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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
1000 NAVY PENTAGON
WASHINGTON DC 20350-1000

5 August 2005

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman
Base Realignment and Closure Commission
2521 South Clark Street
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Chairman Principi:

This is in response to the July 22, 2005 request from Mr. Frank Cirillo of your staff concerning single siting all Navy Fighter Aircraft. This reply has been coordinated with Commander, Fleet Forces Command. Mr. Cirillo's specific questions and our response follows:

Please provide the rationale for co-locating all Navy Fighter Aircraft at a single site, including the economic benefits and operational readiness perspective. If any specific data on the extra costs of dual siting are available, please provide that data to the Commission.

Single site basing will result in significant cost savings while increasing material, operational and training efficiencies and improve quality of life and quality of service of our aircrew and maintenance personnel. Although there are significant military principles such as type aircraft community cohesion, safety, operations oversight and standardization behind this requirement, fiscal reality must also be considered. The recurring additional costs of operating the F/A-18 aircraft community from more than one site will be significant over the expected lifetime of the airframe. Basing all Atlantic Fleet FA-18 aircraft at a single site with their TYPEWING, FRS, weapons school and Center of Naval Aviation Technical Training Unit (CNATTU) provides the following:

Operational synergy. Although difficult to quantify, the synergistic effect on operational readiness created by single-site basing fleet squadrons and supporting commands is the most compelling reason to do so. Basing fleet squadrons, replacement squadrons, the TYPEWING, and weapons school at the same base improves standardization in operations, training and maintenance practices throughout the community. The TYPEWING must be collocated with the squadrons in order to perform its monitoring, management, and support functions effectively. The quality of training improves dramatically when weapons school instructors are in contact with the fleet and FRS on a daily basis. Fleet squadrons benefit from the daily presence of other squadrons through shared maintenance efforts, fly-off and fly-on ground support, exchanging adversary services and operating together during training evolutions.

Flexible aircraft inventory management. Single-site basing permits the short-term rotation of aircraft between squadrons in order to meet operational requirements without requiring full-scale aircraft transfer and acceptance inspections. Reducing such inspections provides flexibility and reduces operational level maintenance man-hours to meet operational commitments. To do so from more than one location will greatly impair this process and thereby impact fleet readiness.

Efficiencies in maintenance support. The primary reason for co-locating the majority of the FA-18E/F with the FA-18C/D was to leverage existing maintenance support common to both airframes. (The 2 FA-18E squadrons at MCAS Cherry Point will also be supported by maintenance from NAS Oceana, and the one FA-18C Hornet squadron at MCAS Beaufort is supported by existing FA-18C MALS). Consolidating all like type-model-series aircraft on one base will maximize the efficiency of support equipment and will dramatically lessen the burden on the supply system. Specifically, it provides tremendous economies of scale with regard to available Ground Support Equipment (GSE), intermediate and depot level maintenance facilities, manning and infrastructure and aircraft modification support. Basing same type/model/series aircraft at multiple bases requires duplication of efforts, materials, equipment and personnel at each location.

Optimized simulator utilization. Simulators are used on a daily basis by both fleet squadrons and the FRS. Single-siting all type/model/series aircraft with their respective simulators minimizes the number of simulator systems required and optimizes utilization rates.

Decreased permanent change of station (PCS) moves. Single-siting all squadrons by type/model/series with their supporting units reduces the number of PCS moves required, because it co-locates sea and shore duty billets. Co-locating the fleet with FRS, CNATTU, the weapon school and maintenance facilities reduces the number of relocations for service members going through training prior to assignment in the fleet. Additionally, members rotating from fleet squadrons benefit from increased opportunities for shore tours at the same base.

Enhancing quality of life (QOL). PCS moves have a major impact on family stability. Decreasing the number of PCS moves for individual service members improves family stability and therefore yields an enhanced quality of life. Retention and its impact on readiness demand that quality of life considerations play an integral part in all future planning.

PCS move costs. PCS moves comprise a significant portion of the Navy's budget. In the interest of streamlining the forces and reducing overhead costs, reducing PCS moves would be extremely beneficial.

