



Commentary: Transforming through BRAC?

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WASHINGTON (Army News Service, April 15, 2005) -- For many Soldiers and their families, their Army installation represents security and stability, and reinforces the sense of belonging to the unique culture of the "military family."

Soldiers return from their deployments to an area that is familiar -- to "Fort Home."

For the local community, the installation represents economic interdependence and more. There is pride in being associated with and supporting our Soldiers -- especially now when our nation faces undefined threats. Some communities grew solely in response to the support mission for the flow of Soldiers and their families in and out of the installation.

So how can it be good to break these bonds and reestablish a new identity at a new base, when things are working so well at "Fort Home?"

A new round of BRAC may make that necessary as transformation changes the way the Army does business, but transformation is change and change can be for the better.

Traditionally, BRAC is designed primarily to gain efficiencies and save money.

For BRAC 2005, the Secretary of Defense has added the goals of transformation and joint basing, training and operations to the BRAC agenda. Although this BRAC is shaping up to be more far-reaching, it is not new.

Why do we need BRAC?

There have been four rounds of BRAC since the program's inception in the 1980s, saving taxpayers more than \$18 billion. In the 1990s, the Army alone closed 112 of its bases in the United States and realigned another 27, saving an estimated \$3.1 billion.

The Department of Defense leadership has determined that there remains a 20 to 25 percent excess capacity throughout its installations. DoD received congressional authorization for a new BRAC round in 2005.

Under the BRAC 2005 milestones, the president will nominate BRAC commissioners this month. After the commissioners review the facilities, their recommendations will go to Congress in November.

For DoD, BRAC can achieve several goals: eliminate excess infrastructure; reshape our military; pursue joint operations; optimize military readiness; and realize significant savings in support of transforming the Department of Defense.

At a minimum, BRAC 2005 must eliminate excess physical capacity, which diverts scarce resources from defense capability. However, BRAC 2005 can make an even more profound contribution to transformation by balancing the Army's structure with its defense strategy. By creating joint organizational and basing solutions, the Army can ease joint missions, reduce waste, save money and free resources to recruit quality people, modernize equipment, and develop the abilities needed to meet 21st Century threats.

BRAC provides the Army support to meet the challenges of today's world. As our fighting forces evolve to quicker, lighter and more mobile units, the support structure must also change.

Will it be like previous BRACs??

Where prior BRAC rounds were primarily focused on saving money, the BRAC 2005 process is primarily focused on transformation and creating a more nimble and adaptable Army. Military value is the primary focus for analyzing installations. The selection criteria also consider potential cost savings, community support and environmental considerations.

In the past, "excess capacity" meant entire bases or large parcels of land. Now, the excess capacity of today's infrastructure is scattered "pockets" throughout an installation's holdings, most often in the form of underused or vacant facilities. These vacant or underused facilities can be made productive through joint use or sharing by several organizations.

More Jointness?

BRAC 2005, unlike prior BRAC rounds, will also include potential realignment and closures of United States Army Reserve and Army National Guard facilities. The focus will be on consolidating and realigning such facilities to maximize savings, reduce footprints, and enhance the mobilization process. As with the active component, the reserve component will look for joint stationing opportunities both within the Army and with other service reserve components.

Implementing BRAC 2005 will be different?

The Army's implementation of the BRAC 2005 recommendations will be different from previous rounds of base closing and realignment in many ways: there will be more joint approaches and solutions, more public-private cooperation, more proactive communications, and more interagency cooperation. BRAC 2005 will provide effective stewardship of the taxpayers' investments at all levels of government by making better use of DoD property through shared use with stakeholders or return of property to the tax rolls or public use. Cost effective, local solutions will involve extensive public participation as BRAC properties are closed, realigned or sold.

The Army will work hard to communicate the BRAC 2005 goals and strategies. The Army will work with local redevelopment committees to ensure former military properties will be ready for new economic opportunities.

The vast majority of communities affected by closure and realignment decisions of the past BRAC rounds have successfully moved to productive economic development. The Army remains committed to working with BRAC 2005 communities to repeat those successes.