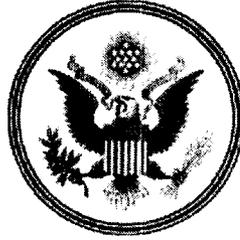


Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

September 3, 2005

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Guard, Tags Aim To Repair Relationship With USAF Strained By BRAC Round

Inside the Air Force

Martin Matishak

September 2, 2005

Air National Guard officials and adjutants general this week said they are optimistic about repairing their strained relationship with Air Force officials after the Base Realignment and Closure Commission last week voted to curb several Pentagon plans to consolidate a list of Guard bases and move aircraft to new facilities.

The Defense Department had recommended shuttering 10 Air Force installations and

realigning another 62 in its May base realignment and closure report. The majority of the Air Force-related proposals pitched by the department called for a significant overhaul of Guard and Air Force Reserve bases, urging seven base closures and 35 realignments. Those proposals also sparked one of the most contentious debates of the months-long BRAC round, as state adjutants general argued they were not consulted when the Air Force compiled its portion of the Pentagon's report.

Last month, late in the 2005 BRAC process, the Adjutants General Association of the United States (AGAUS) submitted its own plan to the BRAC Commission that urged the panel to vote down many of DOD's recommendations.

Ultimately, the panel last week decided to keep aircraft at 10 of the Guard and Reserve bases defense officials had targeted for changes. The commissioners also distributed existing airframes among a number of bases so a flying unit will be located in nearly every state.

"We're actually pretty pleased with the results," Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, Adjutant General (TAG) of Nebraska and AGAUS president told Inside the Air Force Sept. 1.

Commissioners also included language in their proposals that force the service to keep aircraft at those bases that will receive new emerging missions, such as the family of UAVs at Grand Forks Air Force Base, ND, Lempke continued.

"When we looked through the whole thing . . . we found we got about 70 percent . . . of what we asked for," Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John Jumper told reporters during an Aug. 29 Pentagon roundtable. The commission's recommendations must still be approved by President Bush and Congress.

"So, we're fully prepared to accept the outcome of the process that we signed up for . . . I don't look at it as a severe blow; I look at it as getting most of what we asked for," the outgoing chief of staff said. "I'm not disappointed" in the BRAC panel's decisions.

Jumper added that the most difficult issue the commissioners had to examine was the Air Force's move to transform the ANG's overall mission.

However, Maj. Gen. Frank Vavala, TAG of Delaware, disagreed with Jumper, saying his analysts have closely dissected the commission's votes and determined the panel approved about "85 percent" of the Pentagon's proposals.

With the commission's work largely complete, Air Force and TAG officials must turn their focus toward repairing what has become a rather strained relationship, he added.

"That's going to be a real tough chasm to negotiate," the two-star said. "That relationship is only going to improve by good faith and inclusion by the Air Force in allowing us to participate in Future Total Force . . . especially as it relates" to the Quadrennial Defense Review, Vavala added.

Senior Air Force officials this week declined to comment on the commission's decisions and how it would respond to panel's highly publicized moves.

The Future Total Force (FTF) plan is envisioned by service officials as a comprehensive path for the Air Force -- taking into account equipment modernization and divestment, along with the optimal active, Guard and Reserve force mix.

Lempke said the TAG's relationship with senior Air Force officials "has been improving as of late."

"Our plan is to work with the Air Force towards defining our role in the [FTF] and working to change our force structure to meet those needs," he said. Meetings already have been scheduled for later this month with the incoming Air Force chief of staff, Gen. Michael Moseley, to address the issue, Lempke added.

Moseley is slated to take over as service chief Sept. 2 for the soon-to-rotate Jumper.

While Guard and Reserve officials were conciliatory this week, several states targeted for changes by the BRAC panel responded to last week's votes by filing lawsuits in an effort to block the commission's recommendations.

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

The commission approved the Pentagon's proposal to remove all 17 A-10 attack aircraft from the 103rd Fighter Wing at Bradley Air National Guard Base, CT, Aug. 26.

"I have said from the beginning that the Department of Defense and the BRAC Commission need my permission as commander-in-chief of the Connecticut National Guard to take any action regarding the 103rd Fighting Wing at Bradley," Connecticut Gov. M. Jodi Rell (R) said in a statement. "I didn't give my permission then, and I am not giving it now."

Missouri filed a lawsuit Aug. 30 contesting a commission proposal to remove all 15 F-15 fighters from Lambert-St. Louis International Air Guard Station.

