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MEMO

June 15, 2005

This memo is preliminary in nature and subject to revision and review. Any views expressed are not necessarily those of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston or the Federal Reserve System.

To: Internal Request, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
From: Antoniya Owens, Research Assistant
Re: **Recent Developments in the Military Base Closing Process**

As expected, the Pentagon's recommendations to close or realign major military facilities have generated widespread protests across New England from lawmakers and affected residents alike. On May 20, Senator Edward M. Kennedy led a delegation of local civic leaders and legislators on a tour of the Otis Air National Guard Base on Cape Cod to express their support for the key base, from which F-15 fighters took off to try to intercept the hijacked planes on 9/11. On June 1st, in Maine, several thousand supporters of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard organized a rally to protest the shipyard's targeted closing.

Several measures aimed at slowing down the process were introduced in Congress and the Senate. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-Conn., was among the primary sponsors of a proposed amendment that would have effectively delayed the base closures for two years. On May 25, the amendment was voted down by 317-111. Two similar proposals were also defeated in the House Armed Services Committee. On the same day, Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, introduced legislation, still pending, to delay the closings as long as the Pentagon delays the disclosure of detailed information about how the base restructuring decisions were made.

The Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission, a panel of nine members in charge of reviewing the Pentagon's recommendations, has already visited some of the major bases slated for closure or realignment. Eventually, at least two or three commissioners will have visited each affected major base, accompanied by a staff of 90 and preceded by an analyst in charge of compiling detailed information on each site's staffing and military functions.

Two weeks ago, a group of four commissioners, including Chairman Anthony Principi, toured the major bases in New England. They visited the Naval Submarine Base New London in Groton, CT, and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, ME, on June 1st, and the Naval Air Station in Brunswick, ME, on June 2nd. The general sentiment among base advocates has been positive as they believe they presented their case convincingly to the panel. According to local officials, the commissioners seemed well-informed, asked pointed and aggressive questions, and were committed to carrying out their own



comprehensive analysis, rather than simply “rubber-stamping” the Defense Department’s recommendations. This analysis is very time-constrained as the commission’s final report is due on September 8, 2005. This gives the panel less than four months to complete its work, compared with six or more months in previous base-closing rounds.

One factor that has made the process more challenging for local officials has been the Defense Department’s delay in disclosing information. The Pentagon has been much slower in releasing data this year, citing security concerns about the vast nationwide database of 25 million pieces of information. Officials have complained that the lack of data is significantly hindering their ability to build their case. In early June, the Pentagon finally released some information, which included meeting minutes and reports on economic and environmental impact and community infrastructure. It also revealed plans to close the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard by 2008, four years earlier than the generally expected deadline of 2012. Most of the released data is classified and available only to those with security clearances at a secure facility in Northern Virginia.

Gordon England, the acting Deputy Secretary of Defense, claims the military has provided all documents required by law. Other Pentagon officials add that they have already released more material than during any previous closing rounds. Base supporters argue that still more information is needed, particularly on how the military reached specific conclusions on which facilities to close or realign. Cost comparisons of several bases were released but were classified and cannot be used in the upcoming public hearings.

On June 8, Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., authorized a subpoena to force the Defense Department to release all documents related to the base closing decisions, further exacerbating the confrontation with the Pentagon over how much to share with the public. Collins set a deadline of Monday, June 13, for the handover of the documents. The deadline was later extended to Friday, June 17th. Meanwhile, Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, has threatened to ask a federal court to stop the base closing process, arguing that by not releasing relevant information, the Pentagon is violating BRAC law.

The base closing round is, however, most likely to continue without delays. The Defense Department is planning to conduct public hearings in late June and July. The public hearings are more structured events that provide base supporters with a formal opportunity to present their case to the BRAC commissioners. The hearings on all affected New England bases are scheduled to take place in Boston on July 6, 2005. Judging by past experiences, the hearings are likely to have very limited impact on the final outcome. In the past four base closure rounds – in 1988, 1991, 1993, and 1995 – the BRAC commission ultimately changed only between 10 and 15 percent of the Pentagon’s recommendations.



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