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MILITARY BASES

Challenges in Identifying and
Implementing Closure
Recommendations

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to provide you with an overview of our work involving the Department of Defense's (DOD) base realignment and closure (BRAC) process. This includes our legislatively mandated role in assessing DOD's recommendations and process of selecting closure candidates and our subsequent work examining the implementation of BRAC decisions.

Today, I will (1) provide a brief historical account of the BRAC process, including our role in that process; (2) summarize some of the conclusions we have drawn in assessing DOD's decision-making process in prior BRAC rounds and identify improvements that DOD and its components have made to the process; (3) share with you the results of our work on previous base closures--including planned reuse and environmental cleanup of these facilities; and (4) make some preliminary observations about BRAC issues that may extend beyond the life of the current BRAC legislation.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF BRAC

As DOD budgets, force structure, and personnel began to be reduced in the mid-to-late 1980s, it became increasingly important to ensure that scarce DOD resources be devoted to the most pressing operational and investment needs rather than maintaining unneeded property, facilities, and overhead. Historically, however, closing unneeded military facilities had not been an easy task, in part, due to public concerns about the effects on communities and their economies and concerns about the impartiality of the decision-making process. Additionally, legislative provisions enacted in the 1970s requiring congressional notification of proposed closures and preparation of economic, environmental, and strategic consequence reports severely hampered base closure efforts.

Legislation enacted in 1988 (P.L. 100-526)--which was used only for that year--facilitated a successful round of base closure decision-making. It outlined a special process for considering closing actions, authorized a special commission to propose closures and realignments, and provided relief from certain statutory provisions that were seen as hindering the base closing process.

Efforts by the Secretary of Defense in January 1990 to initiate additional base closure actions--without special enabling legislation--encountered difficulty and were not completed. Concerned about the Secretary's January 1990 proposals, the Congress passed the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (title XXIX, P.L. 101-510) halting any major closures except those following the new act's requirements. The act created the independent BRAC commission and outlined procedures, roles, and

time lines for the President, the Congress, DOD, GAO, and the Commission to follow.

The 1990 legislation required that all bases be compared equally against selection criteria and DOD's current force structure plan, provided by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). The legislation mandated rounds of BRAC reviews in 1991, 1993, and 1995. For each BRAC round under the 1990 legislation, the services and DOD agencies submitted their candidates for closure and realignment to the Secretary of Defense for his review. After reviewing their candidates, the Secretary submitted his recommendations to the BRAC Commission for its review. The BRAC Commission, which could add, delete, or modify the Secretary's recommendations, then submitted its recommendations to the President for his consideration. The President could either accept or reject the Commission's recommendations in their entirety; if he rejected them, the Commission could give the President a revised list of recommendations. If the President accepted the Commission's recommendations, he forwarded the list to the Congress, which became final unless the Congress enacted a joint resolution disapproving it in its entirety.¹

Base closure rounds in 1988, 1991, and 1993 produced decisions to fully or partially close 70 major domestic bases and to close, realign, or otherwise downsize scores of other bases, installations, and activities.² I need to emphasize that the number of bases recommended for closure in a given BRAC round is often difficult to tabulate precisely because closure actions are not necessarily complete closures, and closures may involve activities and functions rather than bases.

The term "base closure" often conjures up the image of a larger facility being closed than may actually be the case. Military installations are diversified and can include a base, camp, post, station, yard, center, homeport facility, or leased facility. Further, more than one mission or function may be housed on a given installation. Individual base closure and realignment recommendations may actually affect a variety of activities and functions without fully closing an installation. For example, in 1993, the Navy recommended closure of its Naval Aviation Depot (NADEP) in Norfolk, Virginia, which is an aircraft maintenance facility. The Norfolk NADEP is located on the Norfolk Naval Base, which includes among other activities the Norfolk Naval Station and Naval Air Station, which were not closed by BRAC 1993.

¹See enclosure 1 for an overview of BRAC 1995 outlining DOD's selection criteria, key steps taken by DOD components in identifying BRAC candidates, and key milestone dates.

