



BRAC Commission

AUG 18 2005

Received

August 17, 2005

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman
Base Realignment and Closure Commission
2521 Clark Street, Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Chairman Principi and Commissioners:

We are enclosing for your review a letter from retired Air Force General Mike Loh, who testified on behalf of Ellsworth Air Force Base at a regional hearing in Rapid City, South Dakota. His letter summarizes the arguments he made at the hearing, as well as subsequent communications with Commissioners and Commission staff.

We would appreciate your careful review and consideration of the points made by General Loh in his letter, and the other information we have submitted on behalf of Ellsworth. Thank you for your consideration, and for your service to our country.

Respectfully yours,

Tim Johnson
United States Senator

Stephanie Herseth
United States Representative

John Thune
United States Senator

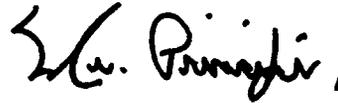
M. Michael Rounds
Governor

John Michael Loh
General, USAF Retired
125 Captaine Graves
Williamsburg, Virginia 23185

August 16, 2005

Chairman Anthony Principi and Members of the Commission
Base Realignment and Closure Commission
2521 South Clarke Street
Arlington VA 22202

Dear Chairman Principi and Members of the Commission,



As a follow-up to my sworn testimony of June 21 at Rapid City, I write to provide you with a succinct summary of my logic and set of arguments supporting the retention of Ellsworth AFB and its B-1 bombers. Following my testimony and after hearing the responses from the Pentagon in response to your questions, I am even more convinced that you should retain Ellsworth.

Please recall that as Commander, Air Combat Command, I commanded all of the Air Force's combat aircraft including the B-1 and other bombers.

Also, I am no stranger to the base closing process. As a result of previous BRACs from 1991 until my retirement in 1995, I personally closed 13 major operational bases in Air Combat Command (George AFB, Bergstrom AFB, March AFB, England AFB, Homestead AFB, Myrtle Beach AFB, Griffiss AFB, Carswell AFB, Eaker AFB, K.I. Sawyer AFB, Wurtsmith AFB, Loring AFB and Castle AFB.) I also oversaw the realignment of several other Air Combat Command bases. I can think of no other Air Force officer, active or retired, that has more experience in this business than I.

Also, as I stated in my sworn testimony and as is still true today, I accept no compensation whatsoever for this work to keep Ellsworth open. I do it because I consider it my duty and essential for our national security. I cannot stand by and let this misguided Pentagon recommendation go unanswered.

Here are my major arguments and supporting rationale:

Military Value of the B-1/Ellsworth Combination. Today and for the foreseeable future, the fleet of 67 B-1 bombers is the backbone of the Air Force's combat power. The B-1 dominated the combat action in both Afghanistan and Iraq delivering more weapons than any other aircraft. Emerging threats in the Western Pacific and Middle East demand that we not uproot the B-1 force and risk severe degradation of combat readiness by moving all of them to one location. The QDR currently underway in DoD will likely validate threat scenarios in the Western Pacific and East Asia that will place an even greater value on the B-1's long range and high payloads. The upheaval of the B-1 force alone will cause extreme and immediate turmoil for several years, and continuing readiness problems thereafter.

Unacceptable Congestion and Overcrowding at Dyess. Sixty seven B-1 bombers at one base is unworkable and will result in the loss of operational readiness, overcrowding of facilities such as hospitals, housing and schools, and reduction in the morale and quality of life for Air Force members and dependents.

The guiding principle for decades in the Air Force for the right size of a bomber base is a maximum of 36 bombers. The nominal number per base is 24 bombers. Twenty Four to thirty bombers are the functional equivalent of 54-72 fighters. Therefore putting 67 bombers at one base is like putting 2 ½ fighter wings, 140-180 fighters, at one base. The mission will suffer greatly. Consolidation may be good in theory, but overconsolidation, the situation here, is misguided.

The Air Force provided a misleading answer to the Commission's question about consolidating all B-1s at one base. The Air Force said consolidating B-1s is no different than having all B-2s, E-8 JSTARS, E-3 AWACS, U-2s, RC-135 Rivet Joints, and F-117s at one base. But, the numbers are very different. Here are the numbers of aircraft in those fleets:

B-2 – 21 aircraft; E-8 JSTARS – 17 aircraft; E-3 AWACS – 32 aircraft; U-2 – 33 aircraft; RC-135 Rivet Joints – 21 aircraft; and F-117 Stealth Fighter – 55 aircraft.

None of these is even half the size of the B-1 fleet of 67 aircraft except the F-117. But the F-117 is a fighter and 55 fighters is a nominal size for a fighter wing. However, 67 long range B-1 bombers at one base is unprecedented and a formula for failure.

