

# Background

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## Guidelines for a Successful BRAC

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The Office of the Secretary of Defense has released proposed selection criteria to guide the next round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC).<sup>1</sup> This marks the beginning of the fifth round of base closings since 1988 and should be the last comprehensive realignment needed for some time.

Realignment and closure decisions are not made arbitrarily. The Pentagon, Congress, and the BRAC commission adhere to a predetermined set of criteria to guide them through the process. The Pentagon released its criteria in accordance with current BRAC legislation, which mandated their publication by December 31, 2003. Their appearance in the *Federal Register* on December 23 marks the beginning of the public comment period, which ends on January 28, 2004. The Pentagon must release its final criteria by February 16, 2004.

While many of the criteria are similar to those of past BRAC rounds, some have been updated to reflect new Pentagon objectives. These new criteria, along with the guidelines outlined in this paper, will be critical to a process that produces the maximum savings and efficiency for the taxpayer.

A successful BRAC is essential to the Pentagon's modernization plans because it will not only rid the Department of Defense of excess infrastructure and free resources, but also ensure that the remaining infra-

1. Department of Defense, "Draft Selection Criteria for Closing and Realigning Military Installations Inside the United States," *Federal Register*, Vol. 68, No. 246 (December 23, 2003), p. 74222.

### Talking Points

To ensure a BRAC process that advances the Pentagon's larger transformation objectives, the final selection criteria should reflect the following guidelines:

- Basing infrastructure should encourage and facilitate joint operations, training, and overall cooperation among the services.
- Realignment decisions must consider present and future encroachment dilemmas.
- BRAC should be a global exercise.
- No base should be left off the table.
- Realignment and closure decisions should minimize excess infrastructure and increase efficiency.

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structure is appropriate for a 21st century military. Poor BRAC decisions could lead to an inadequate infrastructure that, although it may generate savings, neither supports the current force nor prepares the armed forces for future challenges.

While military value was always at the forefront of realignment decisions and must remain so, the savings potential was a driving factor in the past. Indeed, monetary interests have largely defined the success of previous BRAC rounds. Although saving money through efficiency remains important, this round has much higher stakes. If intelligently executed, BRAC can help to ensure a successful long-term defense transformation.

## BRAC 2005

The 2005 round will be the culmination of a three-decade pursuit to achieve balance between the military force and the infrastructure required to support it. The Department of Defense has already gone through four rounds of BRAC and is currently enjoying the fruits of that laborious process.

The previous four rounds have saved a total of roughly \$17 billion and are now saving about \$3 billion annually. Despite this, the 2005 round was one of the most difficult to secure. After contentious, yet successful, rounds in 1988, 1991, 1993, and 1995, the movement to begin a fifth round began in 1997. A fifth round was not secured until Congress passed the 2003 Defense Authorization Act, which amended the original Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990.

According to past criteria, judgments were supposed to be based on military value, return on

### Proposed BRAC Selection Criteria

#### Military Value

1. The current and future mission capabilities and the impact on operational readiness of the Department of Defense's total force, including the impact on joint warfighting, training, and readiness.
2. The availability and condition of land, facilities and associated airspace (including training areas suitable for maneuver by ground, naval, or air forces throughout a diversity of climate and terrain areas and staging areas for the use of the Armed Forces in homeland defense missions) at both existing and potential receiving locations.
3. The ability to accommodate contingency, mobilization, and future total force requirements at both existing and potential receiving locations to support operations and training.
4. The cost of operations and the manpower implications.

#### Other Considerations

5. The extent and timing of potential costs 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.
6. The economic impact on existing communities in the vicinity of military installations.
7. The ability of both the existing and potential receiving communities' infrastructure to support forces, missions, and personnel.
8. The environmental impact, including the impact of costs related to potential environmental restoration, waste management, and environmental compliance activities.

Source: Department of Defense, "Draft Selection Criteria for Closing and Realigning Military Installations Inside the United States," *Federal Register*, Vol. 68, No. 246 (December 23, 2003), p. 74222.

investment, and impacts on the environment and local economy. The legislation for BRAC 2005 recommends that similar criteria be maintained. However, while these criteria are necessary to help the principals decide what to consider when making realignment and closure decisions, they did not advance a broader strategic vision. The new criteria do, and that is why it is important that they be finalized.

The Pentagon is currently attempting to transform the armed forces from an industrial-age military built for the Cold War to a digital-age force prepared to respond to the emerging threats of the 21st century. BRAC 2005 is important to this transformation in two ways.

First, the savings generated by BRAC can be reinvested into the force.

Second, a transformed force will require a transformed infrastructure.

