

Conference call with military analysts and outreach groups on BRAC announcement.

Friday, May 13, 2005, 1130

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Briefers: [REDACTED]

Moderator: Dallas Lawrence

Transcriber: Murphy

On background

Mr. Lawrence: Good afternoon folks, this is Dallas Lawrence at the Pentagon. Thank you for joining us this afternoon for our conference call on the BRAC announcement this afternoon. We are joined today by [REDACTED]

This conference call will be on background, so please if you attribute anything, please attribute it to senior defense department officials. We're going to go ahead and open the call with [REDACTED] who's here with us, who has a brief statement on the overview of the process, and then we'll be opening it up for questions. With that, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Good morning. My name is [REDACTED] for those of you who have never met me or don't know me, and [REDACTED]

As we organize this base realignment and closure, in a November 2001 memo from the secretary of defense, he asked that we involve more heavily – in order to drive transformation and jointness – a team called Joint Cross-Service Groups. The Joint Cross-Service Group that I was particularly a member of was the Industrial Joint Cross-Service Groups, and the Industrial Joint Cross-Service Groups consisted really of maintenance, shipbuilding, ship repair and depots – arsenals, arsenals meaning the production of military munitions.

That having been said, this Joint Cross-Service Group (inaudible) is different from last time, was actually able to surface their recommendations, not just to the military departments close to the end of the process, but throughout the process, and their recommendations then informed the military departments about where joint opportunities might have been that they did not recognize the previous time.

All of the recommendations from the Joint Cross-Service Groups, which were by the way also populated by military service representatives, went up to the Infrastructure Steering Group. This group was really consisted of all the vice chiefs of staff of all the services, and the infrastructure and environment senior leadership for the services, as well as the office of the secretary of defense.

Mr. Lawrence: If I could ask everyone on the phone to please put their phones on mute that would appreciate that for the background noise. Sorry sir; go ahead.

[REDACTED] That's fine. And once, so this Infrastructure Steering Group then began to apply some integrated military value to this. The first thing we did was we went out to the field, I mean nationwide, domestically, and asked for capacity data so that we could focus in on what constituted core requirements and what constituted surge in all of the various aspects that you might measure it. And it is different, by the way, for each of the functional areas. For example, a surge in training may take some time, whereas a surge industrially might be a lot shorter and you might be able to handle it a little easier. A surge in mobilization could be considered in a different way.

That Infrastructure Steering Group then – also I asked that the military departments might bring their recommendations in order that we could have a similar format and a similar methodology to the way we presented material to the next level up, which was chaired by the deputy secretary, the secretaries of the departments, and the chiefs of staff for the function as well as the chairman of the Joint Staff.

Those what we call draft candidate recommendations were then presented to the Infrastructure Executive Committee, where they debated the merits and footprint as the force structure might come down, following the process as if all of our thousand or more scenarios might come true.

As a result of that, they were really vetted down to about 222 recommendations, many of them integrated, and when I say integrated, many of them contained one or more of the scenarios.

Am I having a problem? I hear feedback on the net. I don't mean to try it myself; I'll try to avoid it as best I can.

Those draft recommendations then were vetted through the Infrastructure Executive Council and then packaged up.

The secretary's involvement was as follows. The secretary was the architect of the process; in other words, he was the one who set up this Infrastructure Steering Groups, the Joint Cross-Service Groups, the interaction of the military departments, and basically provided the authorities by which we operated.

The next thing he did was he kept asking me about the process discipline. Have we asked all of the field for data? Did the data get vetted through the military departments? Was the military departments involved in the process? Did we involve the combatant commanders? All of this in the view of outreach. And then at the very end of the process he essentially took possession of the recommendations as they were presented through his deputy, the deputy secretary, and did a pointed question and answers with each of his senior military advisors from the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff through the head of the services.

As you saw in the press conference if you had the chance to watch, all of them stood tall behind the secretary essentially supporting his recommendation and the outcome.

The next steps – in fact as I said in the press conference I just concluded, this really concludes the Department of Defense's portion of this exercise, with the exception that I have to go testify to the Commission, as well as does all of the service secretaries, the chiefs of staff and the secretary himself to the Commission to give them, if you will, a kickoff and a lead into this vast volume of data. And I mean 25 million bits of data that were collected and assembled. And we are trying to construct an orderly process that it might be transmitted and we might train their staff, so that they can do their independent look.

Once that's concluded of course, their independent look, they then would forward this to the president. I believe, [REDACTED] the president has an opportunity to review this. He can make changes or make suggestions and send it back to the Commission. Once he does that, then the Commission then forwards the revised package to him, or he can forward the package as is, where is the Congress then has 45 days on an up-or-down basis to vote a resolution of disapproval, which is then subject to presidential review.