Loss of Operational Readiness. The condition I describe above is bound to cause a loss of combat readiness, aggravated in the short term by the move from Ellsworth, but extending for the long term because of saturated working conditions for operations, maintenance, supply, transportation, base services and munitions handling and storage. The B-1 has four engines, four crew members and a robust set of missions that require a larger number of people per assigned aircraft than any other combat weapon system. The overcrowding at Dyess is too risky a step to take for this front-line bomber.

Encroachment. In my opinion, the Pentagon failed in its assessment of Ellsworth in the criterion regarding present and future encroachment. In my book, Ellsworth ranks number one of all Air Force bases in terms of its resistance to encroachment on the ground and in the air particularly when looking 40-50 years ahead as the Air Force should. Ellsworth enjoys a sparse operating environment, mostly over federal BLM land where encroachment and complaints from citizens is minimal and will be for generations to come. Ellsworth can accept new, future missions and still be free from encroachment or any operating restrictions. Closing Ellsworth will forever deny the Pentagon the use of a base from which it can operate any type of aircraft, subsonic, supersonic, hypersonic for as far as the eye can see. It would be unconscionable to close it.

Endless Range Problems at Dyess. Even absent the current operating restrictions at the Dyess ranges, doubling the number of B-1s operating in the ranges in west Texas will degrade readiness because of range saturation. At the time of my

testimony, I was not aware of the operating restrictions in the ranges used by Dyess's B-1s that currently impose a significant impact to operational readiness according to sworn testimony of the Air Force.

Active lawsuits by farmers and ranchers are causing these operating limitations that further weaken the readiness of the Dyess B-1 crews. Now, doubling the number of B-1s will likely incur more legal action because the plaintiffs there feel empowered to take action as the number of B-1 flights doubles. This situation will only make operations from Dyess worse. Dyess's neighbors are not friendly to the Air Force and B-1 operations, and this situation will only get worse. The Air Force can expect endless litigation and more operating restrictions at Dyess.

Contrast that unfriendly environment with the situation around Ellsworth. As I wrote above, the Ellsworth environment is unencroached and its ranges are largely over federal BLM land. There is no litigation or serious noise complaints in South Dakota and Montana where Ellsworth's B-1s fly. Ellsworth has friendly neighbors and, because of the remoteness of the flying areas, those areas are likely to remain friendly for many decades.

Projected Cost Savings are Illusory and Likely Unattainable. The Pentagon projects cost savings of about \$90 million per year by closing Ellsworth. Apparently, between the GAO and the Air Force, this number has already been reduced considerably. But, even so, my experience with DoD cost projections tells me that the projected savings are extremely optimistic and somehow never materialize, for several reasons.

The two biggest estimating errors in base closure numbers are the cost to close the existing base, and the cost to provide facilities for the gaining base.

Base closure costs are always underestimated. That's because the DoD invariably understates the cost of environmental restoration and the cost of unforeseen problems like unexploded ordnance, dangerous materials in weapon storage areas and remediation of hazardous materials. Many of these costs emerge later and become unprogrammed expenses in current year budgets. I have many examples based on my personal experience in closing 13 bases. I do not believe we ever met the projected DoD cost savings for closure.

Secondly, and more startling, the cost of building the infrastructure for the gaining base is always underestimated by wide margins. Why? Well, the Air Force believes that minimal modifications to existing facilities are all that's required to beddown the new aircraft. In actuality, and based on my own in-depth personal experience, what really happens is that an entire new base infrastructure is funded and approved through the Military Construction process. When it's all said and done, the cost to move Ellsworth's B-1s to Dyess will far exceed the number in the Pentagon's BRAC Report. I know. I've seen it happen over and over again.

So, I look at these cost savings with great skepticism. I seriously doubt there will be any net savings from closing Ellsworth. And that means the Pentagon is causing all this turmoil and risk to our national security in its zeal to meet a meaningless base closure goal. That is irresponsible.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission, I have served as the senior commander of bomber operations for our nation. I sincerely feel that this massive movement of half our B-1s, the most productive bomber we have, to a single base, given all the real world issues I describe here, and based on my personal and professional experience, is misguided, risky, costly and will be injurious to our national security.

I urge you, once again, to retain Ellsworth AFB as a model B-1 base, capable of additional missions, unencroached as far as the eye can see, and essential for our nation's defense preparedness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Michael Loh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being the most prominent.

John Michael Loh
General, USAF Retired
Air Force Vice Chief of Staff, 1990-1991
Commander, Tactical Air Command, 1991-1992
Commander, Air Combat Command, 1992-1995