Negative: BRAC (Base Closure & Realignment)

By “Coach Vance” Trefethen

***Resolved: The United States federal government should considerably decrease its military commitments.***

AFF Plan does another round of Base Realignment And Closure (abbreviated as BRAC) to close unneeded military bases and save money. The last BRAC was in 2005, which is why a lot of the evidence in this brief is either from 2005 or referring back to events then. It’s the best evidence of what BRAC does and what it will or won’t accomplish.

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NEGATIVE: BRAC (Military Base Closures)

TOPICALITY

1. There is no commitment

Link: No evidence of any commitment in the AFF case

The AFF misread the wording of the resolution. They thought it said we should substantially reduce anything the military is doing. But no: It says we should substantially reduce commitments. AFF never read a piece of evidence that says anywhere that the US is committed to having any certain number of military bases. They won’t have to repeal any laws or withdraw from a treaty or tell someone that we can’t keep a promise we made to them, in order to do their plan.

Signing a mortgage is a commitment that you will pay for your house. But living in a house for a long time is not a commitment that you will never move.

Violation: No reduction in commitment

The plan reduces military bases, not commitments, so it doesn’t do what the resolution says. The military never made a commitment to anyone that those bases would be kept open for any certain period of time. Closing them ends no commitment.

Impact: No Affirmative team

No one showed up in the room to affirm the resolution, so there is effectively no Affirmative team in the round. No matter who wins, you should vote Negative.

2. Not substantial reduction in military bases

Link: U.S. has over 800 military bases

*Prof. David Vine 2015 (associate professor of sociology at American University)* Where in the World Is the U.S. Military? July/Aug 2015 https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/06/us-military-bases-around-the-world-119321#:~:text=Despite%20recently%20closing%20hundreds%20of,about%2030%20foreign%20bases%20combined.

Despite recently closing hundreds of bases in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States still maintains nearly 800 military bases in more than 70 countries and territories abroad—from giant “Little Americas” to small radar facilities. Britain, France and Russia, by contrast, have about 30 foreign bases combined.

Link: The last BRAC could only find 12 bases to close

Dr. [Christopher M. Schnaubelt](https://www.rand.org/about/people/s/schnaubelt_christopher_m.html) 2017 (PhD in political science; Senior Political Scientist at RAND Corp.) 16 March 2017 “Making BRAC Politically Palatable” https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/03/making-brac-politically-palatable.html

According to the [2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission](http://www.brac.gov/finalreport.html), BRAC actions in 1988, 1991, 1993, and 1995 resulted in the closure of more than 300 bases across the U.S. The 2005 commission identified an additional 12 bases for closure.

Do the math: closing 12 out of 800 = 1.5%

On what planet is reducing something by 1.5% a “considerable” reduction?

Impact: Abuse justifies Negative ballot

Allowing Affirmative cases that cut something by 1.5% puts an unacceptable burden on Negative research this year. Let’s teach Affirmatives not to do that by awarding a Negative ballot.

3. Not substantial reduction in dollars

Link: Although their estimates are exaggerated and we don’t believe them, the Defense Dept. says a new BRAC would save $2 billion/year

Congressional Research Service 2019 (non-partisan research agency of Congress) 25 Apr 2019 “Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC): Background and Issues for Congress” <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R45705.html> (brackets added)

Emphasizing the potential cost savings, DOD [Dept. Of Defense] has suggested a new "efficiency-focused BRAC" could save the Department billions of dollars annually: "Savings from BRAC rounds are real and substantial. The last five BRAC rounds are collectively saving the Department $12B annually. A new efficiency-focused BRAC could save the Department an additional ~$2B annually (based on the '93/'95 rounds)."In its ongoing series of BRAC-related reports, the GAO has noted the unreliability of DOD cost savings estimates.

Link: Even if we grant them that inflated number, compare it to the Defense Budget: $705 billion

US Dept of Defense 2020. “DOD Releases Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Proposal” 10 Feb 2020 https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2079489/dod-releases-fiscal-year-2021-budget-proposal/

On February 10, 2020, President Donald J. Trump sent Congress a proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 budget request of $740.5 billion for national security, $705.4 billion of which is for the Department of Defense (DoD).

Do the math: Saving $2 billion out of $705 billion = 0.3%

Enough is enough. This microscopic plan needs to be getting Negative ballots to teach Affirmatives to follow the Resolution. If they get enough Negative ballots, they’ll get the hint and write an Affirmative case that’s topical and debatable.

