

Broad coalition agrees: military base closures long overdue

Cato Spearheads Efforts on Base Closures

Congress has not authorized a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process for 13 years, despite the fact that multiple secretaries of defense have asked for congressional authority to eliminate unnecessary military bases. The most recent Pentagon estimates conclude that the Department of Defense has 19 percent excess capacity, meaning that roughly one in every five facilities are either wholly unnecessary or certain activities could be consolidated into other facilities. This is not only wasteful of American tax dollars, but also it hinders the military's ability to move its resources to where they are actually needed. As Secretary James Mattis recently stated, "Every unnecessary facility we maintain requires us to cut capabilities elsewhere. I must be able to eliminate excess infrastructure in order to shift resources to readiness and modernization."

The Cato Institute is leading the way on efforts to bring BRAC to the forefront of foreign policy debates. Cato's Christopher Preble has been studying the economics of base closures



REP. ADAM SMITH (D-WA) (left) and Cato's CHRIS PREBLE discuss the need to close unnecessary military bases.

around the country for several years and has written extensively on the benefits of BRAC. Last year, Preble and the Cato foreign policy team began a concerted effort to increase awareness on the issue, starting with a policy breakfast with representatives from the major stakeholders: the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, the U.S. military, the Association of

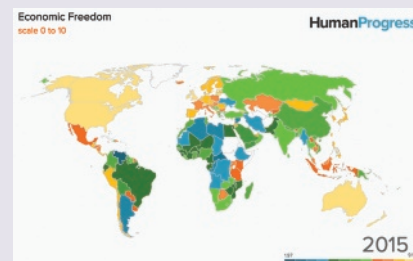
Defense Communities, former BRAC officials, and think tank scholars.

This meeting led to a coalition letter spearheaded by Preble and signed by over 45 experts from over 30 organizations from across the political spectrum, including former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, which urged Congress to authorize a new BRAC round. The letter, released publicly in June of last year, explained that, while closing a military base may be temporarily painful for surrounding communities, these communities often adapt and recover, and the majority ultimately benefit from the opportunity to diversify their economies away from their heavy reliance on the federal government. Thanks to Congress's repeated efforts to block closures, the letter warns, "the military has been forced to allocate resources away from the training and equipping of our soldiers, and toward maintaining unneeded and unwanted infrastructure. . . . Meanwhile, many tens of billions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted."

In March, Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee and frequent proponent of BRAC, came to Cato for an event with Preble to discuss the future of BRAC. He warned that as things stand, the military is "hamstrung" in its ability to move assets, making it very difficult to function wisely or efficiently. Preble and Smith also coauthored an article on the topic in the journal *Strategic Studies Quarterly*. Their article provides an extensive overview of the issue, and features two case studies from Preble's research. ■

Cato News Notes

THE NEW HUMANPROGRESS.ORG



HumanProgress.org, Cato's project to document the improving state of the world with data, charts, and maps, unveiled its new design in March. It features a more intuitive interface and modern design that make it easier than ever for scholars, students, and members of the public to explore the site's wealth of data and articles on how the world is getting better.

CATO LEADS FIGHT ON QUALIFIED IMMUNITY



In April, *Washington Post* columnist George F. Will cited the Cato Institute's new project opposing the doctrine of qualified immunity during an appearance on *Meet the Press*. "There should be a national discussion—and it's going to be one led by the Cato Institute—about qualified immunity for public officials, including policemen," said Will.