²See enclosure 2 for definitions pertaining to DOD base realignment and closure actions.

Complete closures, to the extent they occur, may involve relatively small facilities, rather than the stereotypical large military base. Thus, the term "base closing" used in conjunction with BRAC should be viewed generically as referring to facilities, installations, and activities of varying sizes. Closings and realignments, whatever their size, however, are designed to reduce unneeded infrastructure and achieve operational savings--that is the bottom line in terms of what the base closure process is all about.

DOD is still completing base closures and realignments approved in prior years. DOD must currently initiate closure and realignment actions no later than 2 years after the President submits his list to the Congress and must complete implementing actions within 6 years. DOD data indicates that as of January 1995, 51 percent of the 70 major closing actions of the prior three rounds had been completed. Implementing actions on BRAC 1995 recommendations must be completed by 2001.

The 1990 legislation mandated that GAO analyze the Secretary's selection process and recommendations for each BRAC round and submit a report to the Congress and the BRAC Commission.³ For BRAC 1995, this report must be submitted within 45 days after the Secretary makes public his list of proposed realignments and closures. Our next report must be submitted by April 15, 1995.

ADEQUACY OF DOD'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Several statutory or policy requirements of the BRAC process are designed to enhance its fairness and integrity and have been strengthened over time. They include the following:

- All DOD components must use specific models for assessing (1) the costs and savings associated with BRAC actions and (2) the potential economic impact on communities affected by those actions. We have identified shortcomings in these models and their use in prior BRAC rounds and have seen model improvements made each round to improve their effectiveness.
- Information used in DOD BRAC decision-making must be certified. That is, certification that the information is accurate and complete to the best of the submitting person's knowledge and belief. This requirement resulted from a 1991 amendment to the Base Closure and Realignment Act, and it was

³See Military Bases: Observations on the Analyses Supporting Proposed Closures and Realignments (GAO/NSIAD-91-224, May 15, 1991) and Military Bases: Analysis of DOD's Recommendations and Selection Process for Closures and Realignments (GAO/NSIAD-93-173, Apr. 15, 1993).

designed to overcome concerns about the consistency and reliability of data used in the process.

- DOD components must develop and implement internal control plans to foster accurate data collection and analyses and documentation of decisions. A component of the internal control plans is extensive involvement by service audit agencies and DOD Inspector General personnel to better ensure the accuracy of data used in decision-making and to enhance the integrity of the process. These audit groups have performed admirably, under tight time constraints, to conduct real-time assessments of data used in the decisions. They have pointed out errors and tracked corrections to help ensure the most accurate data possible was being used.

Our reports on prior BRAC rounds have pointed out problems with documentation of decisions and some recommendations by DOD components, but overall we found their decision-making processes were generally sound, and most decisions adequately supported. In the most recently completed BRAC round, 1993, we found that (1) the Navy generally completed return-on-investment analyses primarily to test the feasibility of an alternative, not to determine which, of competing alternatives, produced the greatest savings; (2) the Army chose not to recommend a base for closure, in part, because of environmental cleanup costs--a factor that is not supposed to be considered in calculating closure costs; (3) the Air Force's documentation of some of its final recommendations made it difficult to understand its justification, although subsequent oral explanations seemed to justify the recommendations; and (4) the Defense Logistics Agency overstated estimated savings of some realignments.

Our 1993 report also stated that OSD did not exercise strong leadership in overseeing the military services and DOD agencies during the process. Consequently, some technical problems occurred, and the opportunity to consider consolidation of maintenance facilities on a DOD-wide basis was lost. DOD responded to these problems by attempting to strengthen the process for BRAC 1995 and sought to encourage its components to explore opportunities for cross-service use of common support assets. It did this by organizing cross-service review groups to propose alternatives for the components to consider in five functional areas: (1) maintenance depots, (2) laboratories, (3) test and evaluation facilities, (4) undergraduate pilot training, and (5) medical treatment facilities.

