

BRAC 2005: THE LOOMING GEORGIA STORM

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A storm is looming over Georgia's economic horizon that could have severe consequences for the state's residents. The U.S. military will undergo an intense review process in 2005. In January, each facility will evaluate its operations, conditions and economic impact to the local surrounding area. In February, with the input of these evaluations, the Pentagon will decide on the future size and composition of the military. In March, the President will appoint a nine-member committee, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC), to review the Pentagon's plan, compare it to the military's current infrastructure and make recommendations as to whether certain facilities should close, merge with others, other continue operations as usual. These recommendations will be released in May 2005 and taken to the President in September 2005, who will then approve or veto the entire recommendation.

So what could BRAC 2005 mean for Georgia?

History

BRAC was originally created in the 1960's to address cost issues in a post-World War II environment. During the war, the military significantly expanded in size, both in terms of personnel and facilities. When acute global threats abated in the early 1960's, the military's size was deemed unnecessary and a

commission was established to decide the elimination or realignment of certain under-used facilities.

In the post-Cold War era, there have been four BRAC rounds: 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1998. The actions of these previous rounds closed 97 bases, realigned 55 bases, and resulted in a savings of \$55 billion by 2001. Georgia's facilities have remained largely unscathed. The only recommendation occurred at Fort McPherson, south of Atlanta, which was realigned in the first 1988 BRAC round.

Post-9/11

Even though the military reduced its personnel by 25% throughout the 1990's, few of its facilities were reduced to reflect the military's smaller size. Today, the military operates 120 major facilities in the U.S. In the post-9/11 era, security for government facilities is costlier than ever. Additionally, many buildings constructed in the late 1940's and 1950's have started to decay and are increasingly expensive to maintain. Through BRAC 2005, the military hopes to save an additional \$6.5 billion by 2011 by closing 50 major installations which are underutilized and a drain on the government's budget.

The upside to BRAC's recommendations is a reduction in the federal deficit. The downside is that the bases that close will undoubt-

edly severely impact the surrounding economy in the short-term.

The Military in Georgia

In fiscal year 2002, Georgia received \$5.8 billion in defense contracts, making Georgia the 7th largest state for defense spending. In Georgia, there are 132,000 people employed by the military and 127 military facilities, five of which are large in size, two are medium and 120 locations are considered small. The estimated economic impact of the military for the state is \$22 billion.

Political Clout

Over the last fifteen years since the first round of BRAC, Georgia has had strong representatives in the federal government who have been instrumental in making sure that Georgia's facilities stay off the recommendation list. In the 1990's, these representatives included Senator Sam Nunn, who chaired the Senate Armed Services Committee and Representative Newt Gingrich, who served as Speaker of the House from 1995 to 1999. In 2004, Georgia's most important representatives in Washington include Senator Saxby Chambliss, who sits on the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Jack Kingston, the fifth-ranking Republican in the House of Representatives.

Recent Military Decisions

Over the past six months, a few military announcements have been made which could affect whether or not a particular facility will end up on the recommendation list.

In Columbus, the military announced in July 2004 that an additional brigade of 3,800 soldiers will be added to Fort Benning by September 2005. When these soldiers are finally transferred, they will bring their families with them, adding a total of 10,000 people to Columbus' population.

In Augusta, the military announced in September that Fort Gordon will receive \$230 million for a project to expand intelligence operations. Beginning in 2006, the project will take six years to complete and will eventually add 500-750 new jobs to the area.

In St. Mary's, a small city south of Savannah on the Florida border, residents have just

learned that the King's Bay Naval Submarine Base will lose half of its fleet of ten Trident nuclear submarines by late 2005. Each submarine has a payroll of \$16 million and employs 330 people, all of whom will now be stationed elsewhere. The rapid downsizing of its fleet increases the chances that this base will end up on the recommendation list.

Potential Short List?

While all facilities will be scrutinized, there are several that have a higher chance of being targeted. This is an unofficial list:

Fort McPherson/Gillem - Atlanta

McPherson is an old, tiny base in Atlanta which is mostly a golf course with three headquarter units.

Navy Supply Corps School -Athens

This is a small base in Athens and, in general, an odd location for the Navy because it is hours away from open water.

Marine Corps Logistics Base - Albany

This Korean war-era base is far from any major air or seaport, and far from any Marine units. As a result, the Corps built a seaport logistics facility at Blount Island near Jacksonville, Florida in the 1980s.

Conclusion

Georgia has several factors running against it. First of all, Georgia has fewer powerful figures in Washington than in the 1990's. Secondly, Georgia has never had a major base closing in the four previous BRAC rounds and many politicians may think that it is Georgia's turn to bear the burden. Thirdly, several bases in Georgia are no longer as efficient or logistically practical as they used to be. BRAC, therefore, may not bring down Georgia's entire military operations, it will most likely have a harsh impact on a couple area.

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