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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

January 18, 2008

Congressional Committees

Subject: *Defense Infrastructure: Realignment of Air Force Special Operations Command Units to Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico*

In September 2005, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) recommended closing Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, unless a new mission for the base could be identified by December 31, 2009. In June 2006, the Department of Defense (DOD) announced that Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC)¹ would establish a new mission at Cannon Air Force Base and the command would take ownership of the base on October 1, 2007. As a result, Cannon Air Force Base will remain open. While DOD has satisfied the intent of the recommendation by finding a new mission for the base, this BRAC recommendation was unusual because it contained a contingency clause. Therefore, we reviewed DOD's implementation of this recommendation under the authority of the Comptroller General to conduct evaluations on his own initiative.² This report (1) describes the factors underpinning the decision to house AFSOC at Cannon Air Force Base and (2) provides information on the cost estimate and timeline for the movement of personnel to establish the AFSOC mission.

To determine the factors underpinning the decision to establish an AFSOC mission at Cannon Air Force Base, we interviewed officials involved in the decision-making process from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, Installations, Environment and Logistics; the United States Special Operations Command; and the Air Force Special Operations Command. In addition, we reviewed Air Force documents that described efforts to identify a new mission for Cannon Air Force Base and AFSOC site evaluations and analyses of potential locations for AFSOC missions. To provide information on costs, we reviewed the planned military construction and operations and maintenance funding required for AFSOC units to operate at Cannon Air Force Base. In addition, we reviewed Special Operations Command, AFSOC, and Air Combat Command cost estimates and financial data and interviewed Special Operations Command and AFSOC officials. Based on these discussions and observations, we believe the DOD data are sufficiently reliable for

¹AFSOC is the Air Force component of the U.S. Special Operations Command; it is headquartered at Hurlburt Field, Florida, and it has approximately 12,900 active duty, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard and civilian personnel. The active duty component is located at Hurlburt Field, Florida; Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico; and at two overseas locations. The Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard components are not affected by the realignment of units to Cannon.

²31 U.S.C. § 717 (b).

the purposes of this report. To provide timeline information on moving personnel to Cannon Air Force Base, we reviewed Special Operations Command personnel information and AFSOC site survey data and interviewed Special Operations Command and AFSOC officials. Finally, we met with State of New Mexico and community officials to obtain information on the state's efforts to assist in the reuse of Cannon. We conducted this performance audit from June 2007 through January 2008 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient and appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Summary

DOD's decision to establish an AFSOC mission at Cannon was the result of a confluence of events, chiefly, the BRAC 2005 contingency clause that provided urgency for finding a new tenant for the base and an AFSOC study pointing to Cannon Air Force Base as the best location for the AFSOC mission. According to AFSOC officials, relocating some AFSOC units from Hurlburt Field, Florida, became a priority as Hurlburt Field was nearing full capacity of its ramp and hangar space and the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review recommended the growth of the AFSOC mission. In October 2005, AFSOC evaluated three alternatives to address the lack of existing capacity at Hurlburt Field and rated Cannon as most desirable. Subsequently, in response to the BRAC 2005 contingency clause, the Air Force began to look in January 2006 for another mission for Cannon Air Force Base. The Air Force solicited interest from DOD and other agencies that would consider selecting Cannon Air Force Base for their missions. According to Air Force officials, the intent was to identify a tenant that would make maximum use of the base facilities and the base's associated range, the Melrose Training Range. AFSOC was the only respondent out of six that expressed interest in using the entire base and the associated range. The remaining five planned to use portions of the base. In June 2006, DOD announced that a new AFSOC mission would be established at Cannon.

Although AFSOC took ownership of Cannon Air Force Base on October 1, 2007, there is some uncertainty over the total cost and timeline of personnel growth required to establish the new mission, although AFSOC estimated the cost at about \$517 million over the next 6 years at the time of our review. First, DOD has programmed about \$283 million for military construction projects from fiscal year 2008 through 2013 to support the movement of units to Cannon. Approximately \$201 million, or 71 percent, of these funds are for constructing facilities at other Air Force locations, but these projects were moved to Cannon to support the relocation of the AFSOC units. For example, \$11.2 million was programmed to construct a special operations squadron and maintenance facility and \$15.5 million was programmed to construct a corrosion control hangar at other locations, but these projects were moved to Cannon. The remaining \$82 million in programmed funds were to construct or modify existing support facilities at Cannon. For example, the Air Force had already programmed \$8.1 million in fiscal year 2011 to construct a new dormitory. Second, AFSOC has identified about \$233 million in additional required funding that has yet to be programmed. These funds would primarily be used to construct or modify existing