Our assessment of the 1995 BRAC process is underway and will not be completed until we issue our report in April. Our staff will be undertaking a short, but intensive, scrutiny of the Secretary's recommendations once they are final and made public on March 1, 1995. Operating under tight time constraints, we will track selected recommendations back through the components' decision-

making processes to test their logic, consistency, and reasonableness. We will report any concerns to the BRAC Commission and the Congress.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PREVIOUS BASE CLOSURES

Let me now discuss the status of previous closure decisions. While the implementation of BRAC 1993 is still in its early stages, DOD and local communities have had more time to develop and implement reuse plans for the two earlier rounds. We reported earlier on the results of our review on 37 base closures from the 1988 and 1991 rounds.⁴ While the findings remain unchanged, we have updated the figures for you today (see enclosure 3).

Federal property that is no longer needed is not automatically sold. Rather, DOD is required to first screen excess property for possible use by other DOD organizations and then by other federal agencies. If no federal agency has a need for the excess property, it is declared surplus to the federal government and generally is made available to qualifying nonprofit organizations and state and local governments. Any property that remains is available for sale to the general public. DOD is required to comply with environmental laws for disposing of real property. These laws call for all relevant parties to agree on the extent of cleanup required before property can be transferred within the federal government and that property be cleaned up before it can be transferred to nonfederal users.

Originally, DOD estimated that \$4.1 billion would be received from the sale of property from BRAC 1988 and 1991 rounds to help pay for the costs of realignments and closures. DOD property sales currently total about \$63 million. The primary reason for the low property sales is that about 88 percent of the property we reviewed at these 37 installations was being retained by DOD or transferred at no cost to other federal agencies or state and local jurisdictions. Of the remaining 12 percent, 3 percent is planned for sale and 9 percent is undecided. Closure costs not paid from property sales revenue will have to be paid from congressional appropriations.

In addition to requesting property at no cost, communities are also asking the federal government to provide cash grants, income producing properties, and building and infrastructure improvements to assist with the conversion of military properties to civilian uses. Communities have received nearly \$300 million in cash grants from various federal agencies to assist with the planning and implementation of base reuse plans. DOD's Office of Economic Adjustment has provided \$33 million; the Department of Commerce's

⁴Military Bases: Reuse Plans for Selected Bases Closed in 1988 and 1991 (GAO/NSIAD-95-3, Nov. 1, 1994).

Economic Development Administration has provided \$83 million; the Department of Labor has provided \$46 million; and the Federal Aviation Administration has provided \$130 million.

Communities are also seeking the public benefit conveyances of readily marketable properties, such as military golf courses and family housing, to support reuse activities. Communities are asking for these revenue generating properties to help fund the operating expenses while they implement their reuse plans for activities such as airports or educational institutions.

Finally, communities are asking DOD to renovate buildings, upgrade utility systems, construct roads, and improve other infrastructure. Some requests have been for converting buildings from their former military use to classroom facilities and to bring buildings up to current state and federal standards. Other requests have been for infrastructure system upgrades to gas, water, and sewage systems and the construction of access roads. Communities are asking DOD to perform this work, provide the funds to do the work, or deduct the funds from property sales revenue.

Our work also shows that reuse planning and disposal of property are being delayed for several reasons. These include (1) disagreements over reuse alternatives, (2) changing laws and regulations, and (3) environmental cleanup of contaminated properties.

Disagreements over reuse arise when competing federal agencies, local jurisdictions, or other members of the community cannot agree on reuse alternatives. We have seen disagreements between cities, counties and cities, federal agencies and cities, Indian groups and local communities, and homeless assistance organizations and local communities. When conflicts arise, DOD base closure officials have urged all parties to reach an accommodation; however, DOD has the discretion to determine the final use of the property.

Changing laws and regulations delay reuse planning. When new legislation is passed, communities that are in the midst of reuse planning often choose to delay decisions until implementing regulations are finalized. For example, the Congress passed legislation in 1993 to expedite the base conversion process and support economic development in communities facing base closure. DOD issued interim rules in April 1994 and amended them in October 1994. Final rules are expected to be published in mid-March of this year.