Now, we are very concerned because this activity that we've been involved in will affect 33 major bases. The definition of major base is a plant replacement value in excess of \$100 million. It will affect 29 major realignments, where a major realignment is a loss of approximately 400 positions or more. And there are approximately – let's see if I can get this number right, there are approximately 49 bases and across American where over 400 personnel will be gained. And all of

those by the way are up on our web site right now, specifically through the BRAC, if you will, sub portal.

Mr. Lawrence: Which is www.defenselink/BRAC.

Now, what I would like for [redacted] to go through, and [redacted] is the deputy [redacted] And [redacted] and I have worked tirelessly over the course of the last two years to essentially discipline the process so that the data was clearly certifiable, that we went through an auditable process, and that we in fact evidenced the right kind of compassion for the communities that are affected.

Just so you understand what I mean by transparency, the General Accountability Office and the Office of the Inspector General were with us at every step, building of every model, the vetting of every scenario, so that even the scenarios that were, if you will, rejected, were subject to their review and consideration, and will be, I think, evident to the Commission.

So what I would like for [redacted] to go through now is what's in place to support the affected communities after they've given such terrific service to the our service people. Phil?

[redacted] Thank you, sir. And at the outset, I just want to mention a couple of things, comment on one other, and then we can go to questions.

As some of you may know, the president yesterday amended a prior executive order and reissued and reaffirmed policy with regard to the Defense Economic Adjustment Program, also establishing in the executive order, following on some statutory changes the Economic Adjustment Committee, which is an interagency committee.

The secretary of defense will chair, with the secretary of labor and the secretary of commerce, as vice chairs of that committee. Its purpose, and the purpose of the executive order, and the purpose of our programs are to assist communities as they go through transition, particularly those communities that lose a major base or that lose direct and indirect jobs as a result of these closure and realignment actions, to help get them in a position of viable economic reuses as expeditiously as possible.

We will, and the Office of Economic Adjustment at Defense, will serve in many ways as a clearinghouse for the broader federal response to defense economic adjustment. We are going to work very, very closely and have already begun a process working with our interagency partners to position ourselves well for point in this process where we will get to key economic reuse decisions.

Internally, our programs remain very much the way they have been in the past, and our colleagues in Personnel and Readiness have been updating those with regard to civilian assistance and reemployment, our priority placement programs. The homeowners' assistance program remains in place for those who need assistance or have difficulty selling a home as a result of a closure, particularly a closure decision.

The Labor Department will also be working with worker retraining programs, and some of our other sister federal agencies – Commerce among them – will be working with us on economic development grants so we can provide to local communities. So it will be a very broad federal response assuming the recommendations do become law. And that's where we are on that. And I guess at this point we go to questions.

[redacted] So what we'd like to do is open it up for questions. I guess I don't have a suggestion, do you?

Mr. Lawrence: No. Just questions for the group if you want to bring them in again, remembering this is on background.

Mr. McCausland: This is Jeff McCausland with CBS. Thank you for the presentation. Two quick questions. One is, there's still this question about the so-called legal findings in terms of whether or not we can close National Guard sites absent the concurrence of the governor. I notice that the Army has like 211 National Guard sites by itself that's going to be closed. And I understand Mr. Principi has made that inquiry, so has that legal finding been made? And second of all, obviously there's very large number of lease facilities in the DC and northern Virginia closed down. Can we assume that the realignment across the nation is basically soaking up those activities and those personnel, or is that going to be a separate thing because of all the office space movement?

Well, I think on the, let me take the last piece first. On the leasing piece, as the secretary spoke to, our decisions on leasing do have an effect and had an effect on whether we had excess capacity or not. But I wouldn't look at them in quite the way you did. I would look at them in ways in which we were looking to improve efficiency, military effectiveness and improve our cost structure by getting out of long-term leased space and moving aboard military installations that had capacity.

There's also a secondary benefit, and a very important benefit, in terms of the additional protection for our people and our missions that moving aboard an installation will provide. That said, we're not entirely abandoning leased space. We do need to manage it more effectively, and we're going to do that, and BRAC has a very large statement in that regard, but it is a matter of ongoing emphasis in the department to see how we can most effectively manage both our resources, our space to provide protection for people and mission.

And on the question of the Guard. Certainly we have indicated, and indicated we would have (were to?) follow all applicable law with regard to the Air National Guard and the Army National Guard. We have made these kind of adjustments in previous rounds of BRAC; they've not been challenged before. I understand that some folks desire to challenge those, but we believe that we have taken into account all applicable federal statute.

And in regard to the Army National Guard specifically and the state facilities, the way in which the recommendations were structured, and I think it would be helpful if you had an opportunity to look at them, what we're trying to do is what General Cody spoke to is combining these scattered reserve facilities that support the Guard and Reserve into a unified, joint reserve or readiness center that can accommodate the needs of the joint force and the needs of the Reserve components.