EXTRA-TOPICALITY

1. BRAC does a lot more than the resolution allows (even if there were “commitments” being reduced)

Example #1: Economic Development

Christopher T. Mann 2019 (Analyst in Defense Policy and Trade with Congressional Research Service, non-partisan research agency of Congress) 25 Apr 2019 Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC): Background and Issues for Congress https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R45705.pdf

Under a BRAC, local communities can significantly affect the BRAC property transfer and disposal decisions, which are managed by the Secretary of the responsible military department. Once approved for closure, communities around an installation typically organize a Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA) for the purpose of creating and executing a redevelopment plan for the property. [**END QUOTE**] While the plan is not binding on DOD, the Department has been statutorily directed to give the plan considerable weight. DOD makes economic development grants and technical support available through its Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) to assist LRAs with the process. [**THEY GO ON LATER SAYING QUOTE**:] In recent BRAC rounds, Congress has authorized a special transfer authority that has permitted DOD to transfer title to property at less than fair market value, or even at no cost, if the LRA agrees to certain conditions designed to create employment at the former defense facility. This has been referred to as an Economic Development Conveyance (EDC).

Example #2: Environmental cleanup

Christopher T. Mann 2019 (Analyst in Defense Policy and Trade with Congressional Research Service, non-partisan research agency of Congress) 25 Apr 2019 Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC): Background and Issues for Congress https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R45705.pdf

Each year, Congress appropriates funding for the Department of Defense Base Closure Account, part of the Military Construction Defense-Wide appropriation. With no BRAC round authorized or underway, the primary purpose of continuing BRAC appropriations is to fund the environmental cleanup and caretaker functions at bases that were closed under prior rounds (See Figure 3).

Violation: Plan abusively does “Resolution plus more”

BRAC relies on things outside the resolution for its solvency. This is abusive to the Negative because it opens the door to Affirmatives putting one thing in their Plan that does the resolution and a bunch of other things that don’t. Affirmatives could put in mandates about space travel, immigration or food aid and claim all kinds of advantages unrelated to the resolution and impossible for negatives to research.

Impact: Negative ballot

If the Affirmative cannot justify an Affirmative ballot simply by affirming the resolution, they shouldn’t get your ballot. When they have to go beyond the resolution to make their case, they abuse the Negative team and fail to meet their burden.

2. The letter “R”

Link: The “R” in BRAC stands for “Realignment”

The “C” in BRAC stands for Closure, which would be reducing something. But the “R” is “realignment,” which means moving things around, not reducing them.

Defense Department admits: A “primary objective” of BRAC is realignment and reform

GAO 2005 (Government Accountability Office) July 2005 MILITARY BASES Analysis of DOD’s 2005 Selection Process and Recommendations for Base Closures and Realignments <https://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05785.pdf> (brackets added)

He [the Secretary of Defense] further noted that “A primary objective of BRAC 2005, in addition to realigning our base structure to meet our post-Cold War force structure, is to examine and implement opportunities for greater joint activity.” Toward that end, the Secretary indicated that organizationally the 2005 BRAC analysis would be two pronged. Joint cross-service teams would analyze common business-oriented functions, and the military departments would analyze service-unique functions.

Violation: Realignment is extra-topical

A huge part of their plan goes completely outside the resolution.

Impact: Negative ballot

Any Affirmative that goes this far beyond the resolution deserves a Negative ballot. A Negative ballot would send them a message to follow the resolution they agreed to affirm when they signed up for this debate.

MINOR REPAIR

1. Fix the budgeting process

“Need” for BRAC is driven by poor budgeting. The right solution is to budget better, not BRAC

Rep. Robert J. Wittman 2013 (congressman from Virginia) 14 March 2013 “Hearing before the Subcommittee on Readiness of the Committee on Armed Services” House of Representatives “IS BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE (BRAC) APPROPRIATE AT THIS TIME?” <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg80188/html/CHRG-113hhrg80188.htm>

And after reading your opening statements, I understand that one of the principal reasons why the Department requested a BRAC round last year was because of the imbalance between infrastructure and future force structure. This imbalance was caused by reduced force structure levels imposed by the Budget Control Act. Unfortunately, this is a very good example of a poor plan. Whenever budgets drive strategy, poor decisions result, which in this case includes a reduced force structure.