With respect to environmental cleanup of contaminated properties, we have just released our report on the environmental impact at

closing military installations.⁵ This report addresses the significant environmental cleanup challenges that face the Congress, DOD, the state, and local communities before the property can be reused.

The Congress, DOD, and the Environmental Protection Agency have taken a number of actions over the past several years to resolve environmental cleanup issues at bases that are being closed and realigned. However, problems still remain. For example, our report shows that DOD's cost estimate for cleaning up 123 closing and realigning activities/installations increased to \$4 billion in its fiscal year 1995 budget request.⁶ However, later, more comprehensive estimates developed by 84 installations for their April 1994 cleanup plans totaled about \$5.4 billion. We found that even these estimates were understated.

Our report also shows DOD has made all closing and realigning installations eligible for high priority cleanup funding. This high priority accelerates DOD's cleanup funding needs. However, 63 percent of the \$5.4 billion estimate is for installations that would not have been given a high priority for cleanup funding if they were not closing or realigning. Also, most of the property will remain as federal lands and may not have to be cleaned up before reuse. In addition, in 1994 DOD received authority to use long-term leases so property can be placed into nonfederal reuse before cleanup is completed. To date, only a few leases have been signed.

Finally, our report shows that DOD's cleanup progress has been limited. Most sites at closing and realigning installations are in the earliest stages of investigation and study and may be 10 years or more away from cleanup. DOD has made limited cleanup progress for several reasons. First, the study and evaluation process is lengthy. Second, some of the contaminated sites are just too large or prohibitively expensive to clean up and some of the cleanup methods are unsure. Decontaminating groundwater is costly, difficult, and sometimes impossible. Third, new technology is frequently not a ready option because it may involve unacceptable risks or contractors may prefer other technology based on their past experiences.

⁵Military Bases: Environmental Impact at Closing Installations (GAO/NSIAD-95-70, Feb. 23, 1995).

⁶The 123 activities/installations are those that are identified in DOD's fiscal year 1995 base realignment and closure budget justification documents. This number differs from other summary figures for base closures because of the way DOD aggregated these numbers for budget purposes.

To accelerate the environmental cleanup at closing installations, DOD established the Fast Track Cleanup program in July 1993. While certain elements in the program have achieved desired results, others have not, and opportunities for improvement remain.

For example, one initiative focused on quickly identifying and transferring uncontaminated property. However, although the services identified about 121,000 of about 250,000 acres at 1988 and 1991 closing installations as uncontaminated, the regulators only concurred on about 34,000 acres. Moreover, most of the uncontaminated property that has been identified is usually undeveloped, remotely located, and often not desirable for reuse.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

BRAC 1995 represents the last round of base closing reviews authorized under the 1990 legislation. Questions exist about whether sufficient infrastructure reductions will be made in the current round or whether additional rounds will be needed. Further, the BRAC round in 1993 was used to obtain BRAC Commission approval for changes to BRAC decisions made in 1991; the same is expected to occur in BRAC 1995 relating to prior BRAC decisions. Since DOD cannot unilaterally change a BRAC Commission decision, questions exist as to how any adjustments to 1995 BRAC decisions will be made in the future once the 1995 BRAC Commission has completed its work.

The question of whether the 1995 and earlier BRAC rounds will have eliminated sufficient excess infrastructure cannot be fully answered yet. However, recent statements by the Secretary suggest that excess infrastructure may remain after the 1995 BRAC round. DOD's goal for the 1995 round was to reduce the overall DOD domestic base structure by at least 15 percent of DOD-wide plant replacement value--an amount at least equal to the three prior BRAC rounds. Recently, the Secretary said that he expects that the 1995 round reduction will be smaller than the 1993 round. This suggests that the current round may not meet DOD's stated goal. Our review of the 1995 round will address DOD's reasoning for the degree to which excess infrastructure was retained.

