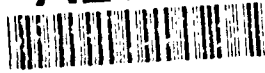


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Handling the Hot Potato: Evolution and Analysis of the Base Closing Decision Process

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**Handling the Hot Potato:
Evolution and Analysis of the
Base Closing Decision Process**

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Hugh R. Leonard, Jr.
U.S. Army**

This paper examines development of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (PL101-510, Title XXIX), discusses the law's provisions, and analyzes the decision making processes employed in its implementation.

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Handling THE HOT POTATO:

Evolution and Analysis of the Base Closing Decision Process

Announcing the Pentagon's recommendations for closing, reducing or realigning more than 70 US military installations Defense Secretary Dick Cheney said, "By 1995 the number of people in the US military will be about one-fourth smaller than it is today. Smaller forces need fewer bases. It's as simple as that."¹

Simple? Not so fast, Mr. Secretary. "In the two-and-a-half months the [Defense Base Closure and Realignment] Commission conducted its business, it received more than 143,000 letters and more than 100 phone calls a day. This level of input uncovered for commissioners every possible argument that could be proffered on behalf of potentially impacted bases."²

In spite of public sensitivities, the Defense Department, Congress and the President reached the decision to close 35 installations and realign another 42. How did they do it without committing political suicide? It's an interesting story.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the early sixties Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara undertook the "most extensive [military] base realignment and closure [program] in the history of the United States".³ Acting with Presidential approval he and his Pentagon "whiz kids" initiated an aggressive cost cutting drive that would eventually affect hundreds of sites throughout the country. Among these were more than 60 major installations the Department of Defense (DoD) intended to completely shut down and eliminate from its nationwide inventory.⁴

Congress was furious. First of all it wasn't in session when the Pentagon made its public announcement right after the 1964 elections. And what's more, even though the massive restructuring would directly affect the lives (and votes) of thousands of constituents, McNamara virtually excluded the legislature--and the uniformed services for that matter--from his decision process.⁵ Charges that the Administration was engaging in political shenanigans flourished as the two branches of government squared off over which would ultimately control the volatile base closure issue.

In its very next session Congress tried to legislate itself into control over the process. The measure failed when supporters couldn't muster the necessary votes they needed to override President Johnson's veto. The realignments and

closings continued.⁶

For more than a decade Congress attempted--albeit unsuccessfully--to codify its authority and thereby block the unilateral Pentagon action it considered politically unacceptable. In 1976 for example it slipped a provision into the Military Construction Authorization Bill requiring DoD to notify Congress at least nine months prior to taking any closure action. Furthermore the provision would stop DoD from closing any military facility employing 250 or more civilians without the expressed consent of Congress.⁷ Again the President--this time Gerald Ford--successfully vetoed the legislation.

It wasn't until the Presidency of Jimmy Carter that Congress would have its way. President Carter signed into law a bill requiring the Defense Department to notify Congress whenever a base was selected as a closure candidate, to submit a series of reports covering each closure's strategic, economic and environmental impact and to allow a 60-day grace period for Congress to respond on behalf of affected constituents. Additionally the law mandated Congressional approval for any closure affecting 300 or more civilian employees.⁸

The Defense Department's ability to further streamline its base structure came to a sudden stop. Congress finally had gained control.

Six years later⁹ The President's Private Sector Survey on Cost Control--

popularly known as the Grace Commission--submitted its formal report to Ronald Reagan. Among other things the Commission reasserted that the Pentagon could indeed realize significant savings through a comprehensive adjustment in its military base structure. Foreseeing the potential for a political impasse, the commissioners recommended creation of an independent base realignment and closure commission--one unconstrained by politics--to attack the issue and develop proposals.¹⁰ The President accepted the report but took no immediate action to implement the recommendation.

The Reagan Administration's massive defense build-up brought major changes to the structure of U.S. military forces but their basing remained virtually unchanged. Inefficiencies abounded. Some organizations were reconfigured with their subordinate units dispersed over a wide area. That burdened them with command and control problems. Others were stationed at installations no longer able to accommodate their training needs. (For example one Army brigade with a contingency mission focused on central Europe was based--and trained--in the west Texas desert.)¹¹ Several military support agencies had the potential to streamline through consolidation but either the limitations of geography or the realities of local politics prevented it. Something had to be done.