"It is incomprehensible to me that the recommendation to close the 131st Air National Guard Fighter Wing was adopted by the BRAC Commission," Gov. Matt Blunt (R) said in a statement.

Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney (R) also is considering a lawsuit after the commission approved DOD's plan to Close Otis Air National Guard Base and redistribute that base's F-15 fleet.

However, of all the pending legal actions, Pennsylvania's has progressed the furthest.

A federal court judge late last month ruled the BRAC panel's decisions on the 111th Fighter Wing at Willow Grove, PA, and its A-10 attack planes were both "null and void." The decision came within hours of the commission's Aug. 26 vote to approve DOD's plan to retain the facility and add an Army "enclave."

That federal court ruling came just weeks after the Justice Department sided with the Pentagon in the dispute over whether governors or the Pentagon possesses the right to move ANG units. Justice officials argued in a statement that even though the Guard descends from the nation's earliest militias, the Constitution states Congress has the power to "provide for organizing, arming and disciplining" such units when they are called on for national service.

At press time (Sept. 1), a spokeswoman from Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell's (D) office did not respond to questions about the governor's planned next steps in the litigation process.

The BRAC Commission will send its report to the White House by Sept. 8. By law, the president must approve or reject the commission's list by the end of this month. The recommendations will become law if the president approves the proposals and Congress does not object within 45 legislative days.

BRAC Commissioners Vote To Keep Ellsworth And Cannon Open

Inside the Air Force

Martin Matishak

September 2, 2005

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted last week to keep open two major Air Force bases, rejecting Pentagon plans that would have altered the service's bomber and fighter compositions.

Commissioners voted 8-1 Aug. 26 against the Defense Department's proposal to shutter Ellsworth Air Force Base, SD, and move its B-1 bombers to Dyess AFB, TX. Hours later, the panel approved by a 6-1 vote the decision to break up the F-16 fighter fleet at Cannon AFB,

NM, but to "enclave" the base for possible future missions rather than shutter it, meaning the aircraft would be moved but the infrastructure and personnel would remain.

The independent panel approved the Pentagon's recommendation to lose Onizuka Air Force Station, CA, in order to consolidate satellite command-and-control operations. The facility's missions would be moved to Vandenberg AFB, CA.

The Defense Department estimated shifting Ellsworth's 24 B-1 bombers would save \$1.8 billion but the panel concluded it actually would generate a net cost of \$19.4 million over 20 years.

Ellsworth was considered for closure in the 1995 BRAC round but that proposal was dropped to avoid having the Air Force's entire B-1 fleet in a single location. Half the U.S. military's B-1 fleet is located at Ellsworth. However, a July 1 Government Accountability Office report found that service officials had stopped worrying over such consolidation.

The Air Force would just be moving the bombers from one quality base to another, but without any actual cost savings, commission member retired Adm. Harold Gehman, argued.

The panel's staff found the proposed closure of South Dakota's second-largest employer would result in an 8.5 percent job loss, compared to the DOD average for BRAC-related economic impact of plus or minus 1.5 percent. The figure increased due to South Dakota's low population and the base's rural location, according to staff members.

During the debate, commissioners also expressed apprehension over how the Pentagon's proposed move would be affected by a pending lawsuit in Texas from residents near the Dyess base. They claim bombers fly so low that the turbulence affects their homes and are seeking to change local laws to redetermine the aircraft's altitude. Their lawsuit would raise the bomber's "floor" from 300 feet to 500 feet.

The commission's decision on Ellsworth was a major victory for freshman Sen. John Thune (R-SD), who promised voters throughout his 2004 campaign that his ties to President Bush would help keep the base open. That promise helped nudge Thune over former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D) in the election.

"I commend the BRAC commissioners and their staff for listening to our arguments and recognizing Ellsworth's military value," Thune said in a statement immediately following the decision. "Ellsworth Air Force Base is integral to America's current and future security needs."

Meanwhile, with Cannon the panel partially embraced the Pentagon's plan for that base. The department's plan called for removing the base's F-16 aircraft and distributing them among Andrews AFB, MD; Nellis AFB, NV; Hill AFB, UT; Joe Foss Field Air Guard Station, SD; and Truax Field Air Guard Station, WI.

The Pentagon estimated closing Cannon and moving its fighter fleet would save the department \$2.7 billion over 20 years but again the panel's math came out differently, concluding the change would save only \$216.5 million.