If further BRAC rounds are needed, the recent history of base closures suggests that some form of authorizing legislation may be needed to overcome problems which inhibited base closures in the past. However, I am not suggesting such legislation at this point, because we have not completed our review of the current BRAC round. In addition, we plan to complete a more detailed assessment of lessons learned from these rounds to determine what worked, what did not work as well, and what might be done differently to facilitate any additional reductions.

Regarding changes to prior BRAC decisions, the history of recent BRAC rounds suggests that some mechanism will be needed to authorize changes to 1995 BRAC decisions. I am not recommending a

specific approach at this time. However, we would be glad to provide some alternatives for your consideration at a later date.

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Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to respond to any questions from you or Members of the Subcommittee.

OVERVIEW OF BRAC 1995

The following is an overview of BRAC 1995 outlining DOD's selection criteria, key steps in DOD components' decision-making, and key dates pertaining to the BRAC process.

DOD SELECTION CRITERIA

Military Value (receives priority consideration)

1. The current and future mission requirements and the impact on operational readiness of DOD's Total Force.
2. The availability and condition of land, facilities, and associated air space at both the existing and potential receiving locations.
3. The ability to accommodate contingency, mobilization, and future total force requirements at both the existing and potential receiving locations.
4. The cost and manpower implications.

Return On Investment

5. The extent and timing of potential cost and savings, including the number of years, beginning with the date of completion of the closure or realignment, for the savings to exceed the costs.

Community Impacts

6. The economic impact on communities.
7. The ability of both the existing and potential receiving communities' infrastructure to support forces, missions, and personnel.
8. The environmental impact.

KEY STEPS TAKEN BY DOD COMPONENTS IN IDENTIFYING BRAC CANDIDATES

- Categorizing activities.
- Collecting data needed to identify excess capacity and establish military values at individual locations.

- Identifying realignment and closure candidates and analyzing alternatives/scenarios.
- Performing analyses to gauge potential costs and savings from realignment and closure alternatives/scenarios.
- Determining economic, community, and environmental impacts.
- Recommending candidates for realignment and closure.

KEY DATES

The 1995 BRAC process is governed by certain key dates. No later than:

-- March 1, 1995: The Secretary of Defense reports his recommendations for realignments and closures to the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission. This point marks the first public release of proposed realignments and closures and public availability of DOD BRAC documents.

-- **April 15, 1995:** GAO provides Congress and the Base Closure Commission with "a report containing a detailed analysis of the Secretary's recommendations and selection process."

-- July 1, 1995: The Base Closure Commission reports to the President on its recommendations for realignments and closures.

-- July 15, 1995: The President transmits to the Commission and Congress a report containing his approval or disapproval of the Commission's recommendations.

-- August 15, 1995: Should the President disapprove any of the Commission's recommendations, the Commission must transmit a revised list to the President.

-- September, 1995: Congress has 45 days in which to enact a joint resolution should it desire to disapprove the entire package of realignment and closure recommendations.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE DEFINITIONS

The following definitions were provided by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to the Department of Defense (DOD) components for use in the 1995 base closure and realignment process. The definitions remain unchanged from the 1993 process.

CLOSE

All missions of the base will cease or be relocated. All personnel (military, civilian, and contractor) will either be eliminated or relocated. The entire base will be excessed and the property disposed. Note: A caretaker workforce is possible to bridge between closure (missions ceasing or relocating) and property disposal which are separate actions under Public Law 101-510.

CLOSE, EXCEPT

The vast majority of the missions will cease or be relocated. Over 95 percent of the military, civilian, and contractor personnel will either be eliminated or relocated. All but a small portion of the base will be excessed and the property disposed. The small portion retained will often be facilities in an enclave for use by the reserve component. Generally, active component management of the base will cease. Outlying, unmanned ranges or training areas retained for reserve component use do not count against the "small portion retained."