In 1985 Senator Barry Goldwater asked then Secretary of Defense Caspar

Weinberger to take a critical look at revamping the military base structure and to develop an "illustrative list" of those that could be eliminated. Weinberger complied and submitted a proposal to close 22 installations. Hearings were conducted but Congress took no definitive action.¹²

Frank Corlucci, Weinberger's successor at Defense, seized the Grace Commission's recommendations in 1988 when he chartered the Defense Secretary's Commission on Base Closures and Realignments. The twelve member commission--co-chaired by former Senator Abraham Ribicoff and former Congressman Jack Edwards--met and returned recommendations affecting 145 installations nationwide (86 for closure, 5 for partial closure and 54 for realignment). They pegged the potential annual cost savings at nearly \$700 million, a substantial amount.¹³

Secretary Corlucci embraced the independent commission approach as an effective method for overcoming years of political dilemma. In Congress, however, affected members sharply criticized both the process and the results. Their charges? The process had been secretive. The Commission had blindly accepted information without visiting the installations. It had accepted and considered biased information. One of the parameters used for evaluation (a six year cost recovery mandate) was alleged to be so restrictive that it automatically eliminated alternative bases from consideration. The challenges

were exhaustive.¹⁴

In spite of the emotionally charged debate Congress voted to accept the Commission's recommendations and codified them in Public Law.¹⁵ Carlucci, it appeared, had been correct.

Confronted with pressing budget realities and unparalleled political changes in Eastern Europe, Dick Cheney, the Bush Administration's Defense Secretary, placed on additional 36 bases on the existing Congressionally authorized closure list.¹⁶ Spurred by this, the Administration's latest move, Congress passed the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act.¹⁷ The members had had enough!

1990 BASE CLOSURE ACT

Congress, in the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990, set forth in clearly understandable terms exactly what it expected from the Administration: "a fair process that will result in the timely closure and realignment of military installations inside the United States." It further stipulated the 1990 Act was to be "the exclusive authority for selecting for closure or realignment, or for carrying out any closure or realignment of, a military installation inside the United States."

In broad terms it directed establishment of an independent base closure

commission, described the procedures for developing recommendations and provided instructions for implementing the approved base closure and realignment decisions.

The Commission

The law required the President--with advice and consent of Congress--to appoint an eight-member "Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission" which he did. The Commission's duties were to review and analyze DoD's closure and realignment recommendations, to conduct public hearings on them and then to prepare and submit its own revised recommendations to the President. It was to conduct its work in open session and be finished by July 1, 1991.¹⁸ Although the Commission wasn't bound by DoD's recommendations it was required to fully justify any changes it decided to make to the President. It was the Commission's list then, not DoD's, that would constitute the final closure and realignment recommendations for Presidential approval.

The Procedures

The 1990 Act directed the Secretary of Defense to develop specific

selection criteria for use in identifying bases for closure or realignment. He was to derive the proposed criteria from an assessment of threats to national security, the planned force structure to counter those threats and the plan for implementing the force structure. What's more, he had to present the criteria for public comment prior to final publication in the Federal Register and submission to Congress. Then, unless specifically rejected by joint resolution of Congress, DoD's proposed criteria would automatically become the approved basis for developing base closure and realignment recommendations.

The Implementing Instructions

The Act's implementing instructions addressed several important points. First it granted DoD the authority to take the required measures to execute all closure and realignment actions approved by the President. Second it authorized DoD to assist all affected communities in both planning economic adjustments and providing assistance to those civilian employees who would lose their jobs. Third it required DoD to perform any environmental restoration that must be done. Finally it provided specific instructions on the disposition of surplus government property.

Basically the Defense Department
DEFENSE DEPARTMENT PLAN had to satisfy three requirements to
to be in full compliance with the law:
develop selection criteria for use in evaluating bases, prepare a Force
Structure Plan covering fiscal years 1992 through 1997 and recommend bases
for closure or realignment.

In a 10 December 1990 policy memorandum Under Secretary of Defense D. J. Atwood gave a "heads up" to senior DoD officials. His memo established the general requirements and provisions of law, issued compliance guidance and prescribed the basic administration and record keeping procedures to follow.

Mr. Atwood placed Colin McMillan, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Production and Logistics (ASD(P&L)), in charge of the overall base closure effort and designated him the Department's exclusive point of contact with the Commission and Congress. Recognizing that differences in the service's roles and missions could complicate the process, he authorized Mr. McMillan to issue additional instructions "to ensure consistency [whenever possible] in application of the selection criteria, methodology, and reports."