Commission member and retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd Newton introduced a motion that would have broken up the fleet as intended but replace those jets with training aircraft from Moody AFB, GA. Cannon could have increased utility for future aircraft training, specifically the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, and could serve as a hub for coalition exercises, he argued.

However, BRAC Commission Chairman Anthony Principi and other panel members felt "uncomfortable" dictating moves to the Air Force and the Pentagon.

When Newton's motion failed, former chief of staff for the first President Bush Samuel Skinner, introduced another amendment to "enclave" the base. He said he understood reducing the base to that status would impact the local economy negatively but the half-dozen

communities proposed to receive F-16s would suffer if the fleet was not dispersed.

Skinner's motion also asked Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to consider finding a new mission for the facility before Dec. 31, 2009. If the Pentagon fails to do so, the base would close.

Local News Articles

Suit Aims To Prevent Closing Of Fort Monmouth

New York Times (New York, NY)
Damien Cave
September 3, 2005

A coalition of state and local elected officials, as well as soldiers, unions and defense contractors in New Jersey, filed a federal lawsuit yesterday that seeks to keep Fort Monmouth from being closed based on a recommendation by the Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

The lawsuit, filed in Federal District Court in Trenton, argues that the commission, known as BRAC, exceeded its authority by voting to close Fort Monmouth while adding a condition: that the Army first create safeguards to ensure that shuttering the base will not hamper the war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Since the law that gives the nine-member commission its authority over bases does not include a provision for amendments, the suit said, the panel overstepped its authority.

"We are simply asking the court to review the process and determine whether the BRAC commission failed to comply with the BRAC Acts of 2005 and 1990," said United States Representative Rush Holt, a Democrat whose district includes parts of the base. "If we win, the remedy is simple: Take the fort off the list."

The base will close only if President Bush approves the commission's recommendation next month. He can make changes to the panel's list before submitting it to Congress for an up-or-down vote, but neither the president nor

lawmakers are expected to overturn the commission's decisions.

In the case of Fort Monmouth, the closing of the base would mean the end of nearly 5,200 jobs, both civilian and military.

Representative Frank Pallone Jr., a Monmouth County Democrat, said the lawsuit also argued that the commission should not have voted to shutter the base because it found that it did not meet the legal criteria for closing, which led to the additional condition. "It's like saying we want to close it even though we think we shouldn't," he said. "From a legal point of view, we don't believe they had the authority to close the base when most of the criteria were violated."

A federal judge is scheduled to hear the case on Tuesday.

States Take Legal Steps To Block Loss Of Fighter Wings

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (St. Louis, MO)
Philip Dine
September 2, 2005

WASHINGTON - Missouri and Illinois took separate legal steps Thursday to try to block the loss of Air National Guard fighter wings in their states.

Missouri filed a motion for a preliminary injunction against the closing of the 131st Air National Guard F-15 Fighter Wing at Lambert Field and had a teleconference with the federal judge involved, said Scott Holste, spokesman for Missouri Attorney General Jay Nixon.

The judge ordered the Department of Justice to file a brief in response today and told Missouri to file its reply on Monday, Holste said. If the judge hears arguments on the case, it would be on Tuesday.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted last week to move St. Louis' F-15s to other states and to take similar action with the Air

National Guard F-16 Fighter Wing in Springfield, Ill.

In Springfield, Ill., officials requested a temporary restraining order to block the BRAC Commission from sending to President George W. Bush its recommendation for the 183rd Fighter Wing in Springfield.

A court hearing has been set for 10 a.m. today, said Illinois assistant Attorney General Terence Corrigan.

Illinois, along with Missouri and Pennsylvania, has already filed suit against the Pentagon for recommending that Air National Guard bases in the respective states be closed. The suits assert that such action can't be taken without the consent of the governor involved. A District Court judge in Pennsylvania ruled in favor of the state last week; the other cases are pending.

Corrigan said Illinois took the additional action Thursday because it is trying to block the BRAC Commission from sending its list of closures and realignments to Bush, who has indicated he would approve the list and send it on to Congress. The commission must send its list to Bush by Thursday.

In its suit, which requested an expedited ruling, Pennsylvania argued that once the list is forwarded to the president, action can no longer be reviewed by the court, Corrigan said. While Illinois does not agree with that interpretation, it filed Thursday's request "to protect us if that's a correct interpretation of the law," Corrigan said. Missouri is also trying to beat the Thursday date, Holste said.

