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June 20, 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 that the Commission conduct a hearing on the Air Force's proposal to turn 23 Air National Guard bases into enclaves. At this time, we do not believe the concept has been examined by anyone outside the Pentagon. We are very concerned about this new concept 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 bomber supports this concern. GAO's September 2002 analysis (GAO-02-846) pointed out,

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.

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Second, we are concerned that this is an effort to circumvent 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 accommodate the enclave concept. It is our understanding that budgeting is normally 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, it appears the current system would provide minimal funds. Such a scenario leaves in question whether these bases will shrink so much that they no longer have the capacity to accommodate the growth required for follow-on missions. In the long-term, we are concerned that these enclaves may eventually lead to base closures, which would happen slowly and without following the BRAC process.

Finally, 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 need for homeland security.

Nowhere in the BRAC legislation is enclave mentioned as an option. At this point, we have heard a lot of generalizations, but have seen little analysis to support this new concept. We respectfully request that the Commission hold a hearing specifically on the enclave concept.

Thank you for your service on this critical Commission. Please contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

  
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