But importantly with regard to the state-controlled facilities, the recommendations are all written in a way that the new Air Force – or Armed Forces Reserve Center for example, and I'm looking at one specifically in the state of Nebraska, shall have the capability to accommodate Nebraska National Guard units from the Nebraska Army – the Army National Guard Readiness Center at a given location if the state decides to relocate those National Guard units. And the point that General Blum made was that we have done this exercise with the adjutants general. The governor, at the end of the day, with a state-owned facility, has the choice – to move in there, and to provide for a better-supported force. We think we're doing the right thing by this. The adjutants general think we're doing the right thing by this. And the Guard chiefs in this building – Army and Air Force – believe we're doing right by this. So I think we've had a very cooperative process in that regard, and I expect we're going to get significant force transformation as a result.

Mr. McCausland: Thank you.

Mr. Lawrence: Next question please.

Mr. Sheppard: Don Sheppard, CNN. Is it my understanding that the president has until the 23rd of September and he has to accept the whole list in its entirety, he cannot make adjustments on the list itself, is that correct?

Don as I understand it, the president can – I think it's the – we're going to get the specific date for you – I had in my mind the 18th, for whatever reason. I think the president can send the list back, remand it back to the Commission, with suggestions. For example, he could remand it back with suggestions where his staff has a specific objection or a suggestion to either our recommendation, by the way, or to the Commission's recommendation. But then they have an opportunity to revise it or leave it alone. And once he does that one time, it then goes to the president on an up-or-down acceptance. So I think you have that part right. And then when it goes to Congress it's also an up-or-down acceptance. Or excuse me, an up-or-down rejection, because I think the Congress is a

Joint resolution.

Joint resolution of disapproval. Do you have the date?

Mr. Lawrence: I'll email the date out to the group.

The Commission's process – their deadline is the 8th of September. The president has until – I believe it's the 23rd, but I think Dallas is right, we ought to be specific with regard to the date.

Mr. Lawrence: We will email a timeline out to everyone and I am pretty sure – the timeline is actually on the BRAC website. Which again, I left the dot mil off. It's www.defenselink.mil/BRAC. And there is a full BRAC timeline on there.

And I think yes, we gave a presentation yesterday, or the day before - no, yesterday, which had that timeline in it Don and just for precision we appreciate you taking a look at that.

Mr. Allard: Ken Allard, MSNBC. Two things. Number one, the web site is seriously overloaded; you can't get to it. The second is can you describe the impact, if any, that various considerations related to homeland security, homeland defense may have had on your deliberations? Did you apply that matrix to your thoughts on what ought to be closed?

I would say that it's all part of the criteria. And when our military leadership took a look at it, it was in, it was – because they were already participating in many aspects of homeland defense, that was a consideration, particularly when it came to military judgment or military value. That's the way that we had postured it. There wasn't – I would add – there wasn't for example an interaction with the Department of Homeland Security specifically looking at each of the recommendations, but it was through the military involvement of the combatant commanders like North Command, and that kind of a thing that we felt we had the implications pretty well covered.

Mr. Allard: So when you do something like recommend the closing of Otis in Massachusetts (Otis Air National Guard Base) we can assume the fact that you had also looked at the standpoint of, hey, how do we cover the air space in New England, for example?

: Yes, sir, you can.

Mr. Lawrence: Next question, please.

Ms. Holleman: Deirdre Holleman from TREA? (Retired Enlisted Association). [redacted] except for your testimony before the Commission do you know when they're planning, or what their plans are for community or public testimony?

Do you want me to take it?

Go ahead, please.

My – this is [redacted]. My understanding is, and the Commission, my understanding is the Commission has only announced the schedule through next week.

Ms. Holleman: That's all I found.

And that would include General Taylor's testimony as well. My understanding from discussion with the Commission staff is largely they were waiting on the transmission of the list to begin to figure out and plan for their next set of activities. I would direct you directly to them, but I would expect they would go out into the field and take hearings and input from folks pretty quickly, so. But they hadn't announced a schedule because frankly they didn't know where to go.

But I do know that this is really the time, if you will, for the communities to probably communicate with the staff to make sure that they are -- that they can get their story told and, if you will, put forward their best arguments. I think the Commission staff has said they are going to take a very independent look at not only our data, but data that the individual communities (surface?), and take that all on board. It's something that you all ought to consider is that we could not, we could not take advantage of community input in our submissions, other than the community input that had been ongoing for many, many years. The Commission, however, can take into account community input that is not only present but planning.

Ms. Holleman: Thank you.

Mr. Lawrence: Next question, please.