Group Files Lawsuit to Keep N.J. Base Open

The Washington Post (Washington DC)
Jeff Linkous
September 2, 2005

TRENTON, N.J. -- A group of politicians, unions, contractors and soldiers filed a lawsuit Friday seeking to overturn a federal panel's decision to close Fort Monmouth, making New

Jersey at least the fifth state where suits have been filed over the federal base closings plan.

"We're doing this for the men and women overseas whose lives depend on the work at Fort Monmouth," Rep. Rush Holt said of the lawsuit asking that Fort Monmouth be taken off the list of bases slated for closure.

"If they're fighting for us, we think we shouldn't give up on them," Holt said.

A hearing was scheduled for Tuesday, two days before the deadline for the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to present a list to President Bush. Bush and Congress have veto power over the final plan.

The commission voted last month to close Fort Monmouth and send thousands of jobs to the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. The panel said, however, that shuttering the base could not interfere with the ongoing war on terror. Holt said that condition was one of several moves targeted by the lawsuit.

Commission spokesman Robert McCreary believed the panel's members had not seen the lawsuit yet. However, he said, "We're following the court proceedings and will act accordingly."

Lawsuits over the commission's closure recommendations also have been filed in Connecticut, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Tennessee.

On Friday, a federal judge said he would rule promptly on Tennessee's request for a temporary injunction that would halt the Pentagon's recommendation to relocate the Tennessee Air National Guard's 118th Air Lift Wing.

Another federal judge, in Connecticut, this week temporarily halted the national base closings commission from recommending a realignment of a Connecticut Air National Guard base, which the governor contends cannot be done without her approval.

Illinois filed a similar lawsuit in an attempt to prevent an F-16 fighter squadron in Springfield from being moved to Indiana. A federal judge recently ruled in favor of Pennsylvania's governor after that state argued the Defense Department needs the governor's approval to dissolve an Air National Guard division there.

**Air base's outlook remains unclear
Officials can't say how decisions of panel will
impact Jacksonville**

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (Little Rock, AR)
Brandon Tubbs
September 2, 2005

A week has passed since a federal panel assembled to help reorganize the nation's military cast votes that affect Little Rock Air Force Base and still no one is saying exactly how many additional planes and jobs the base will land.

Under Defense Department recommendations released in May, Little Rock was to add dozens of C-130s to its fleet of an estimated 73. The Air National Guard was to gain 10 for a total of 18. The Jacksonville base also was to receive 3,000 to 4,000 jobs over the next two to six years.

But the Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted last week to keep open two Air Force bases, meaning that the Jacksonville base likely will not be getting as many new planes and jobs.

Members of Arkansas' congressional delegation believe the base will gain only nine C-130s, based on initial counts by the Air Force.

"I wish I could share with you exactly where we're at with Little Rock Air Force Base," U.S. Rep. Vic Snyder, D-Ark., said at a meeting of the North Little Rock Rotary Club at Alltel Arena on Thursday. "Every time I think I'm getting the exact information, it seems to be in conflict with the information I got just before or the information I'm about to get about ... what kind of changes are going to happen at Little Rock Air Force Base.

"My guess is that we will probably see a small, net increase in the number of planes and the accompanying personnel, but I would expect it's going to be pretty small."

The commission's work has left others trying to interpret the impact on the base near Jacksonville .

"I thought the picture of Little Rock would be clearer," Democratic Sen. Mark Pryor said Thursday. "It's still like a jigsaw puzzle and there's a few pieces missing."

Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark., spoke with commission Chairman Anthony Principi late Wednesday, and she said he reassured her that Little Rock will not lose any planes.

But no one has said how a motion made by another commissioner, retired Adm. Harold Gehman, will affect the base. The motion, according to the uncertified transcript of the commission's deliberations, reads, "realign Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas, distribute 42 of the C-130 aircraft assigned to Little Rock, Arkansas."

Gehman was not available for comment.

Jacksonville Mayor Tommy Swaim said, "We've just resolved to be patient. The point that I think is important to us is the Air Force will ultimately have authority to disperse planes that weren't addressed" by the commission.

As of September 2004, the Jacksonville base had 56 C-130 Es, 14 C-130 Hs and three C-130 Js authorized to the 314 th Airlift Wing, which is the primary training wing for C-130s. The Air National Guard 189 th Airlift Wing has eight C-130 Es and two in reserve.

