

Statement  
of  
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Chairman  
2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment  
(BRAC) Commission

Closing of Final Deliberations and Decisions

Arlington, Virginia

August 25, 2005

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As the clock runs out on the Commission's deliberations and decisions, I want to take a moment to reflect on the decisions we reached over the past few days.

Some will keep a score card of base closures or realignments we approved, or rejected, or of the dollars we saved or expended. Those measures are important, but I believe we should look beyond these numbers. This Commission played an integral and essential role in the arduous, but necessary, evolution of our armed forces.

Change is always difficult and frequently painful. In the short run, human institutions tend to avoid pain and defer difficulties. And those short-run inclinations tend to produce long-run inertia; inertia that can paralyze institutions that must remain dynamic if they are to succeed and prosper.

I believe that Commissioners, and the staff that supports us, can take pride in our role in balancing proposals to restructure military infrastructure against the human and painful impact of those proposals; in fulfilling our responsibility to provide an *independent* assessment of the Department of Defense's adherence to the statutory BRAC selection criteria and the defense force structure plan.

We have approved closure of major Army bases such as Ft. Monmouth, Ft. McPherson, and Ft. Gillem, Navy bases at Pascagoula and Ingleside and transformed operations at Air Force bases like Cannon Air Force Base. We approved proposals to close facilities with historic legacies such as Walter Reed Army Medical Center and Ft. Monroe, as well as relatively new facilities like the Navy base at Ingleside. Our approval of a host of closures and realignments, both major and minor, will enable the streamlining of all our military forces, active, National Guard and Reserve, as well as the extensive logistics, research and development, maintenance and repair infrastructure supporting them.

Our actions support the creation of "centers of excellence"; consolidating activities with common goals or missions, a major theme of the Department's recommendations. We did not flinch when we determined that the Department's proposals are consistent with the BRAC selection criteria and force structure plan.

Neither did we flinch when we determined that some proposals substantially deviated from those criteria and structure.

Major installations like the Portsmouth Navy Yard, Submarine Base New London, the Red River Army Depot, and Ellsworth Air Force Base will continue to contribute to our national defense.

Nor did we hesitate to identify and respond to problems, like the effect of encroachment at NAS Oceana, that we felt the Secretary of Defense should have addressed but did not.

Our report will list the installations we approved for closure or realignment and the Defense Department proposals we rejected or modified. Preliminary estimates, subject to

revision, indicate that our recommendations will save about \$37 billion, including military personnel cost avoidances, and approximately \$13 to 14 billion excluding DoD's military personnel cost avoidances, compared to the \$49 billion originally claimed by DoD.

Those numbers are important, but I believe they tell only part of the story. Secretary Rumsfeld made it clear that, in addition to savings, transformation of our armed forces was a major goal of this BRAC round.

Keeping in mind that "collocation" is not synonymous with "integration", that "transformation" is not synonymous with "jointness", and that the Secretary's recommendations won't move the ball across the goal line, I do believe that our decisions will help move the ball down the field.

I also believe that the BRAC process is a healthy and necessary one.

As difficult as it may be, our nation should regularly reexamine our military infrastructure. Failure to do so will inevitably drag down our defense with the sea anchor of unneeded, obsolete or poorly sited installations.

For that reason I recommend that the Congress provide for regularly scheduled BRACs at 5 or 10 year intervals. I also recommend that future BRACs begin their work immediately *after* completion of the Defense Department's Quadrennial Defense Review rather than just before.

The members and staff of this Commission performed at heroic levels to complete their work in the few months between May 13 and September 8. While uncommon dedication is a common virtue in the men and women who serve our national defense, including this Commission and its staff, I also recommend that future Commissions not be required to depend upon the uncommon willingness of Commissioners and staff setting aside all personal life to work unending hours at an exhausting pace, but rather that future Commissions be given more time to complete their analysis and deliberations.

In order to avoid the perception of political interference in the Commission's deliberations, I recommend that Congressional oversight of future BRACs be deferred until after a future BRAC Commissions' report is completed.

This Commission could not have completed its work without the dedicated hard work of a large number of disparate, but equally committed, individuals and organizations.

Our deliberations took place under the unobtrusive but watchful eyes of Arlington County Police officers, Arlington County Sheriffs deputies, Virginia State Troopers and United States Marshals. Theirs is an unsung but essential role in proceedings like ours and I appreciate their unfailing professionalism.

While we had early problems obtaining accessible information from the Department of Defense, I would be remiss if I did not commend the Department and its leaders for moving to correct those problems and for the exemplary effectiveness of the “data clearinghouse” established to provide certified and responsive answers to our questions.

I also acknowledge the many members of Congress, and the Committees they represent, who contributed to the Commission’s success. In their advocacy, they played an irreplaceable role in ensuring that the Commission had the benefit of *all* points of view.

No Commission can succeed without a capable and hard working staff, and this Commission is blessed with a staff of vast competence and extraordinary dedication. Our staff includes men and women who set aside the pleasures of retirement and summer vacations to take up long hours of high-stress work and seven-day work weeks. They combined extensive travel with an unqualified commitment to perfection.

Our staff includes extraordinarily capable men and women whose commitment to our mission led them to leave secure employment for a one-time job that will end in a matter of weeks, with no more security than a belief that performance will be rewarded. We also have the benefit of the knowledge and experience of detailees from government agencies who interrupted their careers to make this commission a success. Much of our administrative support came from consultants and contractor employees who quickly adopted a commitment to our mission and a laser-like focus on our outcomes. Their work for us made it clear to me that for them, this assignment was more than “just a job”.

The English language does not provide words adequate to express my gratitude and appreciation to all of the members of our staff; and to the members of our Commission.

I wonder how many of you knew what you were getting into when you said “yes” to membership on this Commission. All of you have successful and rewarding careers. *None* of you needed the stress, the travel, the overwhelming workload, the heart wrenching decisions that came with the title” commissioner”.

And yet each of you responded to the Commission’s challenges with the unquestioned integrity, the inexhaustible energy, and the bulldog like tenacity it took to burrow into the Department’s recommendations, formulate and raise the questions needed to understand them, and the judgment needed to reach fair and open decisions.

And, while we are all strong willed and articulate individuals, you made it a personal as well as a professional pleasure to work with you.

The men and women who defend our nation now, and those who will do so in the future, are in your debt.

The families who bring our defense communities to life are in your debt.

The American people who fund our national defense are in your debt. But, I will end by saying that..... **I** am in your debt.

Thank you for your service to our nation ..... and to this Commission.