To assist him in managing the project Mr. McMillan formed a steering committee comprised of key officials at the assistant secretary/deputy secretary level from each service and the Office of the Secretary of Defense

(OSD). Further, he assigned OSD representatives to each service's working group to coordinate the total effort. "It was my intention," he testified before Congress, "that the services would know what the Department expected of them at all times and how to handle various closure issues."¹⁹

Developing the selection criteria was a challenging task. Not only did DoD have to consider broad differences in the services' respective roles and missions but also accommodate an extensive list of community concerns. After conducting public hearings and making appropriate adjustments in its initial list, DoD--with Congressional concurrence-- settled on the following eight:

"Military Value

1. The current and future mission requirements and the impact on operational readiness of the Department of Defense's total force.
2. The availability and condition of land, facilities and associated airspace at both the existing and potential receiving locations.

3. The ability to accomodate contingency, mobilization, and future total force requirements at both the existing and potential receiving locations.

4. The cost and manpower implications.

Return on Investment

5. The extent and timing of potential costs and savings, including the number of years, beginning with the date of completion of closure or realignment, for the savings to exceed the cost.

Impacts

6. The economic impact on communities.

7. The ability of both the existing and potential receiving communities' infrastructure to support forces, missions and personnel.

8. The environmental impact.⁻²⁰

DoD identified the four "Military Value" criteria as its priority for consideration.²¹

General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, addressed the force structure issue with Congress on March 19, 1991. In a secret briefing he outlined the Pentagon's threat assessment, explained the need for continued U.S. military presence overseas and presented the Administration's Force Structure Plan along with its implementation schedule. His briefing went to the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission four days later.²²

SERVICES RESPOND Mr. McMillon formally passed the final selection criteria to the service Secretaries in a February 13, 1991, policy memorandum. In order "to ensure consistency" he also described the general method he wanted each service to use in analyzing its own bases and developing closure recommendations. He instructed them to:

- categorize bases possessing similar missions, attributes or capabilities
- analyze the combined basing capacity of each category
- develop "appropriate objective and quantifiable measures or factors" for each of the final criteria

- explore cross-category and multi-service base use opportunities
- establish internal controls to verify and document the accuracy of the data and the process
- calculate "health care costs, unemployment costs and environmental costs and savings"
- determine the economic and environmental impact on affected communities
- calculate return on investment

Armed with Mr. McMillan's instructions and the Chairman's Force Structure Plan the services went to work on the problem. Their approaches varied.

Department of the Army

Department of the Army established a Total Army Basing Study group (TABS) in November 1990. By the time the Army received Mr. McMillian's February memorandum work had already begun.²³

The TABS group organized with members from the Army Staff representing a

broad array of functional areas (operations, logistics, etc.) as well as representatives from each of the Army's Major Commands (MACOMs). Supported by a senior advisory committee, the group was charged with developing both the Army's selection strategy and its list of recommendations which--when completed and approved by the Secretary--would become the Army's proposal to OSD.

To ensure the consistency, equibility and integrity of the overall effort, the Army Audit Agency was called upon to independently evaluate procedures, check validity of data and verify the accuracy of quantitative analyses.

The TABS group approached the problem in two phases. Phase I consisted of categorizing bases according to mission functions and then evaluating their military value. Phase II consisted of identifying the candidates for closure or realignment based on an analysis of their excess capacity. Completion of these two phases would provide the baseline for applying "best military judgement" in reaching a final decision.

During Phase I the group arranged bases into seven mission categories:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Fighting and Maneuver | 5. Industrial Activities |
| 2. Major Training Area | 6. Corps of Engineers |
| 3. Training Schools | 7. Army Reserve |
| 4. Command and Control | |

To determine "Military Value" relative to the total Army the group assigned and weighted measureable attributes drawn from DoD's priority selection criteria and criterion number seven:

<u>Attributes</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Mission essentiality	250
Mission suitability	250
Operational efficiencies	150
Expandability	150
Quality of life	<u>200</u>
Total	1,000

The MACOMs expanded each of these with their own lists of quantifiable attributes--approved by the TABS group--each weighted in order to compare similar bases in an unbiased manner.

In Phase II the TABS group conducted its analysis. Members examined each mission category to identify the Army's excess base capacity. After dropping from consideration bases with high military value, unique missions, those unaffected by the planned force structure changes and those where data was insufficient to make a sound decision, the group identified 24 mission bases and 39 under the Corps of Engineers as candidates for closure or realignment.

Finally it evaluated each of these with respect to the remaining three selection criteria--return on investment, economic impact on communities and the environmental impact. The results, after review by the senior advisors, were sent to the Secretary.

The Secretary of the Army approved and forwarded to OSD a list of 18 Army installations recommended for closure or realignment.²⁴

Department of the Navy

The Department of the Navy--which oversees both the Navy and Marine Corps--took a different approach.

