



Dozens of think tankers join DoD in push for BRAC

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As the Defense Department makes its plea to Congress to shut down unneeded bases in 2021, dozens of defense experts are lobbying for the cause.

“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. 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. The time to act is now. Congress should grant our military the authority to eliminate waste, and ensure that vital defense resources flow to where they are most needed,” the [June 19 letter](#) stated.

The letter was signed by a bipartisan coalition of think tankers, including members of the Project on Government Oversight, National Taxpayers Union, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the American Enterprise Institute, the Center for a New American Security, the Atlantic Council and the Bipartisan Policy Center.

DoD has been asking for another round of BRAC for years and this year isn’t any different. DoD’s 2018 budget request asks Congress to give the department the authority to begin looking at BRAC for 2021.

“If the Congress were to authorize BRAC in the ’18 [defense] authorization bill, upon enactment we would begin organizing and start conducting the analysis. It’s an extraordinarily comprehensive and frankly difficult analysis to conduct and I know that from experience,” Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations and Environment Peter Potochney told Congress this month. “It would lead to recommendations that the Secretary of Defense would provide to the commission in April of 2021. So we would have a robust amount of time to do this extensive and frankly exhaustive work.”

A 2016 [report](#) from the Pentagon stated DoD is paying to maintain 22 percent more military base infrastructure than it can put to practical use. DoD thinks it can save \$2 billion a year by closing and consolidating bases.

“As Department of Defense leadership has repeatedly testified, spending resources on excess infrastructure does not make sense,” Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work wrote in a memo accompanying the report. “We urge Congress to provide the department with authorization for another round of base realignment and closure.”

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DoD sent legislative proposals for the 2018 defense authorization bill to Congress last week. In the package was a more than 60 page request outlining how a new round of BRAC would work.

The basic timeline requires DoD to create a force structure plan with the probable end strength levels and major military units needed to meet threats. DoD will provide a description of the infrastructure needed to accommodate the force, an economic analysis of the effect of the closure or reassignment of bases and a complete list of military installations.

The DoD comptroller will evaluate the plans and the need for closures.

The Pentagon will decide what installations will be closed based on mission requirements, the effect on readiness and the condition of the land. Other things taken into consideration are the ability of the installation to accommodate contingency, surge or mobilization requirements and the cost of operations and manpower.

A commission would convene in 2021 to decide what installations should be closed and then the President would review and approve the closures.

Chris Preble, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute and one of the signers of the letter told Federal News Radio BRAC is becoming more likely.

Opposition to BRAC “is weakening for a couple reasons. One, the Pentagon is quite insistent that they do have excess capacity,” Preble said. “Even if President Trump gets his wish of dramatically increasing military spending, it’s still not entirely clear where some of that money will come from, but he says some of the additional funding will come from waste. A key aspect of waste inside the Pentagon budget is excess overhead.”

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“The department is not happy with what happened in the 2005 BRAC round in terms of cost take-out. We rebalanced the force in some useful ways, but we think a future BRAC round would have much different financial ramifications,” Jamie Morin, then-director of cost assessment and program evaluation, said last year. “We just need to move forward on this to enable a whole bunch of cost takeout to drive more combat capability out of each taxpayer dollar.”

A few members of Congress already stepped forward with their support for another BRAC round. House Armed Services Committee Ranking Member Adam Smith (D-Wash.) introduced a BRAC bill earlier this year for a 2019 round.

“We should not be wasting hard-earned taxpayer money to maintain excess infrastructure that DoD has determined it does not need,” Smith said in a statement.

Smith's bill strengthens the role of Congress in the next BRAC round. Unlike in previous rounds, in which a list of proposed base closures was prepared by an independent commission, based on DoD recommendations, and then presented to lawmakers as a single take-it-or-leave-it package, the Smith-proposed 2019 round would give lawmakers an additional opportunity to stop the BRAC process if they disagreed with DoD's going-in assessments of how much infrastructure it needs to support future force levels.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain (R-Ariz.) is also in favor of BRAC. McCain said Congress showed "cowardice" for its inability to work on BRAC, and the committee's ranking member Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) said he is considering BRAC as well.