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

1. No excess capacity

Don’t need to cut excess military capacity because there isn’t any

Rep. Robert J. Wittman 2013 (congressman from Virginia) 14 March 2013 “Hearing before the Subcommittee on Readiness of the Committee on Armed Services” House of Representatives “IS BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE (BRAC) APPROPRIATE AT THIS TIME?” <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg80188/html/CHRG-113hhrg80188.htm>

Furthermore, this assertion that a reduction of 100,000 service members is a principal reason to have a BRAC round is shortsighted. I compared the BRAC 2005 force structure numbers to the 2017 future force structure proposed by the Department. While it is true that we will have reduced the Active force structure by 130,000 service members, this is almost completely offset by the increase in civilian personnel of 120,000 over the same time period. Where is the excess infrastructure? I have yet to see any empirical evidence that would provide even the slightest degree of support for another round of BRAC.

SOLVENCY

1. Past experience shows BRAC doesn’t save money

Estimates of money saved by new BRAC are doubtful based on experience with last BRAC in 2005

DEFENSE NEWS 2017 (journalists Aaron Mehta & Joe Gould) 14 Dec 2017 “The new BRAC strategy: capability over cost savings” https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2017/12/14/the-new-brac-strategy-capability-over-cost-savings/

The Pentagon estimates that a new BRAC could close about 22 percent excess capacity for an annual savings of $2 billion or more by 2027. But members of Congress have openly expressed skepticism about that figure, particularly in light of the 2005 BRAC process that saw significantly higher costs than expected.

2005 BRAC savings were greatly overestimated

Christopher T. Mann 2019 (Analyst in Defense Policy and Trade with Congressional Research Service, non-partisan research agency of Congress) 25 Apr 2019 Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC): Background and Issues for Congress https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R45705.pdf

Savings estimates submitted during the 2005 round were overvalued by as much as 67%, according to GAO analysis, with onetime implementation costs rising from $21 to $35.1 billion. GAO found that the $14.1 billion increase was due primarily to the rising cost of new construction associated with subsidiary projects not included in the original BRAC implementation plan.

Last BRAC (2005) was an absolute failure

Rep. Robert J. Wittman 2013 (congressman from Virginia) 14 March 2013 “Hearing before the Subcommittee on Readiness of the Committee on Armed Services” House of Representatives “IS BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE (BRAC) APPROPRIATE AT THIS TIME?” <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg80188/html/CHRG-113hhrg80188.htm> (brackets in original)

As to the BRAC process itself, BRAC 2005 was an absolute failure. Cost estimates to implement BRAC 2005 recommendations have increased from $21 billion to $35 billion, a 66-percent increase. Compared to the commission's reported estimates, GAO [Government Accountability Office] determined that the BRAC 2005 payback would not occur for over 13 years. Even more efficient BRAC initiatives of the 1990s did not pay back until a few years after BRAC implementation was finalized. At a time when there is significant variability in the budget and the ensuing force structure, would a BRAC round be effective in providing rapid savings? Unfortunately, history has emphatically told us, ``no.''

2. Environmental cleanup costs

Base closures require massive environmental cleanup costs, offsetting the expected savings

Col. Stephen Schwalbe 2003. (US Air Force colonel) 10 June 2003 An Exposé on Base Realignment and Closure Commissions https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/ASPJ/journals/Chronicles/schwalbe.pdf

As mentioned earlier, the contamination at most military bases has been the biggest stumbling block to transferring bases to the public and recouping money to defray other military expenses. Virtually all of the contamination at military bases stems from activities that took place before 1980. DoD, therefore, is liable and legally responsible for remedying the contamination to the extent necessary to protect future users and the environment. (And, closing a base does not relieve DoD of its clean-up responsibilities.) It can take DoD many years and billions of dollars to clean up the contamination at all the bases scheduled for closure. The estimates reflect the high cost of studying, excavating, transporting, treating, and disposing of contaminated soil and groundwater. For example, the Air Force Times reported on 14 April 2003 that, after 13 years of clean-up efforts that have cost a total of $500 million, the land at Fort Ord, California, is still not available for civilian use.