Additionally, is it feasible to single site one or both of the Fighter Fleet Replacement Squadrons at a centralized location at a location other than the designated Master Jet Bases?

DON does not recommend this approach for the following reasons:

Lost Efficiencies. One of the stated requirements in the Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for the FA-18C on the East Coast (BRAC 95), FA-18E/F Basing on the West Coast (1999) and FA-18E/F Basing on the East Coast (2003) was to base the FRS with the majority of the fleet squadrons to capitalize on support infrastructure and optimize utilization of simulators, schoolhouses, personnel movements and maximize standardization of operations. This proposal runs counter to all of those stated objectives. Inefficiencies created by this scenario include:

Reduced efficiency of existing maintenance and logistic support, and increased costs associated with establishing maintenance and logistic support at a third location. Concentration of the FA-18 force at Lemoore and Oceana provides tremendous economies of scale in maintenance and logistic support. (The FA-18C squadron at MCAS Beaufort is supported by established MALS support there, and the 2 FA-18E squadrons to be based at MCAS Cherry Point will be supported by NAS Oceana.) This basing strategy was designed specifically to leverage FA-18 airframe commonalities to create significant savings and efficiencies. Moving the FRSs to a centralized location would require the establishment of a third FA-18C/E/F maintenance and logistics infrastructure, thus decreasing the efficiencies gained in the current force laydown, and increasing recurring operating costs significantly.

Paying for moves twice, and creating excess capacity. In 2011, the DON will begin transition all of its FA-18C aircraft to the JSF. Moving the FA-18C FRSs to a base where there is no FA-18C infrastructure will require construction and establishment of new facilities. However, the JSF FRS is recommended to be located at a joint training facility (Eglin AFB), thus creating excess capacity at any new site when the FA-18C is retired in 2017 timeframe, since only the 57 FA-18E/F FRS aircraft (out of the total 105 FA-18C/D/E/F) will remain.

Reduced utilization of aircrew simulators. Greater dependence on training in the simulator has increased fleet usage of those devices, but the primary user of the simulators remains the FRS. Co-location of the fleet and FRS provided efficient use of simulator devices by allowing the fleet to make use of simulators when not in use by the FRS. An additional site for the FRS would most likely require additional simulator devices and utilization rates would decrease.

Loss of daily interaction between FRS, fleet squadrons, CNATTU and the weapon school. As described in the FA-18E/F Basing Operational Requirements (CNAL 2000), such daily interaction improves the quality of training dramatically, and improves standardization in operations, training and maintenance practices throughout the community.

Loss of objective. Relocating squadrons from NAS Oceana is a concept ostensibly designed to avoid urban encroachment. Relocating only the 45 FRS aircraft from NAS Oceana would leave 172 fleet squadrons at NAS Oceana, and therefore not "benefit" nearly 80% of the force.

Relocating any aircraft from NAS Lemoore has not been an option under any BRAC scenario studied thus far, and the objective in doing so remains unclear.

Poor timing. In the next 5-8 years, the 21 FA-18C/D FRS aircraft at NAS Oceana will be replaced by JSF, recommended for basing at Eglin AFB. The remaining 64 fleet FA-18C will transition to JSF. Relocating 45 FA-18C/D/E/F FRS aircraft from NAS Oceana before 2011 would have less impact and would be less efficient than delaying any relocation until the JSF transition, beginning in 2011. At that time, relocating to a JSF base, if so desired, would result in a net decrease of 85 aircraft (~ 40% of the total) from NAS Oceana, nearly double the impact of the proposed scenario. Allowing the FA-18C fleet and FRS to decommission in place while constructing JSF facilities elsewhere remains the most efficient and logical use of resources.

Insufficient operational capacity (airfield and airspace) to support both current residents and the FRSs. The NAS Oceana FRS alone accounts for 70,000 homefield flight operations. Combining the FRS from both Oceana and Lemoore will more than double those operations. Thus, any airfield that would be considered as a receiving site for all of the FA-18 FRSs, would need to demonstrate the ability to absorb more than 140,000 operations in addition to existing operations.

I trust this information satisfactorily addresses your concerns. If we can be of further assistance, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Anne R Davis

Anne Rathmell Davis
Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Navy
for Base Realignment and Closure