The Secretary established a six-member Base Structure Committee in December 1990. It was chaired by the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Installations and Environment) and began its work the following January.²⁵

The Committee planned to use data collected during an earlier basing study as its starting point. By May, however, it reported to the General Accounting Office (GAO) "that much of the data were biased in favor of keeping bases open and were [therefore] inadequate for an objective assessment of the Navy's basing needs."²⁶ As a result, the committee chose to rely heavily on hearings with senior officials representing both Navy and Marine Corps.

For analysis the Committee grouped facilities into 23 Navy and six Marine categories according to missions, capabilities and specific attributes. Members then analyzed each category looking for excess base capacity. Their study considered factors such as relative criticality, projected deployment schedules, planning criteria, unique attributes, data from existing data bases, compatible use zones, airspace congestion and explosive safety. When the analysis was complete eight of the original 29 categories were identified for further study, seven Navy one Marine.

The Committee next considered DoD's four priority selection criteria and subjectively assigned each base a green, yellow or red color code to reflect its relative military value. Green bases had the highest military value, red the least. Green bases were excluded from further consideration as were those facilities having strategic importance, exceptional operational value or some unique aspect.

With the field further narrowed, the Committee conducted a computer assisted cost-benefit analysis and examined the potential impacts on local economies and the environment.

The Secretary of the Navy--with advice of the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps--identified 41 facilities for closure or realignment.²⁷

Department of the Air Force

The Secretary of the Air Force appointed a Base Closure Executive Group consisting of five General Officers and five Senior Executive Service officials with widely ranging backgrounds and expertise. The committee was augmented with a working group of senior technical advisors from both the Air Staff, the Secretariat, major field commands and reserve component organizations. For validation and internal quality control of its work the Executive Group employed the services of the Air Force Audit Agency.

Bases were first arranged into the following nine mission categories:

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Support | 6. Flying/Training |
| 2. Training | 7. Flying/Other |
| 3. Flying/Strategic | 8. Other |
| 4. Flying/Tactical | 9. Air Reserve |
| 5. Flying/Mobility | |

The Executive Group analyzed the bases within each category for both excess capacity and mission essentiality. As a result all but 51 facilities were withdrawn from further analysis.

Unlike the Army and Navy, the Air Force's first cut at its candidate bases

included consideration of all eight selection criteria. To gauge the relative value of the bases to one another the eight criteria were further subdivided into 83 quantifiable subelements.

To build a database the Executive Group distributed questionnaires addressing the criteria and their associated subelements to all 51 installations. The working group collected the data, compared subelement scores for each installation against an agreed upon standard and then assigned each subelement a color code based on the results:

GREEN: Met or exceeded standard

YELLOW: Marginally met standard

RED: Did not meet standard

Based on its assessment of the working group's analysis, the Executive Group next determined the overall color code--green, yellow, red--of each of the eight selection criteria for each base considered.

Once this work was complete, the Executive Group developed five closure and realignment options by assigning varying weights to aspects of the selection criteria. For example, in one option cost was weighted heavier than training readiness, in another the two were reversed.

The Secretary of the Air Force selected and forwarded the option that

prioritized military value, readiness, training, future mission and cost. His recommendation listed 15 Air Force installations.²⁸

FINAL DECISIONS Except for one,²⁹ Secretary Cheney accepted all the services' recommendations and submitted them as his final proposal to Congress and the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission on 12 April 1991. The Commission adopted the majority--but not all--of his recommendations. (Several were rejected because, in the Commission's opinion, they deviated from either the legal selection criteria or the projected force structure requirements or both.³⁰) On July 10, 1991, President Bush accepted the Commission's report. Since Congress failed to pass a Joint Resolution of Disapproval the Commission's work became the final base closure and realignment decision for this the first of the three rounds.

SOME OBSERVATIONS Congressional intent to make the base closure process "fair" was written clearly into law. The act established an independent commission to make the tough non-partisan decisions, provided a review and approval--or more accurately disapproval--process that included

both the legislative and executive branches, it called for monitoring by the GAO and specifically directed that all bases would be considered equally as candidates for closure.

Mr. McMillan, OSD's point man in managing the base closure effort, had both the authority and latitude to effectively attack the problem. His organization reflected a wide range of experience and expertise and its procedures allowed close coordination both up and down the command chain and laterally between the services. The procedures, however, did not provide adequate oversight for the processes developed and used by the uniformed services. Accordingly, analysis methods and cost estimates varied widely.

