



CHAPTER 1

COMMISSION STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

America's servicemembers are supported by, but also constrained by, the physical infrastructure of our nation's defense establishment: the bases where they live and train; the facilities where they maintain their weapons and equipment; the schools where they learn and practice their craft; the laboratories where future weapons and equipment are researched, developed, and tested; the logistics installations that servicemembers count on for the supplies they need to operate; and the depots that refurbish and overhaul their equipment. Today's defense infrastructure is the collective and tangible legacy of decades—even generations—of decisions on defense installations. Today, the armed forces and the Department of Defense are the stewards of installations ranging from some built originally to defend our harbors during the age of sail to others defending against intercontinental ballistic missiles.

No institution will remain successful without adapting to its constantly changing environment. Our armed forces must adapt to changing threats, evolving technology, reconfigured organizational structures, and new strategies and structures. Our infrastructure must support that progress, not hinder it. Neither DoD, nor the American taxpayer, can afford to support unneeded infrastructure at the expense of funding for supplies and equipment for our servicemembers. The base closure and realignment (BRAC) process is a systematic, rational process to bring our nation's military infrastructure into line with the needs of our armed forces, not only by reducing costs and closing unneeded installations, but also by facilitating the transformation of our armed forces to meet the challenges of the new century.

The closure or realignment of a base can have profound effects on the communities hosting our military installations and, more important, on the people who bring those communities and our military to life. The BRAC process created by Congress establishes clear criteria for DoD evaluation of, and recommendations for, the closure of military installations, to be followed by an assessment of those DoD recommendations by an independent commission. The President and then the Congress have the option of accepting or rejecting the Commission's report, in its entirety. Under law, neither the President nor the Congress can pick and choose from the Commission's report.

Prior BRAC rounds occurred at the dusk of the Cold War, when military budgets and force structure were shrinking. The 2005 BRAC round occurred in a post-9/11 environment with our armed forces deployed in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan with stable or increasing force structure and defense budgets. During the 2005 BRAC implementation period, the armed forces expect to relocate 70,000 servicemembers from overseas to installations within the United States. Prior BRAC rounds took place in the context of military doctrine and force structure shaped by the Cold War. The 2005 BRAC round occurred during the transformation of military doctrine and force structure to meet the needs of an entirely new threat and security environment.

The Commission's assessment of the Secretary's recommendations took numerous factors into account, as discussed below.

THE ROLE OF DEPOTS IN WARTIME AND UNCERTAINTY

In assessing DoD recommendations against the statutory BRAC criteria and the Force Structure Plan, the Commission had to consider the tradeoff between savings attributable to closure of excess depot capacity and the efficiencies attributable to consolidated operations against the value of retaining sufficient surge capacity to sustain our military in a time of war and uncertainty. Scaling back depots and industrial functions reduces the capacity to rapidly increase outputs and could lead to an unacceptable risk of single-point failures in our nation's capacity to repair and/or modify certain critical weapons systems and platforms. Under the 20-year Force Structure Plan, many major weapons systems and platforms are projected to remain in service for decades. Utilization of these systems in the Global War on Terrorism, including in Afghanistan and Iraq, subjects many vehicles and aircraft to harsh battlefield conditions and extensive and unanticipated operational tempo. The Commission had to assess whether living with slightly higher levels of excess capacity might be preferable than being left with too little capacity.

RECONCILING THE PRINCIPLE OF DISPERSION TO BRAC

The Commission had to assess the effect on the statutory BRAC criteria and Force Structure Plan of trade-offs between efficiency and affordability and the strategic values of dispersion and defense in depth. Yet the 2005 BRAC Commission was asked by DoD, in the form of many BRAC recommendations, to agree to the concentration of some types of facilities and systems onto fewer large DoD-owned installations.

STRATEGIC PRESENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

The Commission's assessment of the Secretary's recommendations' consistency with the Force Structure Plan and the BRAC selection criteria took place in the context of changing threats to our national security. During the Cold War, the domestic U.S. installation infrastructure focused primarily on projecting power across the Arctic Circle and across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. In the post-September 11th era when the main threats of the future do not involve Soviet bombers, submarines, or ballistic missiles, a re-evaluation of facility infrastructure has turned some Cold War virtues into vices. But in DoD recommendations for shifting assets and investments, Commissioners were required to assess whether the result might be insufficient strategic presence in some parts of the United States. In addition, the Commission addressed a concern about the long-term effects of having little military presence in large regions of the country.

COORDINATING HOMELAND DEFENSE AND HOMELAND SECURITY

In preparing its recommendations, DoD was required by statute to consider the homeland defense implications of its proposals. Additionally, DoD was to consider the costs that might be incurred by non-DoD agencies as a result of closure and realignment actions. Many DoD installations host non-DoD federal tenants, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (e.g., the Coast Guard), the FBI, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. These non-DoD tenants reap significant benefits from their collocation at military bases. In turn, DoD spreads its base operating support costs (BOS) across all of its tenants, and thus these non-DoD entities are frequently bill-payers that help reduce DoD's installation operating budgets. If DoD proposes to close or downsize these installations, these non-DoD tenants often incur substantial new costs that were not budgeted or anticipated. In many cases, the Commission learned through its investigations and analysis that DoD routinely failed to properly account for the added costs to non-DoD tenants and failed to properly coordinate its decisions with federal tenant organizations. Many tenants learned of DoD's BRAC recommendations for the first time on May 13, 2005. As a result, Commissioners were required to assess whether certain DoD closure or realignment proposals that posed an unanticipated negative impact on federal tenant organizations might rise to a level where the proposal's military value and feasibility were cast into doubt.

