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Military value will be the focus for the final selection criteria to be used in the 2005 round of base realignment and closures.

That value represents the ability of the installation to contribute to DoD future mission capabilities and operational readiness, said Philip Grone, principal assistant deputy undersecretary of defense for installations and environment, in an interview with American Forces Radio and Television Service Feb. 26. In fact, four of the eight guiding principles are centered on military value.

The final selection criteria are also based on factors such as potential costs and savings, community support and environmental considerations, Grone said. However, he added, "ultimately, the secretary must base his recommendations principally on how it contributes to our current and future mission capabilities, how it contributes to military value, how it supports the force."

The selection criteria for the upcoming BRAC round were finalized and published Feb. 12 in the Federal Register, a publication that fulfills the legal requirements to publish items such as proposed rules and notices, among other documents, for public comment.

Grone said Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld approved the final selection criteria after an earlier public comment period for the draft version. The BRAC timetable also called for sending the draft and final criteria to defense congressional committees. Congress has 30 days to carry out any disapproval action on the criteria.

More review work continues in coming months on items such as a force structure plan and infrastructure inventory. The secretary makes final recommendations on base realignment and closures to an independent commission in May 2005.

The commission's nine members will review the secretary's BRAC recommendations before making their own recommendations to the president by September 2005. The president then either approves or rejects the commission's recommendation before sending them to Congress in November 2005. Congress has 45 legislative days to enact a joint resolution rejecting the recommendations or they become binding.

While the mechanics of the basic BRAC process are similar to prior rounds, Grone pointed out that the department's emphasis on transformational options and a "capabilities-based" approach is a significant change. "BRAC can make a profound contribution to our defense posture by realigning our infrastructure to support the new defense strategy," he explained.

And equally important, he added, emphasis will be placed on joint utilization for functions and facilities, as well as converting what he called "waste to warfighting."

"We have facilities that we no longer require that are costing us millions or billions of dollars to maintain over their useful life. Those facilities are not adequate to the mission; we don't need them. Those resources that are devoted to facilities we do not need, need to be converted to warfighting capabilities," he said.

In addition to eliminating waste at bases in the United States, Grone said the department will also look at overseas assets through a global posture review. "The important part about the global review is to look at all of our infrastructure and to look carefully at how they are positioned to support the mission, and to assess whether or not we can make changes -- not just where the wars of the 20th century ended, but where we need to realign and re-position our assets to deter, or where necessary, defeat any potential adversary in the 21st century," he explained.

Meanwhile, Grone said BRAC has become a "key component" of the secretary's transformation initiatives to realign the department's warfighting capability. He said the department's transformation will not be the best possible "unless we have the infrastructure in the right place to support the missions where they need to be. ... We can only accomplish that through a comprehensive base closure and realignment effort."

Although he emphasized there are no specific goals on the number of bases the department plans to close, he indicated past studies have estimated there to be roughly a 23 percent excess capacity across DoD. However, he said, "That doesn't translate into a number of bases that we might close or realign.

"There are no lists of bases to close, we have no specific targets," he explained. "And the reason we don't have specific targets is because it is important for us to put all of our transformational options on the table and not be constrained to an artificial number that we must close a given number of bases."

Grone said that installations affected by a closure and realignment recommendation must begin to implement the closure or realignment within the first two years in which the recommendation becomes law. All closure and realignment activity must be completed within a six-year window, he said.

"So it is a phased approach, but we want to get on with it aggressively because we want to do what we can to get the missions where they need to be to support force and business transformation of the department."

Related Web Site: Base Realignment and Closure [<http://www.dod.mil/brac>]