



T H E M I L I T A R Y C O A L I T I O N

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August 10, 2005

The Honorable Anthony Principi
Chairman
Base Realignment and Closure Commission
2521 South Clark Street
Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of nationally prominent military and veterans organizations representing more than 5.5 million active duty, Guard and Reserve, retired and former members of the uniformed services, plus their family members and survivors, is forwarding the attached Issue Paper on the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Recommendations for consideration by members of your distinguished Commission.

Although TMC does not formulate positions on individual BRAC recommendations, the Coalition believes it is important to highlight some critical issues that are of concern to our beneficiaries, many of which have been highlighted by GAO in a recent report, entitled "Military Bases: Analysis of DoD's 2005 Selection Process and Recommendations for Base Closure and Realignments" (GAO-05-785).

It is essential that the impact of all BRAC actions, as well as transformation, Global Repositioning, and Army modularity initiatives, fully consider the impact on and within each beneficiary community. The effect of these multiple and simultaneous initiatives by DoD and the Services compounds the challenges to sustaining and executing vital support, services, and quality of life programs that are so important to all beneficiaries wherever they might live.

Your consideration of these concerns is appreciated.

Sincerely,

The Military Coalition
(Signatures attached)

TMC Issue Paper on the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Recommendations

The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of nationally prominent military and veterans organizations representing more than 5.5 million active duty, Guard and Reserve, retired and former members of the uniformed services, plus their family members and survivors, urges the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission to thoroughly evaluate the effects of its recommendations on all active, Guard, Reserve, and retired personnel plus their families and survivors. Although TMC does not formulate positions on individual BRAC recommendations, the Coalition believes there must be serious consideration of the impact of actions within each community. In addition, multiple and simultaneous initiatives by DoD and the services (transformation, Global Repositioning, Army modularity, and BRAC) compound challenges to these vital programs and services and place essential quality of life benefits at greater risk.

Many of the affected sites have sizeable military populations of active, Guard, Reserve, and retired enlisted personnel or junior officers, plus their families and survivors, whose incomes are limited. These personnel have made important decisions about where to locate after retirement, and determined other aspects of their livelihoods around the availability of the military installation and its facilities. The loss of a military treatment facility, for example, or a commissary and MWR program or activity, can cause a huge financial strain on those no longer having access to an Armed Forces installation.

In addition, there are myriad concerns about detailed transition planning at BRAC sites and adequate funding for programs to smooth this process once recommendations are approved and enacted into law. These concerns are also relevant to the rebasing initiative and individual service(s) transformation plans.

This paper is divided into key subject areas identified under separate headings and there are references to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report, entitled "Military Bases: Analysis of DoD's 2005 Selection Process and Recommendations for Base Closure and Realignments" (GAO-05-785).

HEALTH CARE ACCESS

BRAC Review Methodology:

DoD medical facility closures and realignment recommendations assumed availability of certain levels of support from outside groups. However, as pointed out in the GAO Report, most support groups were not included in the review process to ensure the availability and capacity of adequate DoD facilities. These groups include the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Managed Care Support Contractors, and beneficiary advocacy groups.

Future medical readiness requirements and identification of medical mission(s) are not clearly defined. What capacity will the expanded facilities be built to? Will MTF capacities and capabilities include care for the total catchment area beneficiary population, or will these actions shift care to the civilian networks thus increasing costs to DoD and subsequently shifting costs to the beneficiary?

Beneficiary Impact:

Medical asset adequacy and the process of ensuring these assets and capabilities will be available before, during and after any personnel movements is very important. TMC's concern is that essential non-

DoD resources may not be available to meet increases in demand for those areas expanding, or those areas losing military medical assets. These would include both network and non-network VA and Civilian Providers.

The timing of medical personnel realignment and civilianization is an issue along with the unknown impact of re-basing efforts. The lack of Service coordination both internally and externally is troubling given the scope and complexity of the BRAC process.