While the criteria will ensure that military, economic, and environmental value will all be considered, a broader set of guidelines that work hand in hand with the criteria would guide the process toward achieving the Pentagon's transformation objective and minimize external political pressure, which often does not reflect the interests of the nation. The final selection criteria should reflect the following five guidelines:

- **Guideline #1.** Basing infrastructure should encourage and facilitate joint operations, training, and overall cooperation among the services.
- **Guideline #2.** Realignment decisions must consider present and future encroachment dilemmas.
- **Guideline #3.** BRAC should be a global exercise.
- **Guideline #4.** No base should be left off the table.
- **Guideline #5.** Realignment and closure decisions should minimize excess infrastructure and increase efficiency.

Such a set of principled, strategic guidelines would provide policymakers with an objective metric by which to direct the overall BRAC process. This is essential for a number of reasons.

First, one of the primary obstacles to BRAC's achievement of maximum effectiveness is politics. Following principled guidelines can help to minimize decisions that are based more on a facility's value to a politician's reelection campaign than its value to national security.

Furthermore, these guidelines would funnel closure and realignment decisions toward achieving the larger objective of force transformation. Guidelines intended to save money and achieve efficiency

will likely be quite different from guidelines designed to advance transformation.

### A Brief History of BRAC

The effort to close down excess military infrastructure has been going on for decades.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in the 1960s, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara headed an effort to close bases, and the end of the Vietnam War led to another round of closures in the early 1970s. Although these efforts achieved the goal of reducing excess infrastructure, they were plagued by accusations that the executive branch was using the closings to punish foes in Congress. Congress responded by creating a series of legislative obstacles that prohibited the Pentagon from closing bases without the consent of Congress.

By the mid-1980s, the Department of Defense was once again burdened with excess infrastructure. In an effort to address the issue, Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) requested that Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger identify a series of bases that could be closed. Although no action resulted from Secretary Weinberger's list, this effort gave rise to the Defense Authorization Amendments and Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1988,<sup>3</sup> which formed the first BRAC commission and laid the groundwork for future commissions.

The next three rounds of BRAC were a direct result of the end of the Cold War. Then-Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney recognized the need for significant reductions in base infrastructure and led the effort to obtain congressional approval for additional reductions. Congress passed the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990. This act addressed the shortcomings and criticisms of the 1988 round and provided the model for BRACs in 1991, 1993, and 1995, which have all been completed.

The push for the 2005 round of BRAC began in earnest in 1998 with the publication of *The Report of the Department of Defense on Base Realignment and Closure*,<sup>4</sup> which stated that the Pentagon still maintained an excess base capacity of nearly 25 percent.<sup>5</sup>

2. For a comprehensive history of base closings, see "History of Base Closings," Chapter 1 in Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, *Report to the President*, 1991, and Colonel Stephen R. Schwalbe, USAF, "An Expose on Base Realignment and Closure Commissions," *Air and Space Chronicles*, June 10, 2003.

3. Public Law 100-526.

## BRAC is a Requirement for Defense Transformation

The transformation debate often focuses on military platforms, investments, and operational concepts. All of these things are important; wrong decisions on any of these fronts would create major obstacles. However, before transformation can fully succeed, the Pentagon must maximize its scarce resources and create an environment that invites and supports change, which is why BRAC is so important.

Another round of BRAC will not only relieve the Pentagon of excess infrastructure, generating savings that can be reinvested into the force, but also could advance longer-term institutional objectives, such as transformation. Relying on an infrastructure meant to support a Cold War force will perpetuate the status quo. Alternatively, changing the military basing system to reflect the strategic and technological realities of the 21st century will help the rest of the Department of Defense to make similar changes.

### Guidelines for a Successful BRAC

The primary objective of BRAC 2005 should be to facilitate long-term defense transformation while ensuring that today's force can operate effectively and efficiently. While savings have been the result of most BRAC realignment decisions, monetary judgments should not drive BRAC 2005. Likewise, every effort must be made to minimize the impact of parochial political concerns.

The following guidelines will help to ensure that the process advances transformation, pursues—but is not driven by—monetary saving, and minimizes politics.

**Guideline #1: Basing infrastructure should encourage and facilitate joint operations, training, and overall cooperation among the services.**

Perhaps the most critical element of defense transformation is the continued effort to achieve greater cooperation, or jointness, among the services. Restructuring the Department of Defense's support infrastructure, in much the same way the Goldwater–Nichols Act of 1986 restructured the Pentagon bureaucracy, can compel the services to work together more closely.

One of the ways to advance this cause is to create a basing infrastructure that puts a premium on joint operations and multimission training.

**Guideline #2: Realignment decisions must consider present and future encroachment dilemmas.**

Growing populations and regulations are encroaching on many of America's bases, and the result has been reduced training opportunities for the armed forces and a negative effect on readiness. This is inconsistent with the requirements of transformation, which will necessitate more training opportunities, not fewer.