3. Last-minute spending to avoid BRAC negates cost savings

Bases at risk of being cut by BRAC suddenly get new spending and improvements to help them avoid BRAC

 Col. Stephen Schwalbe 2003. (US Air Force colonel) 10 June 2003 An Exposé on Base Realignment and Closure Commissions https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/ASPJ/journals/Chronicles/schwalbe.pdf

There are several methods that have been attempted to position a base against closure from changing or adding new missions to the base, to acquiring significant base infrastructure improvements. Whiteman AFB changed from a Minuteman ICBM base to a B-2 bomber base in a key congressional district, and survived all three BRACs of the 1990s. Sorenson observed that, "Since base-closure decisions are usually made partly on the basis of the value of the installation, one logical response is to get new construction that increases the dollar value of the base." DoD has announced the base housing improvements for 2004, and the Air Force bases with the most improvements may be the ones the Air Force is worried about losing in 2005, to include Sheppard and Lackland AFBs in Texas, and Seymour-Johnson AFB in North Carolina.

4. Phantom job cuts

47% the “savings” of BRAC 2005 was from eliminating jobs at closed facilities. But they weren’t eliminated, just transferred! So the savings were “false”

GAO 2005 (Government Accountability Office) July 2005 MILITARY BASES Analysis of DOD’s 2005 Selection Process and Recommendations for Base Closures and Realignments https://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05785.pdf

Also, much of the projected net annual recurring savings (47 percent) are associated with eliminating jobs currently held by military personnel. However, rather than reducing end strength levels, DOD indicates the positions are expected to be reassigned to other areas, which may enhance capabilities but also limit dollar savings available for other uses. Without recognition that these are not dollar savings that can be readily applied elsewhere, this could create a false sense of savings available for other purposes.

5. Extra-topical mandates produce much of the “savings” (things not related to “reducing” military commitments)

**The letter R is key to this debate round. Remember the “R” for Realignment? That’s what actually brings a lot of the savings under BRAC. But all the AFF can do is “Reduce” not Reform or Realign, because that’s all the Resolution allows. Anything beyond “REDUCE” is extra-topical and must be dropped from their plan. But these other extra-topical activities are what produce a lot of the savings they claim in their plan.**

A lot of BRAC savings come from Reform and Realignment, not Reduction. Examples: Creating new fleet readiness centers, reengineering business processes

GAO 2005 (Government Accountability Office) July 2005 MILITARY BASES Analysis of DOD’s 2005 Selection Process and Recommendations for Base Closures and Realignments https://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05785.pdf

Furthermore, about $500 million of the net annual recurring savings is based on business process reengineering efforts, but some of the assumptions supporting the expected efficiency gains have not been validated; while savings are likely to be realized, the precise magnitude of savings is uncertain. For example, one of DOD’s recommendations—to create fleet readiness centers in the Navy by integrating different levels of maintenance to reduce repair time— is estimated to yield $215 million in annual recurring savings as a result of overhead efficiencies, but such assumptions have not been validated and actual savings will be shaped by how the recommendations are implemented. We have previously reported on limitations in DOD’s efforts to track and update savings from prior BRAC rounds. Our concerns over this issue are heightened in this BRAC round, with the emphasis on business process reengineering efforts, because of past tendencies to reduce related operating budgets in advance of actual savings being known and fully realized.

Much of BRAC is about Reform (transformation), not Reduction. Some of it is even building new sites!

GAO 2005 (Government Accountability Office) July 2005 MILITARY BASES Analysis of DOD’s 2005 Selection Process and Recommendations for Base Closures and Realignments https://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05785.pdf

While DOD characterized many of its recommendations as transformational—whereby infrastructure would be aligned with the defense strategy—we found that the concept of transformation is not well defined, and many of the recommendations referencing it as support for the proposed BRAC actions are more appropriately categorized as efforts to improve business processes. Some proposed actions increase emphasis on jointness, such as establishing a single site for initial training for the Joint Strike Fighter aircraft.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Reduced Combat Readiness

Link: BRAC would be too expensive, and would take money away from military readiness & modernization

DEFENSE NEWS 2017 (journalists Aaron Mehta & Joe Gould) 14 Dec 2017 “The new BRAC strategy: capability over cost savings” https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2017/12/14/the-new-brac-strategy-capability-over-cost-savings/

Sen. Jim Inhofe, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee’s Readiness and Management Support Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over base closures, said he saw no way a BRAC would not be prohibitively expensive in the first three years of the process, money he would rather see go to readiness and modernization. “We absolutely have to have every dollar right now for survival,” said Inhofe, R-Okla. “It’s not that I have five installations in Oklahoma I’m trying to protect. Now, we’re in a crisis; now’s not the time to do this.”