REALIGN

Some missions of the base will cease or be relocated, but others will remain. The active component will still be host of the remaining portion of the base. Only a portion of the base will be excessed and the property disposed, with realignment (missions ceasing or relocating) and property disposal being separate actions under Public Law 101-510. In cases where the base is both gaining and losing missions, the base is being realigned if it will experience a net reduction of DOD civilian personnel. In such situations, it is possible that no property will be excessed.

RELOCATE

The term used to describe the movement of missions, units, or activities from a closing or realigning base to another base. Units do not realign from a closing or a realigning base to another base, they relocate.

RECEIVING BASE

Enclosure 2

Enclosure 2

A base that receives missions, units or activities relocating from a closing or realigning base. In cases where the base is both gaining and losing missions, the base is a receiving base if it will experience a net increase of DOD civilian personnel.

MOTHBALL, LAYAWAY

Terms used when retention of facilities and real estate at a closing or realigning base are necessary to meet the mobilization or contingency needs of DOD. Bases or portions of bases "mothballed" will not be excessed and disposed. It is possible they could be leased for interim economic uses.

INACTIVATE, DISESTABLISH

Terms used to describe planned actions that directly affect missions, units, or activities. Fighter wings are inactivated, bases are closed.

December 1994
PLANNED PROPERTY DISPOSALS AT SELECTED BASES CLOSED IN THE 1988 AND 1991 ROUNDS

Base	Federal		Public benefit transfers				Econ dev transfer	Market sales	Undetermined	Total acres
	DDO	FWS/BLM Other federal	Homeless	Airports	Park/recreation	Education				
Army MTL, MA	356		8	2,860	7			30	37	
Bergstrom AFB, TX									3,216	
Cameron Station, VA									165	
Castle AFB, CA	13	660	8	1,581	18	132	13	365	2,777	
Chanute AFB, IL				1,181	147	62		729	2,132	
Chase NAS, TX							262	96	3,757	
Davisville MCBC, RI	380	10			219			159	1,280	
Eaker AFB, AR				1,690	484	300		809	3,286	
England AFB, LA				2,282					2,282	
Ft. Benjamin Harrison, IN	244		4		1,550			5	2,501	
Ft. Devens, MA	5,598	800	20					2,633	9,311	
Ft. Ord, CA	1,190	15,009	133	846	2,605	338		2,681	4,923	
Ft. Sheridan, IL	310		46		103	4		249	712	
Ft. Wingate AD, NM	13,000	8,812	34	2,300		63		328	21,812	
George AFB, CA									5,068	
Grissom AFB, IN	1,398	47,500	4		210			5,000	2,722	
Jefferson Proving Ground, IN									55,264	
Lexington AD, KY									780	
Long Beach NS/NH, CA	592		26			62		57	932	
Loring AFB, ME	1,223	6,600	35			18		1,811	9,487	
Lowry AFB, CO	115		47		175	220	22	576	1,866	
Mather AFB, CA	57		28	2,883	1,462	95		1,169	5,716	
Moffett NAS, CA	130	1,440						7	1,577	
Myrtle Beach AFB, SC				1,244		15		1,559	3,744	
Norton AFB, CA	112		4	1,267	24	10	39	641	2,130	
Pease AFB, NH	230	1,095		2,305	30	27	6	600	4,257	
Philadelphia NS/NH/MSY, PA	550							902	1,502	
Presidio of San Francisco, CA		1,480							1,480	
Puget Sound NS, WA	214	4	18	202	82	21	16	12	151	
Richards-Gebaur ARS, MO	300			1,635				80	2,015	
Rickenbacker AGB, OH	79		29			4			485	
Sacramento AD, CA	10		54		103	219		875	1,620	
Tustin MCAS, CA									840	
Warminster NAWC, PA	100			3,262		642		138	4,042	
Williams AFB, AZ		580							580	
Woodbridge ARF, VA			7	1,600	15	10	5	489	3,541	
Wurtsmith AFB, MI			466	27,138	7,298	2,215	390	17,285	191,220	
Total acreage	26,205	80,400	4,848					18,373		
Percent of total	13.70	42.05	2.54	0.24	14.19	3.82	1.16	9.61	9.04	100.00

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