

3 Sept 2005  
BRAC Commission

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Received

Dear Chairman Principi —

Enclosed is a recent editorial in the normally excellent Christian Science Monitor that is critical of your Commission. Also enclosed is <sup>(a copy of)</sup> my reply to them, which I hope that they will publish. They just don't seem to get what BRAC is all about, and they certainly can't appreciate what being a commissioner is like!

Keep up your outstanding work! I wish that you would run for political office someday. Regardless of party, I'd vote for you! We totally need thoughtful and sensitive leaders like yourself!

Very respectfully,  
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## Peter Bowman

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**From:** Peter Bowman [pbbskb@comcast.net]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 01, 2005 11:57 PM  
**To:** oped@csps.com  
**Subject:** "READERS WRITE"/OPINION ARTICLE

"OFF BASE ON BASE CLOSURE..."

I truly treasure my subscription to the Monitor! That said, periodically, I react strongly to some of the Monitor's editorials and op-ed pieces. In large part because I was a Commissioner on the 1993 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, I take particular issue with your 1 September 2005 editorial, "MILITARY BASES AREN'T A JOBS PROGRAM"!

Monitor editorial writers seem to forget that it was Congress itself that set up the process, popularly called "BRAC", specifically because of the inherent politics associated with military base closure. To their great credit, Congress realized that they had failed to handle this important task in the past, and therefore beginning in the late 1980s gave the responsibility and accountability to a non-partisan commission. Members of the Commission were either hand-picked by the President or the leadership of Congress itself. They appropriately designed the process, which has evolved through the years, to be as immune from politics as possible, especially in regard to rejection of the Commission's recommendations in bits and pieces; i.e., the President and/or the Congress must reject the recommendations in whole or not at all.

There is no question that the U.S. has had a number of bases that served their purposes well in previous times of conflict but have out-lived their need. Similarly, few would argue that transformation is a way of life, as well as a means of ensuring competitiveness and superiority, in the military (as well as in industry, politics and other aspects of life). However, it is the same leadership in the Pentagon who miscalculated the post-war situation in Iraq that would have the the fleet moored in mega-bases (e.g., Norfolk and San Diego) and therefore vulnerable to a host of risks, not the least of which include hurricanes and terrorists. One begins to wonder just how expert these "experts" really are! Someone with the requisite authority, statutory independence, military experience...must be able to challenge DoD experts' "wisdom", sometimes better labeled "bad judgment". In part, Congress responded to this need by creating the BRAC process. I strongly suggest to you that Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and Submarine Base New London were removed from the closure list by this Commission because in their best (non-political) judgment it did not make sense to close them. In the case of Portsmouth, the Commission appeared to believe that "excess capacity" was marginal to non-existent if the shipyard were to close, and the shipyard's best-in-the-business or "gold standard" performance was worth preserving. On the other hand, the synergy among Submarine Base New London, General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton and other facilities in the area, plus the Sub Base's highly efficient and compact maintenance facility and training complex seemed to make closure there not a smart move. Personally, I couldn't agree more!

Having observed the BRAC process in detail since 1993, I can tell you that previous Commissions also changed about 15% of the Pentagon's recommendations. I strongly believe that the 2005 Commission does have the depth of expertise, judgment, experience and decisiveness to challenge the DoD recommendations (they are probably even stronger in this regard than the 1993 Commission) . I wonder if the Monitor editorial staff possesses similar skill and experience levels to reach the conclusions that they did (e.g., ..."rejection, as would be the best course, with a new round of review.").

As a previous BRAC Commissioner, I can tell you from first-hand experience that Commissioners are affected by "the human and painful impact of those proposals". To not be so moved would be almost inhuman. And as a commissioner, it is your duty to be immune to politics. You just have to summon up your best judgment, based on what you know and have experienced. In 1993 for example, I voted to close the same base where my wife was born, where we met and were later married, where her parents had been assigned and where I had also served. On the other hand, I voted to keep open Submarine Base New London and the Defense Language Institute, both of which survived the 2005 BRAC as well. In another 1993 example, Arthur Leavitt excused himself from the 1993 Commission because he was nominated to head the Securities and Exchange Commission. Unnamed, outside political interests sought to substitute another commissioner late in the process just before voting began.

