

Chapter 8

A Look Ahead

The Commission, reflecting on the circumstances that led to its formation, and having invested a great deal of thought and effort in developing both a process for reviewing military installations and a list of recommended actions, would like to believe that lessons drawn from this experience could be applied constructively in the future. The base structure should properly be derived from the force structure, which in turn should reflect national security strategy. That strategy must change over time in response to changes in the external strategic environment and may also be altered to reflect internal fiscal or political realities. The Commission believes that the nation's interests will be best served by an ongoing base-management process that is responsive to change.

The Future Strategic Environment

Some of the more dramatic trends or circumstances that could occur over the next two decades might be a significant change in the threat, a potential reassessment of priorities within the Soviet Union, the negotiation of far-reaching arms-reduction agreements, the emergence of new major powers and alliances, an increasing number of Third World contingencies, and the continued development and fielding of long-range advanced-technology weapons--nuclear and non-nuclear, both offensive and defensive.

The number of overseas bases available for use by American forces is considerably lower than it was immediately after World

War II. With fewer forward bases and increasingly limited access to overseas ports, airfields, and even airspace, U.S. forces will have to be better prepared to provide direct support of overseas operations from bases in the United States.

Additional uncertainties nagging at future U.S. basing needs include possible shifts in alliances or force-reduction agreements that could prompt a return of sizable numbers of forward-based forces to the United States. While returning forces might be inactivated under terms of an agreement, or in response to budget constraints, if the United States intends to maintain a capability to project forces into the theaters from which they have been withdrawn, these will need to be retained in the force structure. In that event, a larger home-based strategic reserve of ground, air, and naval forces might consist of new blends of active and reserve components. There already exists a clear trend toward meeting current budget realities and force requirements with greater reliance on Reserve-Component forces, with some concomitant reduction in the number of active-duty personnel and units. Of the Army's overseas deploying forces in time of emergency, 70 percent come from the Reserve Components. The Air Force, for its part, plans to reduce the number of tactical-fighter wings from the 38 it presently has to 35 in FY 1990, having set aside for the time being its ultimate goal of equipping and manning 40 wings. Possible implications for basing associated with this trend might be fewer facilities

such as housing for the active force, and perhaps more, widely dispersed, training areas accessible to reserve units, whose members live throughout the United States.

It follows that the future military base structure in the United States would need to have an elasticity to support a rapid force expansion and the wherewithal (in terms of airlift, sealift, and aerial refueling) to underwrite a global mobility capacity greater and more versatile than that of today.

Another set of base requirements could emerge from long-range new-technology weapons. Requirements for space-borne command, control, communications, and intelligence are expected to increase substantially and be critical for future wartime operations, and the U.S.-based ground facilities providing linkage with space platforms will grow in number as well.

All of this cautions against taking base-closure actions today that may adversely affect the deterrence and defense capacity of tomorrow's military forces. It also means that if popular paradigms were adopted that see U.S. bases predominantly in their peacetime roles or in terms restricted to peacetime cost-effectiveness, national defense risks would be increased. Unused capacity at military bases allows room for future force structure changes, rapid expansion in conflict, and potential dispersal for wartime operations.

Desirable Features of a Future Process

To be successful, future base management must be an integral part of our political system, an open process that builds on the trust of the American people. The process should be aboveboard and

based on sound criteria that emphasize military value. Such a process will best serve the national defense and assure the public that basing decisions are made independent of unfounded biases from any quarter.

The future base-management process should have a healing effect. It should be structured in such a way that over time greater bonds of trust and confidence between members of Congress and the Defense Department can be built. While the management of the nation's military base structure is the responsibility of the Secretary of Defense, the Congress is clearly a partner in matters of national defense. The Military Departments and the Joint Chiefs of Staff also have essential roles to play in the process. The nation's interests would not be served by a continuation of the unworkable process that led to the formation of this Commission.