The realignment and closure process began in the 1980s to transform the military by cutting excess facilities and combining others to create a more efficient fighting force. In the most recent round, the Defense Department developed an initial list of proposed changes, which were evaluated by the nine-member commission. The commission visited bases and held public

hearings before finalizing its own recommendations.

The commission's report will be forwarded to President Bush, who can accept it, reject it or send it back for additional work. Congress will review the final recommendations, but it can only veto the plan in its entirety or allow it to take effect.

Judge to rule on blocking transfer of fighter wing

Copley News Service (Springfield, IL)
Adriana Colindres
September 2, 2005

A federal judge plans to rule Tuesday on state officials' request for a temporary restraining order that would block the transfer of the 183rd Fighter Wing's F-16s from Springfield to Fort Wayne, Ind.

Judge Jeanne Scott said at a hearing Friday that the legal effort to preserve the 183rd's jets must face a couple of "really big issues," including whether the federal court has jurisdiction to act.

She cited a 1994 U.S. Supreme Court decision that found it was a president's action, and not a report submitted by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, that had a direct impact on military base closings. That position could weaken Illinois officials' legal argument that Gov. Rod Blagojevich's rights have been violated by a recommendation to move the jets out of Springfield, she said.

Blagojevich and Attorney General Lisa Madigan on Thursday filed a motion in federal court for the temporary restraining order. They contend that governors must agree to any type of realignment involving a state's National Guard bases, and Blagojevich did not give his consent to the plan to move the F-16s.

The motion was filed against U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the BRAC commission. Last week, the commission endorsed the Pentagon's recommendation to

transfer the 183rd's jets, headquartered at Springfield's Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport.

"The bottom line is what they are doing is deactivating the Fighter Wing by removing the elements that make it a Fighter Wing," Assistant Attorney General Matt Bilinsky told Scott in U.S. District Court in Springfield.

But Assistant U.S. Attorney Rodger Heaton told the judge that the governor's rights have not been violated.

Scott said she plans to rule by noon Tuesday on the temporary restraining order. She also scheduled a hearing for 10 a.m. Wednesday on state officials' motion for a preliminary injunction that would stop the BRAC commission from sending President Bush its recommendation to realign the 183rd.

States go to court to block loss of National Guard fighter wings

Missouri seeks injunction

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (St. Louis, MO)
Philip Dine
September 2, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Missouri and Illinois took separate legal steps Thursday to try to block the loss of Air National Guard fighter wings in their states.

Missouri filed a motion for a preliminary injunction against the closing of the 131st Air National Guard F-15 Fighter Wing at Lambert Field and had a teleconference with the federal judge involved, said Scott Holste, spokesman for Missouri Attorney General Jay Nixon.

The judge ordered the Department of Justice to file a brief in response today and told Missouri to file its reply on Monday, Holste said. If the judge hears arguments on the case, it would be on Tuesday.

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National Guard F-16 Fighter Wing in Springfield, Ill.

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A court hearing has been set for 10 a.m. today, said Illinois assistant Attorney General Terence Corrigan.

Illinois, along with Missouri and Pennsylvania, has already filed suit against the Pentagon for recommending that Air National Guard bases in the respective states be closed. The suits assert that such action can't be taken without the consent of the governor involved. A District Court judge in Pennsylvania ruled in favor of the state last week; the other cases are pending.

Corrigan said Illinois took the additional action Thursday because it is trying urgently to block the BRAC Commission from sending its list of closures and realignments to Bush, who has indicated he would approve the list and send it on to Congress. The commission must send its list to Bush by Thursday.

In its suit, which requested an expedited ruling, Pennsylvania argued that once the list is forwarded to the president, action can no longer be reviewed by the court, Corrigan said. While Illinois does not agree with that interpretation, it filed Thursday's request "to protect us if that's a correct interpretation of the law," Corrigan said. Missouri is also trying to beat the Thursday date, Holste said.

Residents resist reopening Cecil Field air base

Gainesville Sun (Gainesville, FL)
September 3, 2005

JACKSONVILLE - Some residents are opposed to reopening Cecil Field, a naval air station that closed in 1999, and are angry they were not asked before state and city officials lobbied for its return.

Almost 500 residents attended a meeting at an equestrian center on Cecil Field that included an appearance by Jacksonville Mayor John Peyton. The Florida Times-Union reported in Friday's editions.

