



## Defense experts call on Congress to allow military base closures

Rebecca Kheel

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Forty-five leading defense experts, think tank leaders and advocacy group officials are calling on Congress to allow the Pentagon to close excess military bases.

“The time to act is now,” they wrote in an [open letter](#) to the House and Senate Armed Services committees released Monday. “Congress should grant our military the authority to eliminate waste and ensure that vital defense resources flow to where they are most needed.”

The letter was organized by Chris Preble, vice president of defense and foreign policy studies at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute. The letter was signed by experts from across the political spectrum.

The Trump administration has requested that Congress authorize the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) procedure, saying the Pentagon has about 20 percent excess infrastructure capacity. A BRAC round could save an estimated \$2 billion by 2027, the administration says.

Last week during hearings on the budget, Defense Secretary James Mattis argued for BRAC by showing that the money saved could be put into new hardware.

“Over a five-year period, that would be enough to buy 300 Apache attack helicopters, 120 F-18s Super Hornets or four Virginia-class submarines,” he said.

But Pentagon leaders have for years requested a new round of BRAC as a way to save money, while Congress has repeatedly prohibited it in defense policy and spending bills.

Lawmakers worry about the economic effects of the closures on their communities, as well as the upfront costs of a BRAC round outweighing future savings.

In their letter, the defense experts sought to rebut both arguments.

The experts said keeping unneeded or underused facilities open does more harm to communities than BRAC. They cited a letter last year from Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work that said that, in the absence of BRAC, the Pentagon is making cuts at all installations.

“Without BRAC, local communities' ability to plan and adapt to these changes is less robust and offers fewer protections than under BRAC law,” Work wrote in the letter.

On the second point, the experts said savings from BRAC start almost immediately, despite the upfront costs. The 1990 BRAC saw savings in the first year, as did the 1992 BRAC.

“Today, the first four BRAC rounds together are producing annual recurring savings of around \$7 billion,” the experts wrote. “Even the much-criticized 2005 BRAC — which focused mostly on realignment of functions at existing facilities, and closed far fewer bases than in preceding rounds — is producing nearly \$5 billion in annual savings.”

As Congress blocks BRAC, the military has been forced to cut training and equipment to maintain unneeded or unwanted facilities, the experts concluded.

“BRAC has proven to be a fair and efficient process for making the difficult but necessary decisions related to the configuration of our military’s infrastructure,” the wrote. “In the absence of a BRAC, defense communities are hurting. Although members of Congress have blocked base closures with the intent of helping these communities, they are actually making the problem worse.”