TRICARE Prime provider networks must be maintained in areas where closure actions will occur since many have made critical life decisions based upon medical services available in a geographic area. While TMC understands that closures of military facilities may result in higher co-payments for beneficiaries, **we believe that BRAC actions should not result in a degradation of the benefit provided to these individuals.**

Another concern is sustaining the Services capabilities to provide robust Graduate Medical Education (GME) residency programs for their young doctors. An important aspect of GME training within the Services is learning about military culture and medicine during training. This is invaluable and cannot be provided in civilian medical schools and can positively impact recruiting and retention of doctors and other health care professionals.

QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAMS

Preserving Access to QOL Benefits:

Military beneficiaries are asking Congress and the DoD to ensure that key quality of life benefits and programs remain accessible at BRAC sites. Members of the military community, especially retirees and survivors, are concerned that the size of the retiree, Guard, Reserve and survivor populations remaining in each BRAC location will not be considered in decisions about whether or not to keep commissaries and exchanges open. Congress and DoD have an obligation to these members, whose commitment to service was based on the expectation of having benefits available to them.

Supporting Closing and Gaining Communities:

Shifts in troop populations because of BRAC, transformation initiatives, or the return of servicemembers and families from overseas bases, will significantly impact receiving installations. The increased populations may overwhelm existing facilities and programs and it's imperative that military family and quality of life concerns be considered on an equal basis with other mission-related tasks in any plan to move troops or to close or realign installations.

The QOL infrastructure needed to support the military community includes medical care, housing, quality schools, commissaries, exchanges, children and youth programs, MWR facilities, family centers, and chaplains' programs. Maintaining this infrastructure should not be approached as an afterthought. Planning must include the preservation of programs, services, and facilities at closing installations as long as servicemembers and families remain. A robust QOL infrastructure must be developed and in place at the receiving installation BEFORE the new families and servicemembers arrive.

Commissaries:

The commissary benefit is recognized as a cornerstone of quality of life benefits and a valued part of the servicemembers' total compensation package. BRAC recommendations and other initiatives can significantly impact the availability of commissary stores to significant segments of the beneficiary population. Authorization of unlimited access for Guard and Reserve personnel adds a new and much broader dimension to sustaining the benefit. The Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) reports that since 1991, there have been 43 BRAC related commissary closures – actions that have negatively impacted access to stores and the scope of the benefit. As a result of DoD initiatives in recent years, Congress strengthened statutory protections for, and better defined the purpose of the commissary and exchange systems. TMC is concerned about the unrelenting pressure on DeCA – which may be exacerbated by BRAC recommendations – to cut spending and squeeze additional efficiencies from its operations – despite years of highly effective management and reform efforts. Finally, new models to establish and operate combination commissary/exchange stores (hybrids), must be developed and tested to ensure a continuing commissary and exchange presence at current and future BRAC sites.

Education:

Quality education is important and there must be a plan in place with funding available support school construction, staffing and other costs associated with the increased enrollment of military children. Impact Aid funding from the Department of Education usually lags two years behind any enrollment change; therefore, DoD must be prepared to provide funding in the short term to assist civilian school districts in meeting their obligations to educate military children. Certain DoD Domestic school districts may also need additional construction and operating funds to support an influx of military children.

Transition Support:

As large numbers of servicemembers and families prepare to move from one installation to another, robust support programs provided by family centers, housing offices, relocation staff, and health care personnel must be in place in both the sending and the receiving installations. School districts to which students will be moving should be identified so that the sending school districts can assist in transferring records thus ensuring proper student placement in courses and special programs. Additional resources should be provided for child care slots, and to assist military spouses seeking employment, etc. Consideration must also be given to providing transition benefits to Reserve component members who no longer can travel great distances required to maintain their military status.

Housing:

Public-private housing projects have resulted in an increased reliance on housing in the civilian community outside installations. Receiving installations must identify potential neighborhoods and suitable housing that can support the mix of incoming personnel, and assist these servicemembers in securing housing. This may require working with civilian landlords and developers to encourage new housing construction. Much of this housing will be located farther from the installation and more school districts may need information on the needs of military children, increased communication with the installation, and Federal financial assistance requirements. (TMC is advocating an updating of housing standards used to determine Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) to better reflect servicemembers' responsibilities and to bring them more in line with actual practice and housing standards on military installations.)

