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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4327

August 26, 2005

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEES:
RANKING MINORITY, MILITARY
READINESS
TACTICAL AIR AND LAND FORCES
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SUBCOMMITTEES:
ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES
FISHERIES, CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE,
AND OCEANS

The Honorable Anthony Principi, Chairman
2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission
2521 S. Clark St., Ste. 600
Arlington, VA 22202

BRAC Commission

AUG 29 2005

Received

HAND DELIVERED

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I continue to have deep and abiding concerns about the security of the western Gulf of Mexico in light of the Commission's earlier decision to close the only two Naval Stations in the Gulf of Mexico. As you know, I have proposed a motion for the Commission to consider that would effectively offer the Navy an opportunity to use NSI as a Center for Homeland Defense and Security in the Gulf of Mexico and still enable the mine warfare assets to move to the fleet concentration centers.

The U.S. Northern Command has indicated that in its best military judgment there is an acceptable level of risk to homeland defense in the Gulf of Mexico after closure of all surface naval facilities in the Gulf. NORTHCOM has also indicated that their actionable intelligence plays a key role in the posture of our homeland defense forces. While NORTHCOM has not yet provided me the specific requested information on the number of air and surface hours provided for maritime patrol in the Gulf of Mexico compared to other regions of the continental United States, I have obtained information from the Department of Homeland Security and the Southern Command that cause me great concern about the Gulf region whether it be homeland defense or security.

As a quick overview for basis of comparison, it is important to remember that one third of the continental United States ocean coastline is located along the Gulf of Mexico compared to 40% along the East Coast and 27% along the West Coast. Further, 51% of US refining capability is along the Gulf of Mexico compared to 17% and 11% along the west and east coasts respectively. Over 70% of all crude oil imports enter the US through Gulf ports, where 8 of the top 10 ports (tonnage) are located. The vast majority of domestic oil and gas offshore production takes place in the Gulf of Mexico compared to practically none along the East Coast. And yet to date, for FY 2005, **only 5% of all Coast Guard homeland security maritime assets were expended in the Gulf, compared to the 70% along the Atlantic Coast.**

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Up to this point, the military basing plan approved by the Commission will ensure that there will be an ongoing active Navy presence along the 1,900 miles of Atlantic Coast from Portsmouth, NH to Key West, FL, including 84 Navy vessels. At the same time, there will be ZERO Navy surface bases along the 1,550 miles of the Gulf of Mexico with ZERO vessels homeported in the region.

Additionally, one of the primary "feeder" areas for maritime threat to the Gulf Coast of the U.S. logically stems from Central and South America and Mexico. Since FY 2001, U.S. military maritime patrol in this area has dropped dramatically. In terms of days and hours of assets assigned to this operating area, Navy surface assets available for patrol have been reduced by 53%; U.S. Army air support for maritime patrol has been reduced by 72%; Navy maritime air patrol has shrunk by over 51%; and Air Force maritime patrol has dropped by 59%. If these trends continue, this critical area is going to be defended less, not more, in this dangerous age.

These statistics in and of themselves are alarming. However, when coupled with other statistics related specifically to our homeland defense strategy, it is very clear that the US has a serious threat to its southern coast that is not adequately addressed or resourced. NORTHCOM has noted the importance of actionable intelligence and confidence in being able to respond to this intelligence with the right assets at the right place at the right time. While NORTHCOM has not provided specific details to support that assertion, documented information from other federal maritime commands operating in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean would seem to contradict the NORTHCOM assertion that the Gulf is adequately protected without ANY surface operational naval base in the region. For example, of the criminal maritime traffic headed north towards the Gulf, 75% of activity known to exist from actionable intelligence is never detected – likely due to a lack of maritime patrol assets operating in the Gulf area.

Of the detected hostile tracks, 25% are never intercepted. According to documentation, 84% of the time this failure is due to a lack of surface assets in the area. These metrics were personally provided to me just this week. With open source information clearly documenting the increasing number of people with terrorist ties illegally entering the Central and South American area, the history of established maritime smuggling routes, and the large concentration of national energy and food resources bordering the Gulf of Mexico region – common sense dictates that the Gulf of Mexico is a primary terrorist target and that planned basing decisions do not provide adequate security.

For these reasons I feel compelled to appeal to the Commission to take immediate action to ensure that the Gulf of Mexico, and particularly the Western Gulf, is not left vulnerable to terrorist attack due to inadequate homeland defense and security coordination and mission planning. Our citizens along the Southern coast of the United States deserve the same level of protection as those living along the east and west coasts. The best way to address this issue in the short term is to guarantee that all options remain

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available to the Commission and the Navy. The best venue for this is to amend the Commission recommendation closing NSI to ensure that the base remains a Navy asset until after the Department certifies through the pending QDR that there is no known requirement for a surface navy facility in the Gulf of Mexico any time in the next 20 years. This in no way prevents the Commission's decision to move the Navy's mine warfare assets to the fleet concentration areas. It also does not create a "warm base." It simply preserves options in the near term.

It makes no sense to prematurely and permanently close one of the Navy's newest facilities that is strategically located and capable of performing multiple missions as part of a multi-base complex when it is clearly known that DoD is in the process of updating requirements that may in fact identify the need for the very capability being forsaken.

I am deeply grateful to each of the Commissioners for your service, to our nation during this BRAC season, and I thank you for your patience and understanding in matters related to the security of the Gulf of Mexico region.

With kindest regards, I am

Sincerely,



Solomon P. Ortiz
Member of Congress

SPO:sm:ct

CC: 2005 BRAC Commissioners:

The Honorable James H. Bilbray
The Honorable Philip Coyle
Admiral Harold W. Gehman, Jr.
The Honorable James V. Hansen
General James T. Hill
General Lloyd W. Newton
The Honorable Samuel K. Skinner
✓ Brigadier General Sue E. Turner