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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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June 15, 2005

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman
BRAC 2005 Independent Commission
2521 South Clark Street, Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Chairman Principi:

We are writing to request the Commission conduct a hearing on the Air Force's proposal to turn 23 Air National Guard bases into "enclaves". As we understand it, enclaves are bases that will entirely lose their flying units but are expected to retain Expeditionary Combat Support units. At this time, we do not know of any existing enclave bases and do not believe the concept has been examined by anyone outside the Pentagon. We are very concerned for several reasons.

First, it is not clear that an enclave base can sustain expeditionary combat units. Once flying units are removed from the enclave bases, many will no longer be able to support military or civilian aircraft operations. Even in cases where there is a civilian landing area, the loss of rated firefighters will lead many shared airports to lose FAA ratings and fail to meet minimal Air Force and civilian criteria for landing and loading. This will make quick deployments to new locations difficult as units like security police, civil engineers, and communications teams normally deploy with a decent amount of equipment and weaponry. That equipment and weaponry must be moved to airports that can receive and secure them, delaying deployments.

In addition to the basic logistics, it is not at all clear that Expeditionary Combat Support personnel will stay in Air Guard units that do not have airplanes or regular contact with air operations. Recruiting new personnel for the Air Guard will also be made more difficult. Essentially, the "air" is being taken out of the Air Guard that these individuals joined or look to join. Retention and recruitment are also concerns for those who work on and fly the planes that will leave the enclaves. These are some of our most experienced and skilled maintainers and crews. Particularly in cases where there will be no nearby unit within 50, or even 250, miles, the Air Force and the nation will lose these experienced professionals. Recent experience with the B-1B supports this concern. GAO's September 2002 analysis (GAO-02-846) pointed out,

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
June 15, 2005
Page Two

Air Force officials did not conduct a formal analysis to assess how a reduction in B-1B bombers from 93-60 would affect DOD's ability to meet wartime requirements. Nor did they complete a comprehensive analysis of potential basing options to know whether they were choosing the most cost-effective alternative....As a result, the Air Force understated the potential savings for some options...Our comparison of active and Guard units' missions, flying hour costs, and capabilities showed that active and Guard units were responsible for substantially the same missions but Guard units had lower flying hour costs and higher mission capable rates than their active duty counterparts.

Given the on-going war effort, it is critical that we have a better understanding of the possible retention impacts of creating enclaves.

Second, we are concerned that this is an effort to get around the BRAC process. The Air Force has indicated that these bases will be kept in anticipation of follow-on missions. At the same time, they plan to shrink the facilities. We have seen no evidence that the Air Force has made any adjustments to its budgeting policies to make enclaves work. Normal budgeting is done by allocating funds for an installation based on the personnel and missions it supports. For a base without a mission and greatly reduced personnel, the current system would provide minimal funds. It would then appear that such bases would have shrunk so much that they could not accommodate the growth required for a follow-on mission that might be available two, three, or more years down the road. So, in reality, these enclaves are closures that will happen slowly and without following the BRAC process.

Last, we are concerned that enclaves simply will not meet the homeland security needs of governors. We have heard that originally the 23 enclave bases were going to be closures. It is our understanding that the Air Force belatedly recognized that this would dramatically reduce the ability of governors to meet their homeland security needs. Their solution was to create enclave bases. Yet, we have not seen any evidence that enclaves will actually serve the needs of governors. As we have not seen all of the Air Force data yet, we can only raise this as a point to be investigated. While each state has a different overall situation, we do not believe that enclave bases will provide the governors with what they really need for homeland security.

We hope that the Commission will hold a hearing specifically on the enclave concept. Nowhere in the BRAC legislation is enclave mentioned as an option. At this point, we have heard a lot of generalizations, but seen little analysis to support this new concept. If it is a good idea, that can only become clear through a thorough investigation of the Air Force's plans and rationale in a public hearing.

Thank you for your service on this critical Commission. If we can answer any questions regarding our concerns, please let us know or have your staff contact our staff.

Sincerely,

Joe Biden

Art Bond

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
June 15, 2005
Page Three

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For your reference, here is a typed list of the 26 Senators who signed the letter:

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