Mr. Smith: Yes, this is (General) Perry Smith from CBS. I am having a hard time getting on your web site also, so let me just ask a couple quick questions. I live down in Georgia. Where are the missions from Fort McPherson and Fort Gillem, where are they going to go?

Let's see if I can find those.

Mr. Lawrence: You know, also, everyone on this list received the BRAC recommendation was emailed out to all of you folks about an hour and a half ago. But it wouldn't have had that piece on. Hold on a second, we're looking.

What we're doing is looking specifically at the Army recommendation for Fort McPherson to try to get you that answer.

I got it.

Mr. Lawrence: [redacted] has your answer.

Let me, let me if you'll bear with me for a second, because the recommendation is at some length.

Mr. Lawrence: Do you want to take another question while you read that real quick?

No. In the case of Fort Gillem, the headquarters First Army is to relocate to Rock Island Arsenal Illinois, and there are several other mission moves that move functions to a number of other locations. The second recruiting brigade to Redstone Arsenal, the 52nd (EOD?) group to Fort Campbell, the 81st (ROC?) equipment concentration site to Fort Benning, the Third Army moves to – support office moves to Shaw Air Force Base, headquarters U.S. Force Command VIP explosive ordnance support to Pope Air Force Base, and a number other moves.

So I just ask you to bear with this. And within the case of Fort McPherson, I'll just mention the major piece of course. Relocating Force Comm (?) and the headquarters of the U.S. Army Reserve Command (to?) Pope Air Force Base North Carolina. And the headquarters of the Third Army to Shaw.

██████████ OK, I think that's enough. I think if you got the part about Rock Island for the First and then to Pope Air Force Base for McPherson I think that would probably do it.

Mr. Lawrence: Next question please. Are there any other questions?

Mr. McCausland: Jeff McCausland, back on the Commission for a second. Am I understanding that the Commission will really only work with the list in terms of saying a particular base listed for closure should not be closed, or should perhaps be realigned? They're not going back and looking at those bases that are not affected at all? Is that correct?

██████████ No, that's not...

Mr. McCausland: Look at the bases that are only being realigned? Or are they going to focus solely on the bases listed for closure?

██████████ No. I would tell you first of all the Commission is fairly independent, so it's hard for me to bound their mission. But the – historically, they have not only taken bases that are candidates for realignment and closure and, if you will, peered into our analysis and determined whether it's right or wrong, they've actually removed bases or they have the ability to move the bases.

What has happened this year is different than last time is they have the right to add a base, or to change a scenario, based on the data that we collected. However, the Congress has made it hard for them by demanding that seven out of nine (Commissioners) vote to put a base in contention. They have to visit the base, specifically hear from the community leadership, and then they have to take a second round vote and again achieve a seven of nine majority in order for that base to be recommended for closure.

So I would tell you that they have a lot of rights, some of them you might consider to be restricted, but it is not – they are not just restricted to the bases that are listed here for either major or minor realignment or closure. They have access to our entire database. And we collected information on every base throughout America. I mean, the downside of what we did was frankly that it caused some consternation in areas where there didn't need to be, but we felt we had to examine – border to border – all of our domestic bases.

Mr. McCausland: Thank you.

Mr. Lawrence: Next question, please.

Mr. Allard: Ken Allard again. One of the things that struck me about this round was the very significant input that appears to have taken place from the standpoint of doing this thing from a joint service perspective. The two aspects of that that seem most significant were the reserve community and the medical community. Any other aspects that you can point to in that aspect of consideration?

██████████ Yes. There are about 14 centers of excellence that we attempted to construct. Funny thing – I mean, one of them was because the secretary, in fact, had asked early on why our drivers were trained differently and asked about how that was to be. And so we formed a center of excellence essentially for transportation instruction. We also formed one for culinary. In other words the chefs for the various services had previously been done in their own are now being done in one location...

Voice: Where? I gotta ask that?

Do you remember where that was?

Mr. Lawrence: We'll get it to you.

We'll get it to you. But there's 14 centers of excellence. The most significant one I would say in that regard was the Joint Strike Fighter initial pilot training is going to be at Eglin Air Force Base (Florida) at a joint location. And the reason this is significant is those of you who were pilots, and some of you I am sure were, the services were very possessive of how they train. But they -- and they still will retain advanced pilot training but in this case they collaborated on a single initial pilot training base and they all, if you will, consensus arrived at Eglin Air Force base as being that location.

As we approach lunch time, I am happy to inform you that the joint center for excellence for culinary training will be established at Fort Lee Virginia.

(Laughter)

Voice: Hey, I hope you have lunch there.

Mr. Lawrence: Do we have any other questions from the group?

Voice: Thanks very much.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Lawrence: Thank you.