Throughout the country, lawsuits continue to be filed against the armed forces, arguing that noise and other nuisances associated with military activity are having a detrimental affect on surrounding residential areas.<sup>6</sup> As the population has grown—displacing plant and animal life, making them more dependent on military land for habitat—environmental regulations have begun to interfere with the armed forces' day-to-day operations. Installations around the nation, such as California's Camp Pendleton and Fort Irwin, have already been forced to curtail their activities significantly in deference to environmental regulations.<sup>7</sup>

As the BRAC process moves forward, it should put a high priority on bases that are only minimally affected by surrounding populations and unlikely to be adversely affected in the future.

4. One of the obstacles to defense transformation that have emerged in recent years is understanding the term "transformation" and overdefining it to the point that much of its original meaning has been lost. For the purpose of this discussion, "transformation" should be understood as the process of converting America's industrial-age, Cold War-era armed forces into a modern digital-age force that puts a premium on flexibility.
5. U.S. Department of Defense, *The Report of the Department of Defense on Base Realignment and Closure*, April 1998.
6. For an example of a lawsuit (over noise levels), see James M. Davis, "Military Bases, Training Ranges Threatened by Civil Suits," *Nation's Cities Weekly*, May 7, 2001.
7. Julie Cart, "Showdown with Iraq: Military Seeks an Exemption of Its Own," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 2003.

**Guideline #3: BRAC should be a global exercise.**

A successful BRAC should not limit its scope to bases on U.S. territory. The United States is a global power and requires a global basing infrastructure. However, the United States still maintains an extensive basing system in Western Europe that reflects the static security environment of the Cold War rather than the unpredictable world of the 21st century. Similarly, many American facilities abroad are not conducive either to the type of expeditionary warfare that the nation is most likely to engage in future conflicts or to the force structure that will likely emerge from transformation.

Furthermore, because the United States depends so heavily on its bases abroad, it must evaluate which bases may be more politically vulnerable. This will allow the Pentagon to ensure that it maintains adequate domestic infrastructure to support those forces if they are compelled to leave. Likewise, if the United States is relatively sure that a host nation will not ask its forces to leave, there is little need to maintain excess infrastructure state-side to support those elements.

Ultimately, facilities abroad and at home should not be artificially separated. They are all integral elements of the armed forces support infrastructure and should be viewed as parts of the same whole.

**Guideline #4: No base should be left off the table.**

One method of protecting the political interests of elected officials in the past has been to remove certain facilities from even being considered for closure or realignment. While this may be in the near-term interests of some politicians, it is not in the long-term interests of the nation. Indeed, if those politicians would work on putting the land to some other productive use instead of protecting it from BRAC, they might even find that their political interests are best served by regaining control of some facilities from the Pentagon.<sup>8</sup>

Guaranteeing that every facility is subject to BRAC will have a number of positive outcomes.

*First*, it protects the integrity of the process by ensuring fairness. It is no secret that those with the most political power would have the best chance of taking their bases off the table. This opens the entire process up to legitimate criticism of being overpoliticized.

*Second*, it increases the likelihood that those bases with the greatest military value will be sustained. If a base has great military value, it will not be closed and therefore does not require special protections. On the other hand, politicians may seek special protections for those bases that they view as politically beneficial but that are of dubious military value.

*Finally*, keeping all bases open to BRAC scrutiny protects politicians. It makes BRAC easier for them to support by detaching them further from the process of deciding which bases stay and which go.

**Guideline #5. Realignment and closure decisions should minimize excess infrastructure and increase efficiency.**

Today, maintaining an excess base infrastructure of roughly 25 percent is draining much-needed resources. Although saving money and creating efficiency should not drive the BRAC process, it should play a role. Indeed, a characteristic of a transformed force is that it also is much more efficient.

To maximize efficiency on the battlefield, the Pentagon must begin with efficiency in its support structures. This efficiency will help the Department of Defense to achieve the rapid deployment capabilities that it seeks and also build in the flexibility needed to respond to threats as they emerge in the future.

However, efficiency must not supersede military value. Part of the value that bases add to the force is providing surge capacity if the nation ever requires a large increase in military capabilities due to a rapid change in the security environment. Nevertheless, the requirement for surge capacity should not be used as an indiscriminate excuse not to close

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8. For a description of how communities have found success after base closings, see Christopher Hellman, "New Beginnings: How Base Closure Can Improve Local Economies and Transform America's Military," Taxpayers for Common Sense, October 2001.

a particular base. It is simply a factor that should be considered in the BRAC process.

### **Conclusion**

The wholesale transformation of the armed forces is neither required nor desirable. Any initiative that attempted to do so would likely lead to large-scale opposition and, ultimately, failure.

Therefore, an important step toward building the force of the future is to create an environment that invites change. The focus should be on creating a

system, support structure, and bureaucracy that facilitates transformation. An intelligently executed BRAC 2005 will help to achieve this by creating a solid foundation on which to build the future force, and it will free the resources necessary to reinvest in the force of today and tomorrow.

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