9/1/05

The Commission, in unison, rose to reject this proposal, making our position strongly known to the President. We, and good non-political thinking prevailed!

I agree with the Monitor that "previous base closings since the end of the cold war have served both the nation and local areas well". And I suggest that this year's final list of closure will do the same. In my geographical area, the former Pease Air Force Base is a wonderful example of where the local area has "discovered more abundant economic activity" than previously existed when the base was open, but it took 5-10 years to accomplish this. There are other great successes in the country, but I don't have the data to show if these examples constitute the exception or the rule.

Finally, when threatened with closure, it is human nature, and good "politics", to stand up for your local constituents including your local bases. To expect politicians to do the contrary is naive and wishful thinking if they entertain any hope of getting reelected. Some politicians even argued against reinstatement of the BRAC process in 2005, but although the vote was close, they were (thankfully) in the minority. Wisdom and good judgment prevailed. With the help of the BRAC process, the military is transforming thoughtfully and with integrity as it should.

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What is this?

# Military bases aren't a jobs program

## The Monitor's View

Congress can complain as much as it wants about the president and Supreme Court stepping on its powers, but it belittles itself when it acts in very narrow-minded ways. The latest example: The pressure within Congress to save local military bases.

Last May, the Pentagon proposed shuttering or moving 62 major military bases and 775 smaller installations as part of a strategic plan. Many of the bases were once needed for the cold war, but not now, with new types of threats and advanced warfare.

That military vision, however, was blurred in last week's decisions by a nine-member commission set up by Congress to challenge the Pentagon's wisdom. After intense lobbying by members of Congress whose districts stood to lose bases, the commission recommended that about 15 to 20 percent of the sites be kept open, notably a naval shipyard and submarine base in New England, and a strategic air base in South Dakota. Now the commission's recommendations must be accepted totally first by the White House, then by Congress - or rejected, as would be the best course, with a new round of review.

The commissioners claim their choices were based mainly on disagreements with the Pentagon over the amount of savings in closing many big bases. They may be right on the strict accounting, but that misses the larger point that these closures are judged as necessary for military preparedness by a wide range of Pentagon experts. No commission can match that depth of expertise.

**Bases often do have a footprint in local areas, and closing them can be costly, in human and economic terms. The commission's chairman, Anthony Principi, admitted its decisions looked at the "human and painful impact of those proposals."**

But bases cannot be kept open to keep jobs or help a local economy. US defense requirements, especially at a time of war and in a fluid threat environment, must not be compromised by local political pressures.

Previous base closings since the end of the cold war have served both the nation and local areas well. Federal aid may be needed to help a community adjust. But many areas that lost bases have since discovered more abundant economic activity or other uses such as open green space. A former naval airbase in Glenview, Ill., for instance, has become a thriving, planned

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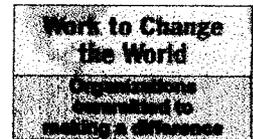
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village.

Transforming the military to make it more effective requires it to be immune to narrow political voices. In recent decades, Congress has lost much legitimacy, and thus authority, to the president in deciding when to deploy military forces. This weakness is due in part to incumbents catering to special interests, such as base workers who clearly know their work depends on shifting defense needs.

Next week, a Senate committee will challenge Supreme Court nominee John Roberts about his views on the high court's regular overturning of laws passed by Congress. Many of those laws were constitutionally weak from the start because they, too, catered mainly to special interests.

To regain stature, Congress must stand up to local interests and explain national interests to hometown voters - who may just decide that bringing home the bacon isn't the only task for their representatives.

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