

Chapter 1

History of Base Closures

In the early 1960s, then-Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara closed many bases to reduce military overhead. Secretary McNamara created within DoD the Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) to ease the economic impacts of closures on affected communities and to allow the reuse of former bases. In the early 1970s, and in response to the end of the Vietnam War, hundreds of military facilities across the country closed.

In the 1960s and again in the 1970s, accusations were widespread that base closures were being used by the executive branch to punish uncooperative legislators. This sentiment prompted Congress in 1977 to pass Section 2687 of Title 10, United States Code, which required DoD to notify Congress if an installation became a closure candidate, and it also applied the National Environmental Policy Act to base-closure recommendations. These stipulations, combined with Congress' reluctance to close military bases, effectively prevented DoD from closing any major military installation.

The 1980s saw a rapid military expansion as a result of a dramatic increase in defense spending. In 1985, Senator Barry Goldwater recognized the need for DoD to rid itself of excess base capacity. He asked Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger to submit an "illustrative" list of military bases for closure. A hearing was held to discuss the 22 bases on Secretary Weinberger's list, but no further action was taken.

1988 COMMISSION

By 1988, while the structure of the U.S. armed forces had changed, the base structure remained unaltered. Therefore, on May 3, 1988, Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci chartered the Defense Secretary's Commission on Base Realignment and Closure, ordering it to conduct an independent study of the domestic military base structure and to recommend installations for realignment and closure. In October 1988, Congress passed and President Reagan signed Public Law 100-526, the Defense

Authorization Amendments and Base Closure and Realignment Act.

The 1988 Commission, chaired by former Senator Abraham Ribicoff and former Congressman Jack Edwards, recommended that 86 bases be closed fully and 59 others be closed partially or realigned. These changes would, according to Commission estimates, generate an annual savings of \$693.6 million.

1990 DoD PROPOSALS

In an effort to reshape and reduce the military infrastructure, Secretary of Defense Cheney in January 1990 proposed closing 36 bases in the United States. The congressional response was reminiscent of the base-closing rounds of the 1960s and 1970s. Congressional critics claimed that the list unfairly targeted districts represented by Democrats. Others charged that Congress again was institutionally incapable of making decisions that were good for the country but painful for some congressional districts.

The list was not acted upon by Congress, but the groundwork was laid for a second base-closing commission.

1991 BASE CLOSURE AND REALIGNMENT COMMISSION

The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (see Appendix A) intends, as the law says, "to provide a fair process that will result in the timely closure and realignment of military installations inside the United States."

The process was built around the following standards:

- The force-structure plan submitted to Congress with the DoD budget request for Fiscal Year 1992 (see Appendix B)

- Eight selection criteria finalized by DoD after public comment (see Appendix C)

Of the eight criteria, the first four concerned military value and were to receive preference.

- Current and future mission requirements
- Availability and condition of land, facilities, and air space
- Contingency and mobilization requirements
- Cost and manpower implications

The remaining criteria were

- Return on investment
- Local economic impact
- Impact on community infrastructure
- Environmental impact

The Commission received DoD's proposed list of closures and realignments after the following process: First, the Army, Navy, and Air Force analyzed their own base structures, comparing them against the force-structure plan and the selection criteria. The services then submitted their proposals to Secretary Cheney, who on April 12, 1991, sent DoD's recommendations to the Commission. The Commission was required to send its recommendations to the President by July 1, 1991.

The statutory test to be applied by the Commission in justifying modifications to DoD's recommended list involves "substantial deviation" from the force-structure plan and selection criteria. The Commission could recommend changes for those bases where a substantial deviation was established.

Approval by the President and Congress

The law requires the President to approve or disapprove the Commission's recommendations by July 15, 1991. An approved report will be sent to Congress. If the President rejects the report, it will be returned to the Commission for revision. The Commission must submit to the President by August 15 a revised report. The President then has 15 days to approve or disapprove the revised report. The President must send an approved report to Congress by September 1, 1991. If he does not approve the report, the closure process for 1991 comes to an end with no action.

Once the Commission's recommendations are approved by the President, Congress has 45 legislative days, or until it adjourns for the session, to consider them. Changes to the approved recommendations are not allowed. Unless Congress enacts a joint resolution disapproving the Commission's proposals, the Secretary must begin to close or realign those installations listed in the report within two years and complete the action within six years.

Differences Between the 1988 and 1991 Commissions

Both Commissions were set up to overcome the political paralysis that had prevented the closure of bases during the previous decade. The recommendations of the 1988 Commission were driven largely by the need to size a bloated base infrastructure to a reduced threat and force structure. The 1991 Commission was driven by further reductions in DoD budgets and dramatic changes in Eastern Europe.

Structurally, the differences between these two Commissions are significant. The 1988 Commission was chartered by and reported to the Secretary of Defense. Congress codified the authority of that Commission when it passed Public Law 100-526. The 1991 Commission, on the other hand, was

established by law from the outset. Its members were appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

Other differences between these two Commissions resulted primarily from the lessons learned in the congressional debate that followed the 1988 base closure and realignment recommendations.

After publication of the 1988 list, affected members of Congress leveled three major charges against the Commission process. First, they contended the process had been secretive. In fact, hearings had been closed and information on the ranking of facilities and transcripts of Commission meetings were hard to obtain. Second, Congress noted many of the affected facilities had not been visited by commissioners. Such visits, believed the legislators, might have helped the commissioners verify information included in the staff reports. Finally, they complained that faulty data had been used to reach the final closure recommendations. Congress believed the General Accounting Office (GAO) or another independent organization should have reviewed the information and data for accuracy.

Commission members and legislators also said that the panel's mandate to recover the cost within six years was too restrictive and had prevented the closing of several obsolete installations.

Congress, through Title XXIX of Public Law 101-510, established the 1991 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission to redress these issues. The process is open, commissioners have visited all major affected bases, and GAO has been an integral part of the process.

Composition of the 1991 Commission

The commissioners were chosen for their distinguished legislative, business, military, and diplomatic backgrounds. Six were appointed by President Bush - four in

consultation with House and Senate majority leaders and two with the advice of House and Senate minority leaders. The other appointments were made independently by the President.

The staff was drawn from backgrounds encompassing government, law, journalism, academia, and the military. Some were hired directly by the Commission, while others were detailed from DoD, GAO, the Federal

Emergency Management Agency, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Under the Commission's founding legislation, no more than one-third of the staff could be detailed from DoD. Divisional directors (including the staff director) were civilians hired directly by the Commission. The Commission also hired independent consultants from the Logistics Management Institute, who helped design and then participated in the review and analysis of the services' recommendations.