A Proposed Mechanism

While an ad hoc commission similar to the present one may be useful, from time to time, in dealing with extraordinary problems of government, such an arrangement should not become a routine means for evaluating bases or addressing other subjects that are part of the day-to-day business of governing. This Commission's work can be an important step in clearing the way for creation of a sound process of base evaluation, realignment, and closure. We need to build on the cooperation and impetus achieved by this legislative-executive effort, drawing on the lessons learned during the Commission's study of basing needs, and defining consistent rules to assist in making decisions on future realignments and closures.

It is important to the success of any future process that it be straightforward, methodical and understandable. The Commission believes that the process it developed is an appropriate starting point; it can, however, be improved. Specifically:

-- The process should not be so constrained by time. The process used by this Commission was an iterative one requiring the development and testing of many options. Prevailing circumstances (the delay in passing the enabling legislation and the reality of the election timetable) forced the Commission to accomplish Phase II of the process, the heart of its task, between the elections in November and the date of this report. While some six months prior to November were spent in assembling data and receiving testimony from expert witnesses (see Appendix J), the time spent developing specific recommendations was constrained. In the future, this Phase II effort should be allotted more time--probably 90 to 180 days.

-- The six-year payback used in the Commission's evaluation is too limiting. The Commission did not discover the genesis of this requirement, but as a result of its application, many otherwise sound actions were discarded. Most actions require substantial "up-front" costs to accommodate relocating units, and even significant steady-state savings may not amortize the "up-front" costs of a desirable action in six years.

-- A ruling by the Defense Department Counsel, based on the history of the enabling legislation, prevented the Commission from recommending actions on government-owned, contractor-operated (GOCO) facilities. The Commission believes that there are opportunities for closure and realignment among the GOCO

facilities and that they should be examined in any future process.

-- By virtue of the time constraint discussed above, several areas that appear to have the potential for further savings were not included to any great extent in the Commission's recommended closures and realignments. Two of these, Reserve Component facilities and military laboratories, are addressed in Chapter 5.

-- The staff of the Commission consisted of dedicated, informed, and hard-working people. The senior staff were Defense Department personnel detailed to the Commission and outside experts hired by the Commission to bring special expertise to the process, as required by the enabling legislation. The staff role in this process is extremely difficult because (1) they must have detailed knowledge of the basing structure to include the associated force structure--they must "know the Pentagon", but (2) they must be independent of the Pentagon and supply the Commission with accurate data and analyses. Quite often the staff found itself in conflict with the Department viewpoint and getting detailed data and support on such complex subjects from already burdened Department officials was often difficult. Despite these built-in difficulties, the staff performed extremely well. Should there be a future commission, this Commission hopes that appropriate legislation would be passed in a more timely manner so that rules would be adopted and independent staff hired in a more orderly fashion.

Given the need to preserve the linkages among strategy, force structure, and base structure, the Secretary of Defense is best suited to execute the nation's base-management responsibilities, including the acquiring and disposing of real estate, and

realigning and rearranging the base structure. This management function must be supported by a consistent, ongoing, base-review process within the Defense Department that looks to the long term. The Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Services, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Unified and Specified Commanders should share in the responsibility of making recommendations to the Secretary on base realignment and closure. At the same time, members of Congress must have confidence in the Department's internal process. The factors to be used in the future base-management process should be auditable and open to the Congress.

One way of satisfying this requirement would be through the creation of a standing, external advisory panel that oversees and verifies the analytical efforts within the Department of Defense. Such a panel, composed of senior experts, could be convened as necessary to render an independent judgment on proposed base realignments and closures. Appointed by the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with Congressional leadership, the panel

members would be expected to examine the DoD analyses that led to identification of a base-management action, providing commentaries on their validity and maintaining a broad perspective on related national issues. The advisory panel would report its findings and observations to the Secretary for review and comment before the proposed action, along with the advisory panel's findings, was submitted to Congress.

This approach could answer the need to ensure that the Secretary of Defense leads the base-management process, while providing an effective means of Congressional participation and support. So long as the process, combining DoD's internal analytical efforts and an external advisory panel, is conducted openly and on the basis of sound and consistently applied criteria, it should provide a workable means for base realignments and closures. Such a process should strengthen our defense by allowing cost-effective use of resources and set the foundation for greater legislative-executive trust in managing the nation's military bases.