Maintaining a Connection with Civilian Communities:

As the military presence shrinks at BRAC sites, DoD must maintain the connection with local communities to sustain effective and necessary communications, enhance awareness, engender stronger support for military personnel and their families and assist with recruiting efforts.

GUARD AND RESERVE ISSUES

DOD Substantially Deviated from Certain Services Recommendations:

The final BRAC selection criteria deviated from the USAF Guard/Reserve and Naval Reserve recommendations. This includes inappropriate assumptions and the failure to complete detailed analysis in evaluating manpower requirements and current and future capabilities. The recommendations overlooked or undervalued impacts on operational readiness including joint warfighting capabilities, strategic location of Guard and Reserve facilities with respect to Defense and Homeland Security concerns, training requirements, end strengths, job specialty demographics and skill sets. The process also substantially miscalculated the availability of land, facilities, and associated airspaces. As a result, future joint war fighting capabilities will be seriously degraded if the recommendations are approved.

The Services relied on active duty constructs in the selection of certain Guard and Reserve facilities for closure and did not adhere to consistent analysis regarding military value – and perhaps most importantly the experienced combat ready manpower that exists within the Reserve Component.

Closures will have a Negative Impact on Recruiting and Retention:

TMC is concerned about the adverse potential affect BRAC recommendations may have on recruiting and retention. For example, DoD plans to close Navy Marine Corps Reserve Center Madison, Wis., and Navy Reserve Center Lacrosse, Wis., and relocate the Navy and Marine Corps units to Armed Forces Reserve Center Madison, Wis. The distance between Lacrosse and Madison is 144 miles. It is not unreasonable to speculate that some reservists, and their families, may grow tired of driving 288 miles each month to drill. Closures will also have a negative impact on support for Guard and Reserve members who are recognized as America's Hometown military force since many are firemen, police, truck drivers, doctors, and other professionals. The sense of hometown involvement and recognition will be lost in many communities.

MWR AND MILITARY CONSTRUCTION CONCERNS

Higher Upfront Execution/Investment Costs Should be Anticipated:

Quality of life issues that affect servicemembers and families must be considered on an equal basis with other mission-related tasks in the execution of any plan to move troops or to close or realign installations. Unfortunately, DoD's past record of tracking, updating and documenting savings from BRAC has been less than adequate.

The Availability of Community Infrastructure:

Adequate community infrastructure to support returning troops, to mitigate the impact on affected communities is very important. The concern is shared by GAO and the Overseas Basing Commission. Are stateside bases such as Fort Bliss prepared to absorb a rapid population growth? For example, 170,000 military and civilian personnel and their families are returning to the U.S. from overseas installations as part of rebasing efforts. Fort Bliss is going to receive at least 11,500 personnel and their families and there are serious questions about whether the installation and local community can handle the health care,

housing, school, child care, and the variety of other needs for these additional personnel and their families.

DoD Prematurely Reduced Base Operations Funding in Previous BRAC Rounds:

There is substantial risk to advance reductions of these budgets because base operations are already under funded. There is always a temptation to use the projected savings from BRAC or modernization efforts before base closures/realignments are fully implemented. This can adversely affect existing MWR and other core QOL programs, since they are seen as easy targets for funding cuts.

TMC Shares GAO's Concerns About the Validity of Long-term Estimates:

GAO indicates the Army's proposed actions show no short and/or long-term savings – “providing infrastructure to returning troops from overseas and consolidation of reserve facilities does not achieve savings during either the implementation or the 20-year period.” Estimated personnel reduction savings, particularly with regard to Navy and Air Force military and civilian personnel end-strengths, are concerns – particularly with regard to the classification of data and how stakeholders view this information.

Coordination with Other Government Departments is Essential:

This includes across DoD and the individual Services, and other federal departments and agencies (Departments of Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security to include the Coast Guard, and Health and Human Services). There are also indications of limited coordination between DoD and active duty and Guard and Reserve components as discussed above.

GAO's research indicates that implementation of joint-basing options is challenging because it involves one Service being responsible for various installation management support functions. TMC is concerned that given the considerable number of Reserve component units impacted by BRAC, that the integration of functions clearly be addressed in the up-front stages of implementation.

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