Impact: Loss of military readiness = lost wars and lost men

Mark Cancian & Seamus Daniels 2018 (Cancian – Senior Advisor, International Security Program, Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS). Daniels – Associate Fellow and Assoc. Director, Defense Budget Analysis, CSIS) 18 Apr 2018 “The State of Military Readiness: Is There a Crisis?” https://www.csis.org/analysis/state-military-readiness-there-crisis

 Readiness is important because it increases the chances that forces will be successful in conflicts. Although many factors determine success on the battlefield—leadership, tactics, sophistication of equipment, and numbers—history clearly shows that high readiness forces are more likely to be successful. A classic example of readiness risk is Task Force Smith, which was deployed from Japan to Korea in June 1950 to stem the North Korean invasion of the south. Occupation forces in Japan had been maintained at a very low level of readiness. The assumption had been that another conflict would be preceded by a long period of mobilization such as had occurred in World War II. Task Force Smith, poorly trained and hastily thrown together, was badly defeated. Its experience showed that future wars might be “come as you are” and that forces needed to be kept at higher readiness levels in peacetime than had been the case earlier in U.S. history.

Impact: BRAC = increased likelihood of service members not coming home from combat

Rep. Robert J. Wittman 2013 (congressman from Virginia) 14 March 2013 “Hearing before the Subcommittee on Readiness of the Committee on Armed Services” House of Representatives “IS BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE (BRAC) APPROPRIATE AT THIS TIME?” <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg80188/html/CHRG-113hhrg80188.htm>

I categorically reject this notion that presumes to balance the Federal budget on the backs of our service members. Having budget decisions driven by strategy is both immoral, and only increases the likelihood of service men and women not returning from future combat. I believe that the Department of Defense needs a robust military capacity, and that any diminution of this capacity should be staunchly opposed.

2. Water contamination and cancer

Link: All the AFF can do is “REDUCE.” They can’t initiate any new programs or spending

Anything beyond “REDUCING” the military is extra-topical, and the Affirmative has no right to claim their plan will do it. But here’s the problem with that…

Link & Impact: BRAC requires hundreds of millions of dollars in new spending to fix contaminated water that causes health problems and cancer. After past BRAC projects were done, they discovered all kinds of environmental problems…

Rachel Cohen 2019 (senior editor) 1 May 2019 “Final BRAC Property Transfers Delayed at Least Six Years” AIR FORCE MAGAZINE <https://www.airforcemag.com/final-brac-property-transfers-delayed-at-least-six-years/> (quote markings added; first brackets (PFAS…) in original; second brackets (Assistant…) added)

Looking forward, the Air Force says it needs $54 million to cover BRAC-related work in fiscal 2020. The remaining 2 percent of property transfer projects are spread across six bases. Of the 40 bases affected by BRAC, 35 of those still need some combination of property transfer and environmental restoration work. But now the BRAC program has to shift additional dollars to deal with water contaminants like perfluorooctane sulfonate and perfluorooctanoic acid, known as PFAS and PFOA. Many of the Air Force’s 13,200 environmental restoration projects at current and former installations focus on “emerging contaminants,” to include PFAS and PFOA, according to the testimony. The substances, shown to [cause adverse health effects](https://www.airforcemag.com/debate-continues-over-safety-of-usafs-firefighting-foam/) including cancer, are found in firefighting foam previously used by the Air Force that has since seeped into groundwater around the country. [**END QUOTE]** “From fiscal years 2013 to 2018, the BRAC program originally budgeted $64.9 million for [PFAS- and PFOA-]related requirements,” Henderson said. “However, due to additional requirements to protect public health and drinking water, we have to date spent $129.9 million in BRAC funds for PFOS and PFOA identification, investigation, and remediation.” Of that total, the service pulled $65 million from other environmental projects. [**SHE GOES ON TO WRITE QUOTE**:] [Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for installations, environment, and energy, John] Henderson also told lawmakers the service has spent about $300 million to remediate PFAS and PFOA over the last few years and wants $303 million in fiscal 2020 alone to continue the effort, which he said will take a whole-of-government approach.