OSD instructed the services to use a computer assisted analysis model to estimate both costs and savings. The program, known as Cost of Base Realignment Actions or "COBRA," was developed by the 1988 commission to determine if the government could recover the costs of closing a base over a six year period.³¹ Unfortunately there were difficulties in using it. "Lack of program documentation and the number of modifications to the COBRA program [limited] the accuracy of these estimates."³²

The Army considered input from all its major players and designed its approach to make maximum use of objective quantitative analysis. It employed the Army Audit Agency as a check on both the accuracy and validity of its

process and made adjustments when recommendations warranted. In its evaluation of the Army's process the GAO reported, "The methodology and approach the Army used in its quantitative evaluation of the military value of its installations was comprehensive, reasonably detailed, and conformed to the requirements of the act."³³

The Navy centralized control and execution of its process at the Assistant Secretary level. Initial data, drawn from a previous base closure study, was biased and therefore tainted much of the early work. Accordingly, the Navy relied heavily on subjective rather than objective analysis. Inconsistencies found their way into the results which left the door open for legal maneuvering by closure opponents. For instance, six installations scored exactly the same in "Military Value" but when color codes were assigned four of them were judged yellow and two green. Additionally, when GAO ran its own analysis of ship berthing capacity, it determined that significant excess capacity would still exist even if all the Navy's recommendations were adopted.³⁴ Unlike the Army and Air Force, the Navy did not comply with the directed requirement of having an internal control plan.

Both the Air Force and Army considered the economic and environmental impact of potential closures as an integral part of the decision making processes. The Navy, however, did not consider these until after the proposed

criteria were decided.

Congress was unwilling to accept the Administration's unilateral base closure actions, yet as a body it appeared politically impotent to address the issue. Congress wanted control over the process but without exercising it directly. Accordingly, it adopted a hands-off approach so as not to put any particular member in jeopardy. Members devised a plan to retain authority without accountability, a plan to approve closures by simply not disapproving them! For Congress was this political cowardice or political genius? Arguably, it was a little of both.

In retrospect, it seems possible (if not probable) that the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 could easily become a legislative model for dealing with volatile national issues in the future. After all, the decision process it established--even with its first round execution problems--ended three decades of political dilemma. Put simply, it worked!

¹Cheney Forwards Base Closing Recommendations to Commission, News Release, Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), (Washington: April 12, 1991).

²Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, Report to the President 1991, (Washington: 1991), p. 4-1.

³Defense Secretary's Commission on Base Realignment and Closure, Base Realignments and Closures, (Washington: December 1988), P. 8.

⁴Department of Defense, Base Closure and Realignment Report, (Washington: April 1991), P. 167.

⁵Sandra J. Dougherty, Army Base Closures: A Status Report, AUSA Background Brief #35, (Arlington, VA: July 1991), p. 1.

⁶Defense Secretary's Commission on Base Realignment and Closure, Base Realignments and Closures, p. 8.

⁷Ibid., p. 9.

⁸Ibid., p. 9.

⁹1983.

¹⁰Defense Secretary's Commission on Base Realignment and Closure, Base Realignments and Closures, p. 9.

¹¹Example based on the author's personal knowledge. Identifying the actual unit with its contingency plan would make the information classified.

¹²Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, Report to the President 1991, p. 1-1.

¹³Ibid., pp. 1-1, 1-2.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 1-3.

¹⁵Public Law 100-526.

¹⁶Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, Report to the

President 1991, p. 1-2.

¹⁷Public Law 101-510, Title XXIX (the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990), November 5, 1990.

¹⁸The Commission's work is to be completed by July 1st in each of the three years it is authorized to meet, 1991, 1993 and 1995.

¹⁹This statement was made by Mr. McMillan before the Military Installations and Facilities Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, July 23, 1991.

²⁰Department of Defense, Base Closure and Realignment Report, p. 143.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 24.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 15.

²³Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, Report to the President 1991, p. 2-1.

²⁴General Accounting Office, Military Bases. Observations on the Analyses Supporting Proposed Closures and Realignments, (Washington: May 1991), pp. 17-18.

²⁵Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, Report to the President 1991, p. 2-2.

²⁶General Accounting Office, Military Bases. Observations on the Analyses Supporting Proposed Closures and Realignments, p. 48.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

²⁹Recommendations from the Army included considered civil functions of the Corps of Engineers which the Secretary decided not to include.

³⁰Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, Report to the President 1991, Chapter 5.

³¹Six year cost recovery was a criterion set forth in the 1988 commission's charter and applied only to that commission.

³²General Accounting Office, Military Bases, Observations on the Analyses Supporting Proposed Closures and Realignments, p. 53.

³³Ibid., p. 24.

³⁴Ibid., p. 49.