Peyton and Gov. Jeb Bush have spoken with lawmakers about the possibility of reopening the base and offered \$200 million to relocate businesses at Cecil, plus another \$100 million for housing.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission has voted to give Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia officials six months to begin reducing encroachment by homes and businesses that has caused safety problems. They are also to start acquiring properties in areas with the greatest accident potential.

Criteria was set for reopening Cecil Field if Virginia and the Navy fail to take steps to curb encroachment.

City officials and lawmakers claim the move best for the community, but some have criticized it.

"Unfortunately, what we may have here this evening is packaged information made to sell an already-made decision," resident Katja Palmer said.

City Councilman Daniel Davis is against it, and an opposition group has formed called "Say No To Cecil."

"You have conveyed the message to Washington that our area is eager for the Navy to return," said the group's leader, Vickie Grant of Middleburg, in a letter. "These positions do not properly represent the citizens of this area."

Many people complained about the potential noise of the Navy jets in a residential area

"I heard the people say we should just be able to put up with a little bit of noise," said Velma Blizzard. She has lived nearby for 35 years.

Oceana has 12,000 military and civilian jobs and nearly 250 aircraft. But more than 145,000 people live around Oceana, and only 10,000 near Cecil. About 5,000 homes are in Oceana's crash zones, while none are in Cecil's, according to the city.

"It's about our Navy. It's about our national security, and for me, it's about something patriotic," Peyton said.

Opinions/ Editorials

Politics as usual: BRAC officials ignore Rumsfeld to appease friends;

Duluth News-Tribune (Duluth, MN)
J.R. Labbe
September 2, 2005

Say what you will about BRAC -- and plenty is being said today through clenched teeth in states that view themselves as big losers in the Base Realignment and Closure process -- the commission managed to prove one thing: It was no rubber stamp for Donald Rumsfeld.

Were the Secretary of Defense a thin-skinned fellow, he might take the changes made to his list by the commission as refutation of his vision for the military's future. Given how many times commissioners chanted that the Department of Defense "substantially deviated from the final selection criteria" before they ignored the Pentagon's recommendations, Rumsfeld could be feeling downright unappreciated.

Take the vote to keep open Connecticut's Naval Submarine Base New London. Under Rumsfeld's future force scenario, the Navy won't need that sub capacity in New England. The commissioners effectively said: "We think there are more subs in our future than you do, Mr. Secretary, and we'll be keeping this place open, if you don't mind."

Same goes for keeping open Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota. The commissioners were concerned that the "eggs in one basket" consolidation achieved by moving B-1 bombers from that base to Dyess Air Force Base in

Abilene, Texas, would make the fleet vulnerable to attack. At last check, Mexico wasn't altogether happy with the current U.S. administration, but it's hard to imagine that it would attack over it.

Surely the Ellsworth turn-around had nothing to do with the fact that John Thune, a rookie Republican senator who defeated one of the Democratic lions of lawmaking (like him or don't, Tom Daschle was a force to contend with in Washington), staked his entire political career on keeping Ellsworth open.

Everyone with a piece on the BRAC chessboard has said from the get-go that the process was designed to keep politics out of the game. They just forgot to tell the politicians.

New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson was blabbering on C-SPAN about how he lobbied the commission hard to keep Cannon Air Force Base open. Richardson claimed that he had made friends with some of the commissioners. Samuel Skinner was obviously one of them, considering that he jumped through all kinds of hoops to keep Cannon open until at least December 2009 rather than close it. Richardson's justification for Cannon's continued operational status had nothing to do with military readiness or future force structure. All he could talk about was the need to keep those jobs on line.

BRAC watchers who rightfully preach the "there's life after BRAC" message in their belief that the Defense Department should be something more than a jobs program contend that politics has been part of this round more clearly than in some previous rounds -- with the exception of the in-your-face decision made in 1995, right before President Clinton's re-election push, to "privatize in place" rather than close McClellan AFB.

If the Air Force is unhappy with the 2005 commission's decisions, it has to take some of the blame for doing a half-hearted job of putting together a BRAC package that demonstrated strategic coherence. (Of course, the flying brass

were kind of distracted by that pesky Boeing tanker fiasco and sexual harassment charges at the academy.)

It's interesting to note that some lawmakers are taking heat for not politicking enough.

