

July 24, 2005

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi, Chairman  
2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission  
2521 South Clark Street, Suite 600  
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Chairman and Commission:

We chair the Board of Advisors of the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) and the Board of Visitors of Air University (including the Air Force Institute of Technology, AFIT), respectively. For some time now, we have participated in the debate on how to best provide for doctoral and master's level technical education of members of the Armed Forces. We would like to offer some insights and information on the outcome of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) meeting on July 1, 2005, as it affects NPS and AFIT. This is crucial to good decision making affecting these two fine educational institutions.

We believe that the best course of action is to allow both NPS and AFIT to pursue their current evolution — integrating similar programs, maintaining or strengthening the existing ones that provide unique value to service members' education, and starting new ones that serve immediate or long-term needs of the nation. Both institutions are in the process of coordinating these programs. They have formed partnerships that leverage each school's programs, faculties, and investments, and have made tangible gains integrating and consolidating certain courses. Our Boards have NPS and AFIT on paths toward more sharing and efficiencies, while preserving specific service competencies where essential.

We believe that physically closing, moving, or simply merging the programs of NPS and AFIT would result in loss of both relevance and quality. Civilian education, such as that offered for instance, at MIT or Stanford University, does not meet the needs of the Armed Forces in the way AFIT and NPS do. For example, civilian institutions do not address issues of defense acquisition or counterinsurgency as AFIT and NPS do, nor do they conduct some of the classified research that provides in-depth, specialized education to members of the Armed Forces. Displacing these programs and trying to reconstruct them elsewhere would take a long time and would result in losses at a time when the public can hardly afford it.

As Board chairs, we understand and, in the public interest, share the Commission's concerns about economic value, cost, and efficiency. We have seen these issues from the perspective of a governing board. Given the complex and different ways in which the Department of Defense, Navy, and Air Force keep cost data, simple arithmetic and superficial comparisons to civilian education costs can lead to poor decision outcomes. We urge you and your analysts to carefully reconsider conclusions concerning costs that may have led to your outcome on July 1, 2005. For example, we understand Navy cost data supports the conclusion that the NPS cost of education, per student, per academic year (9 months) is less than that for graduate programs in engineering at Stanford University. Similarly, we understand that cost data collected by the Air Force supports the conclusion that relying on civilian universities for its current and emerging technical degrees would be more costly — in terms of dollars, time, and flexibility — especially when designing new courses to match changing requirements.

Accordingly, we believe closing or relocating AFIT or NPS would probably not provide the financial benefits that seem to be expected at present. That would carry some high intangible costs, such as the loss of the military nature of their programs and the benefits of US military personnel studying side-by-side with foreign officers. It would also disrupt essential linkages to military research laboratories, related functions, and effective relationships with academic allies.

We firmly believe, and urge you to conclude as well, that AFIT and NPS should remain separate institutions and continue on the path of coordination of programs they already pursue. That is the best for the Navy, Air Force, and the nation, as well as our international allies who participate in our highly technical programs today.

We welcome any opportunity to meet with you, the other commissioners, and analysts to further explain our views.

Very truly yours,



Professor M. Elisabeth Paté-Cornell  
Chair, Naval Postgraduate School Board of Advisors



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Chair, Air University Board of Visitors

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