mission-related facilities to accommodate aircraft that are larger and more varied than the ones previously located at the base. Approximately \$19 million of the additional funding would be used to obtain some temporary facilities until permanent facilities become available. Moreover, AFSOC originally projected that about 5,700 personnel would be moved to Cannon by the end of fiscal year 2010. However, because of funding constraints, the decision to move about 1,400 of these people is under review by DOD. Further, the expected number and pace of personnel growth may change further because AFSOC plans to bring fewer aircraft to Cannon than originally projected.

This report also presents a matter for congressional consideration should Congress authorize a future base closure round. In a written comment letter, DOD had no comments on a draft of this report.

Background

On May 13, 2005, the Secretary of Defense made public his recommendations for the 2005 BRAC round. The BRAC Commission, established by law as an independent entity to evaluate DOD's recommendations, presented its findings, along with its own recommendations, to the President on September 8, 2005. The President approved the commission's recommendations in their entirety and forwarded them to Congress on September 15, 2005. When Congress did not pass a joint resolution of disapproval of the recommendations, they became effective on November 9, 2005. The 2005 BRAC Commission terminated on April 15, 2006.

DOD recommended the outright closure of Cannon Air Force Base. The BRAC Commission also recommended closing Cannon Air Force Base but added a contingent condition that the base could remain open if a new mission could be found by December 31, 2009. DOD subsequently identified a new mission for Cannon, and therefore the base will remain open.

Factors That Affected the Decision to Move to Cannon

DOD's decision to establish an AFSOC mission at Cannon Air Force Base was the result of a confluence of events: chiefly, the BRAC Commission contingency clause that provided urgency for finding a new tenant to keep the base open and AFSOC's desire for another location.

Air Force's Response to the BRAC 2005 Contingency Clause

In January 2006, the Air Force began an effort to identify a new use for Cannon Air Force Base. On the basis of an evaluation of the base's infrastructure, facilities, and community and regional resources, the Air Force developed a prospectus of the base that was distributed to federal organizations both within and outside DOD. The prospectus was to solicit federal agency interest in using the base. Air Force officials told us that the ideal candidate would be one that intended to fully utilize the facilities, including the adjacent Melrose Training Range. The Air Force received responses from six organizations but only AFSOC expressed interest in fully using the base and range. The remaining five organizations expressed a desire to use

limited facilities on the base and, therefore, did not meet the intent of the solicitation. For example, the Defense Logistics Agency wanted to use some of the facilities at Cannon Air Force Base to temporarily store equipment. After a second solicitation did not yield viable responses other than AFSOC's, the Air Force focused its attention on evaluating AFSOC's proposal, and in June 2006 DOD announced that AFSOC would establish a mission at Cannon Air Force Base.

AFSOC officials said that at about the same time that the Air Force was completing its search to identify a new mission for Cannon Air Force Base, AFSOC was completing its own study comparing basing alternatives. Information from the Air Force's solicitation results and AFSOC's comparison study was combined in a series of briefings to DOD.

AFSOC's Desire for Another Location

According to AFSOC officials, in recent years it was becoming increasingly apparent that Hurlburt Field, Florida, was nearing full capacity of its ramp and hangar space. In addition, these officials told us that they were having an increasingly difficult time scheduling training time at the adjacent training range at Eglin Air Force Base. The officials said that these constraints were likely to intensify because Eglin was expecting to have additional demands placed on it as a result of (1) decisions to locate more aircraft (such as the Joint Strike Fighter) there and (2) the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review call for growth in the AFSOC mission. Specifically, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review proposed increasing the Special Operations Forces by 15 percent and establishing an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron under U.S. Special Operations Command.

Starting in October 2005, AFSOC examined three alternatives to address the lack of existing capacity at Hurlburt Field and the anticipated increase in the AFSOC mission as proposed in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review. The three alternatives were (1) increasing capacity at Hurlburt Field; (2) establishing an AFSOC mission at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona; and (3) establishing an AFSOC mission at Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico. AFSOC evaluated each of these locations based on the 11 criteria shown in figure 1. As the figure shows, Cannon Air Force Base was rated the most desirable on 9 of the 11 criteria and tied on 2 criteria. AFSOC officials said that the installation scored particularly high in the criteria deemed to be the most important--the availability of ramp space, lack of encroachment, increased training opportunities, local community support, and military construction costs.