U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison is, as they say, being dog-cussed for not doing enough to protect every Texas facility that landed on Rumsfeld's list. Community leaders think she spent too much time focusing on the Red River Army Depot in Texarkana. She is many things, but stupid is not one of them. She knew where to invest her capital.

BRAC never has been, and never will be, a process devoid of political influences, but it's the only way that the Pentagon has to change its infrastructure in response to evolving force strategies. The end result of this round is less than it should be, but it's unlikely that President Bush or Congress will turn it down because the cuts weren't deep enough.

They are, after all, politicians.

In The Mail : N.D. can celebrate BRAC results

Grand Forks Herald (Grand Forks, ND)
September 2, 2005

WASHINGTON - Many observers doubted North Dakota would get through another round of Base Realignment and Closure or BRAC without the closure of one of our military bases. But we did.

Last week, a number of states got the bad news that one of their military bases would be closed. The news we received here in North Dakota was that our military bases would stay open.

The congressional delegation, the governor, the communities and many others worked together successfully to achieve this result.

Our three bases were kept open because of their military value to our country, but they also are major sources of jobs in North Dakota and

critically important to our economy. So, the fact that we are not on the list for closure is great news for our state.

Actions by the BRAC commission will mean some changes in the missions at the Grand Forks Air Force Base and also at the Fargo Air National Guard. Grand Forks will be the site of the growing, new and exciting unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) missions. And Fargo's Air National Guard unit will be connected to those UAV missions at Grand Forks as well.

We also expect the Grand Forks Air Force Base to be the future home of some new, modern tankers that will replace the KC-135s in the longer term.

And we are determined to get the Air Force to replace the F-16 fighter mission for the Happy Hooligans. It doesn't make sense to take fighter jets away from America's best pilots.

So, there is some more work to be done. But the work we have done during this BRAC Commission's effort has paid real dividends for our state.

When the BRAC recommendations become law later this fall following final up or down decisions - no changes permitted - by the president and Congress, the future of North Dakota military bases is secure.

Byron Dorgan
Dorgan, a Democrat, represents North Dakota in the U.S. Senate.

Base Closings; State officials get credit for persistence in bid to save Willow Grove's fighter wing

The Morning Call (Allentown, PA)
September 2, 2005

The 111th Fighter Wing, a part of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard at Willow Grove Naval Air Station, went on a wild rollercoaster ride Friday. And, unfortunately, the 1,025-member fighter wing's destination still is

uncertain. But Gov. Ed Rendell and some other state officials deserve a lot of credit for putting up a tough fight with the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. They haven't given up yet, nor should they.

Nationwide, the Pentagon recommended that the commission close 33 major bases and realign 29 others. The recommendation covered 13 Pennsylvania military sites, including Willow Grove in Horsham, Montgomery County. The Democratic governor, Republican Sens. Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum, and U.S. Rep. Allyson Schwartz, D-13th District, heavily lobbied the nine-member base closure commission before its unusual, ill-advised decision on Friday.

Gov. Rendell had filed suit in federal court in Philadelphia last month, claiming that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld overstepped his authority when he targeted Willow Grove. As governor and commander of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard, the governor contended, only he can recommend its deactivation.

The argument made sense, since the Air National Guard has a dual mission. Though it is part of the nation's military force, it is also responsible to the state, helping in emergencies such as hurricanes, floods, tornadoes and forest fires. Of course, in these times, homeland security also is a concern.

So, on Aug. 26, U.S. District Judge John R. Padova agreed, ruling that the Pentagon lacks the authority to disband the unit without the governor's approval. Just two hours later, however, the base closure commission cast a bizarre, unanimous vote to move the unit's A-10 fighter planes to bases in Idaho, Maryland and Michigan -- but not to move the unit itself. The commission also voted to convert the Willow Grove base into a dormant "enclave" with a skeleton staff of Army reservists. In addition, the commission voted to move Navy and Marine Corps squadrons and aircraft, plus some other units.

On Monday, Gov. Rendell called upon the Department of Defense to maintain military

operations and aircraft at Willow Grove. If this fails, the governor has talked about taking over the base under the control of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard. There is a precedent for this last resort. The U.S. Army gave the state National Guard control of Fort Indiantown Gap in 1998, three years after a closure committee recommended that the Army leave.

The base closure committee must give its final report to President Bush by Sept. 8. He can accept, reject or send it back for revisions. Congress will have the opportunity to veto the plan in its entirety, but this state hasn't given up on Willow Grove.

Additional Notes