Compounding this problem has been the combined failure of DoD and DHS to define where DoD's responsibilities for providing homeland defense ends and where DHS' homeland security functions begin. A gray area of overlap between these two distinct but related spheres of authority and responsibility persists despite four years' having elapsed since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. BRAC could have been a prime opportunity to shrink this gray and inherently nebulous boundary—had DoD and DHS actively chose to coordinate with each other. Sadly, this opportunity was not seized by either Department. The Commission, on several occasions, solicited input and feedback from DHS on DoD BRAC recommendations having a direct and immediate impact on DHS' ability to execute homeland security functions. But in many cases, these inquiries were met with a level of passivity and reluctance to criticize that was out of proportion to the seriousness of the issues at stake. This was particularly true of many Air Force Air National Guard recommendations that stripped units of their flying mission. Commissioners heard numerous protests from governors and state delegations that DoD's proposed removal of these air assets, and their conversion into Expeditionary Combat Support (ECS) units, could have a direct and immediate negative impact on their ability to perform homeland security missions. Clearly, the presence or absence of such assets as C-130 aircraft, which are routinely tasked by governors to rapidly deploy Civil Support Teams (CSTs) and emergency relief supplies in the event of manmade or natural disasters, was an issue of major significance. DoD proposed significant reallocation of air assets (notwithstanding their retention of expeditionary combat support units) with a direct bearing on the national homeland security network, yet DHS provided little or no guidance, input, or assistance to the Commission on how to objectively evaluate these community homeland security concerns, even when directly asked to do so. As a result, the Commission was forced to assess, by itself, the homeland security and homeland defense implications of many BRAC recommendations.

During the 2005 BRAC process, many Commissioners both heard and expressed concerns about DoD recommendations that would significantly downsize numerous Air National Guard units and radically change their future missions. In many cases, ANG units would lose their flying mission but retain their ECS operations. An extensive volume of evidence and

speculation was presented to Commissioners during their review that the proposed plane-less ECS units and enclaves were not viable over the long term. Commissioners were told by Adjutants General and community representatives that for a variety of reasons the kind of people historically attracted to ANG units will not join in the future if there are no flying assets available. Recruitment and retention in ANG units without aircraft would plummet, according to many communities. Whole regions of the country, it was argued, would be devoid of any significant military or National Guard presence.

TRANSFORMATION VERSUS COST SAVINGS

In previous rounds of BRAC, the explicit goal was to save money and downsize the military in order to reap a “peace dividend.” It was clear from the Commission’s examination of the DoD 2005 BRAC list that the historical goal of achieving savings through eliminating excess capacity was not always the primary consideration for many recommendations. In fact, several DoD witnesses at Commission hearings made it clear that the purpose of many 2005 BRAC recommendations was to advance the goals of transformation, improve capabilities, and enhance military value. In some cases, accomplishing these new goals meant proposing BRAC scenarios that either never paid off (i.e., resulted in a net increased cost) or had very long payback periods. The Commission’s assessment of the selection criteria and Force Structure Plan took place in the context of a balance between the goals of realizing savings and rationalizing our military infrastructure to meet the needs of future missions.

However, as discussed elsewhere in this Report, the Commission noted in many cases that DoD claimed savings from proposals on the basis of eliminated military personnel. Yet, because total end strength was not being reduced proportionately, these so-called “savings” will not actually reduce total DoD spending levels. Hence, they are not truly savings in the commonly understood sense of the term. No new equipment or increases in operations could be purchased with these “reductions” in military personnel. Because these military personnel would not be eliminated, but merely reassigned to higher-priority tasks, the Commission concluded that DoD’s initial estimates of \$49 billion in net savings over a 20-year period were vastly overestimated, although “military value”—the primary selection criterion—might be increased.

COMPLEX AND INTERCONNECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

Among the issues that made the work of the Commissioners more difficult, was the decision by DoD to routinely mingle unrelated proposals under the title of a single “recommendation.” Unlike prior rounds of BRAC where each base was handled by a single integrated recommendation, the 2005 DoD recommendations were scattered throughout its report, often affecting the same facility several times in different proposals. Some installations had ten or more recommendations that had a direct impact on their missions and infrastructure. In many instances, Commissioners had to reconcile whether a substantial deviation in one or more selection criteria and the Force Structure Plan rose to a level that warranted rejecting an entire package of interconnected moving parts. Commissioners struggled to fully understand the net impact on bases that were both gaining and losing missions at the same time, and they knew that rejecting one element of a recommendation could potentially set off a cascade of known and unknown effects rippling across several other proposals. Thus, Commissioners in 2005 not only had to consider each recommendation’s individual merits, but also how the recommendation’s pieces fit together as a whole, and how they related to other recommendations that depended on one another for successful implementation.