Figure 1: AFSOC’s Comparison of Basing Alternatives

Factors	Hurlburt Field, Florida	Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona	Cannon AFB, New Mexico
Operations security	±	-	+
Good flying weather	±	+	+
Lack of encroachment	-	-	+
Training opportunities	±	±	+
Community support	±	-	+
Flexibility	±	±	+
Ramp space	-	±	+
Growth potential	-	-	+
Types of terrain	±	+	+
Availability of facilities	-	-	+
Military construction costs	~\$1.1B	~\$1.43B	~\$150 - \$255M

- Least desirable
± Moderately desirable
+ Most desirable

Source: AFSOC data.

Establishing an AFSOC mission in New Mexico was in line with an interest AFSOC had expressed in the mid-1990s. According to AFSOC officials, a western United States location would provide additional training opportunities for AFSOC and other special operations forces.

Cost and Timeline of AFSOC’s Move to Cannon

AFSOC took ownership of Cannon Air Force Base on October 1, 2007, and plans to spend about \$516.6 million to establish the mission over the next 6 years. First, DOD has programmed about \$283.3 million in fiscal years 2008 through 2013 for military construction projects. Second, AFSOC has identified a need for about \$233 million in additional funding that has yet to be programmed. These funds are needed primarily to construct new or modify existing mission-related facilities to accommodate aircraft that are larger and more varied than the smaller aircraft previously located at the base.³ In addition, AFSOC originally projected that about 5,700 personnel would be located at Cannon by the end of fiscal year 2010. However, because of funding constraints, the decision to move about 1,400 of them is under review by DOD. Moreover, the expected number and pace of personnel growth may change further because AFSOC plans to bring fewer aircraft to Cannon than originally projected.

³The F-16 fighter has a wingspan of 32 feet and 8 inches and a height of 16 feet. The C-130 has a wingspan of 132 feet and 7 inches and a height of 38 feet and 6 inches and, consequently, requires larger hangars and other facilities.

Funding Requirements to Establish AFSOC Mission at Cannon

AFSOC anticipates spending about \$516.6 million to locate the AFSOC units but has programmed only about \$283.3 million in military construction funds from fiscal years 2008 through 2013. Our analysis indicates that about \$201 million (71 percent) of these funds were originally programmed to build facilities at other locations that will now be built at Cannon based on the decision to move some AFSOC units to the base. For example, \$11.2 million was programmed to construct a special operations squadron and maintenance facility and \$15.5 million was programmed to construct a corrosion control hangar at other locations, but these projects were moved to Cannon. The remaining \$82 million in programmed funds were to construct or modify existing support facilities at Cannon. For example, the Air Force had already programmed \$8.1 million in fiscal year 2011 to construct a new dormitory.

As shown in table 1, \$283.3 million of the \$516.6 has been programmed, but additional military construction, operation and maintenance, and procurement totaling \$233.3 million had not been programmed at the time of our report. This additional funding is to construct new or modify existing facilities and infrastructure to accommodate AFSOC’s mission.

Table 1: Programmed and Unprogrammed Funding to Establish AFSOC Mission at Cannon, Fiscal Years 2008 to 2013

Dollars in millions

Type of Funding	Fiscal year						Total
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	
Programmed	\$9.2	\$18.1	\$26.2	\$126.4	\$40.9	\$62.5	\$283.3
<i>Unprogrammed</i>							
Military construction	0.0	0.0	53.0	22.0	48.5	0.0	\$123.5
Operation and maintenance	3.7	24.9	22.9	16.6	17.7	14.8	\$100.6
Procurement	0.0	6.6	2.2	0.4	0.0	0.0	\$9.2
Subtotal unprogrammed	3.7	31.5	78.1	39.0	66.2	14.8	\$233.3
Total	\$12.9	\$49.6	\$104.3	\$165.4	\$107.1	\$77.3	\$516.6

