeatedly asked, "Where are the savings?" and did not receive a convincing answer.

In addition, communities affected by proposed base closures have become far better at responding to the Pentagon. They have learned how to play politics in what, when Congress and the Pentagon created the commission, was supposed to be a nonpolitical environment. And how can anyone blame them when thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in payroll and other military spending are at stake?

The commission's other decisions affecting Alaska, while painful, were as expected. The Kulis Air Guard Station will close, the aircraft and personnel moving to Elmendorf Air Force Base. The Air Force will no longer pay to keep the 7,200-foot runway at Galena ready for military use. And Elmendorf will experience a modest realignment.

The Galena decision was especially lamentable for a small community that will lose one-third of its jobs. Overall, though, Alaska fared far better than expected when the original base closure and realignment list appeared.

Additional Notes

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