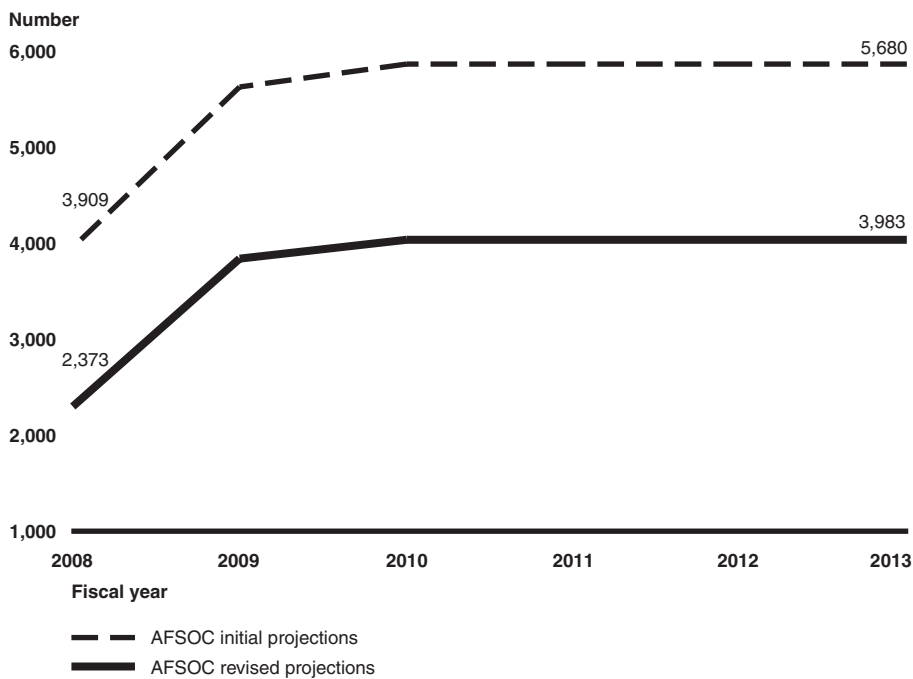
Source: GAO analysis of Air Force data.

As seen in table 1, AFSOC has identified a need for \$123.5 million more in military construction funds for projects such as an aircraft washing facility for C-130 aircraft, hangars for the Predator unmanned aerial system, and squadron operations facilities for an AC-130 squadron. AFSOC also identified a need for about \$100.6 million in additional operation and maintenance funding. According to AFSOC officials, about \$10.3 million is for minor construction projects, such as enlarging entrance bay doors, reworking concrete ramps, and adding partition walls and doors to buildings, and \$27.6 million is for upgrading and securing communications infrastructure. AFSOC officials told us that \$19.6 million is needed to procure temporary hangars for fuel cell maintenance and corrosion control for C-130 aircraft and to lease facilities for squadron operations until permanent facilities are built.

Timeline for Moving Personnel to Cannon Air Force Base

Cannon Air Force Base may have lower personnel levels and grow at a slower rate than initially projected. In July 2007, AFSOC estimated that Cannon Air Force Base would have about 3,900 personnel by the end of fiscal year 2008 and grow to a peak of about 5,700 by the end of fiscal year 2010. However, in September 2007, in response to our request, AFSOC provided us with revised data indicating plans for lower personnel levels and a slower rate of growth at Cannon. AFSOC's plans as of November 2007 indicated that a total of about 2,400 personnel would have moved to Cannon by the end of fiscal year 2008 and grow to a potential peak of about 4,000 personnel by the end of fiscal year 2009. Figure 2 displays initial and revised estimates of personnel to be moved to Cannon.

Figure 2: Comparison of Initial and Revised Projected Personnel Growth at Cannon, Fiscal Years 2008 to 2013



Source: Air Force data.

DOD officials told us that funding constraints caused them to reduce the projected personnel growth at Cannon by about 1,400 personnel and the decision to move these personnel is under review by DOD.

However, our analysis shows that AFSOC may not achieve even the expected growth of about 4,000 personnel by 2010. AFSOC's revisions of the planned personnel growth may be overstated because of the projected decrease in aircraft to be located at Cannon. AFSOC officials told us that fewer aircraft are being moved to Cannon than originally planned and at a slower rate. For example, AFSOC originally projected that

104 aircraft would be based at Cannon by 2010, but subsequently projected that 68 will be there by then.

Conclusions

DOD will incur additional costs to establish a new mission at Cannon; however, these costs were not considered as part of the BRAC process because the decision to relocate AFSOC was made after the BRAC Commission was disestablished and the President's report of the BRAC recommendations was sent to Congress. In addition, because these costs were not part of the BRAC process, Congress did not have visibility at the time of approval over the Cannon recommendation and its impact on the total costs and savings from implementing the BRAC 2005 recommendations.

Matter for Congressional Consideration

If Congress decides to authorize a future base closure round, it may want to consider whether to allow a future BRAC Commission the authority to add a contingent element to a recommendation and, if so, under what conditions.

Agency Comments

In a written comment letter, DOD had no comments on a draft of this report. DOD's letter is reprinted in enclosure I.

- - -

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Air Force, the Commander of Special Operations Command, and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. We will provide copies of this report to others upon request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions on the information discussed in this report, please contact me on (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in enclosure II.



Brian J. Lepore
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Enclosures – 2

List of Committees

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DEC 20 2007

Brian J. Lepore
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U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington DC 20548

Dear Mr. Lepore:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-08-244R, "*DEFENSE INFRASTRUCTURE: Realignment of Air Force Special Operations Command Units to Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico,*" dated December 4, 2007 (GAO Code 351051). The Department has reviewed the Draft Report and has no comments.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond. DoD appreciates the work that has gone into GAO's assessment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kalev I. Sepp". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Kalev I. Sepp
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Special Operations Capabilities

Enclosure II

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Brian J. Lepore, (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov

Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Michael Kennedy, Assistant Director; Aisha Cabrer; Colin Chambers; Mae Jones; Julia Matta; and Allen Westheimer made significant contributions to this report.

Related GAO Products

Military Base Realignment and Closures: Estimated Costs Have Increased and Estimated Savings Have Decreased. GAO-08-341T. Washington, D.C.: December 12, 2007.

Military Base Realignment and Closures: Cost Estimates Have Increased and Are Likely to Continue to Evolve. GAO-08-159. Washington, D.C.: December 11, 2007.

Military Base Realignment and Closures: Impact of Terminating, Relocating, or Outsourcing the Services of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology. GAO-08-20. Washington, D.C.: November 9, 2007.

Military Base Realignment and Closures: Transfer of Supply, Storage, and Distribution Functions from Military Services to Defense Logistics Agency. GAO-08-121R. Washington, D.C.: October 26, 2007.

Defense Infrastructure: Challenges Increase Risks for Providing Timely Infrastructure Support for Army Installations Expecting Substantial Personnel Growth. GAO-07-1007. Washington, D.C.: September 13, 2007.

Military Base Realignment and Closures: Plan Needed to Monitor Challenges for Completing More Than 100 Armed Forces Reserve Centers. GAO-07-1040. Washington, D.C.: September 13, 2007.

Military Base Realignment and Closures: Observations Related to the 2005 Round. GAO-07-1203R. Washington, D.C.: September 6, 2007.

Military Base Closures: Projected Savings from Fleet Readiness Centers Are Likely Overstated and Actions Needed to Track Actual Savings and Overcome Certain Challenges. GAO-07-304. Washington, D.C.: June 29, 2007.

Military Base Closures: Management Strategy Needed to Mitigate Challenges and Improve Communication to Help Ensure Timely Implementation of Air National Guard Recommendations. GAO-07-641. Washington, D.C.: May 16, 2007.

Military Base Closures: Opportunities Exist to Improve Environmental Cleanup Cost Reporting and to Expedite Transfer of Unneeded Property. GAO-07-166. Washington, D.C.: January 30, 2007.

Military Bases: Observations on DOD's 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Selection Process and Recommendations. GAO-05-905. Washington, D.C.: July 18, 2005.

Military Bases: Analysis of DOD's 2005 Selection Process and Recommendations for Base Closures and Realignments. GAO-05-785. Washington, D.C.: July 1, 2005.

Military Base Closures: Observations on Prior and Current BRAC Rounds. GAO-05-614. Washington, D.C.: May 3, 2005.

Military Base Closures: Updated Status of Prior Base Realignments and Closures. GAO-05-138. Washington, D.C.: January 13, 2005.

Military Base Closures: Assessment of DOD's 2004 Report on the Need for a Base Realignment and Closure Round. GAO-04-760. Washington, D.C.: May 17, 2004.

Military Base Closures: Observations on Preparations for the Upcoming Base Realignment and Closure Round. GAO-04-558T. Washington, D.C.: March 25, 2004.

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