

The realignment and closure of military bases in the United States: Understanding the decision making process (1960-1990).

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1 Introduction^{1 2}

Recognizing the lack of studies which take into account defense policy and political institutions, and considering defense policy as a public policy³, this article seeks to understand the decision making process regarding the realignment and closure of military bases⁴ in the United States from the 1960s to the early 1990s.^{5 6} The study is particularly interested in investigating how actors such as the President, the Department of Defense (DoD) and Congress interact to make decisions that will have a varied impact on two levels or dimensions: the district or local level, which includes several people and groups located in states or communities which have had their bases closed; and the national level, where concerns related to national security and balanced public spending take place.

With regard to the closure of bases, national interests (or interests belonging to the federal level) and local interests are clearly in conflict (BLECHMAN, 1990; SORENSON, 1998), as also tend to be oppose the interests of the Executive (more specifically, the President and the DoD) and the interests of Congress. In general terms, the President sees the BRAC process as an opportunity to cut public spending and eventually improve national

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² I would like to thank professor Dr. Fátima Anastasia (UFMG), professor Dr. Eugenio Diniz (PUC-Minas) and professor Mário Fuks (UFMG) for their valuable comments to an earlier version of this paper.

³ Much has been discussed regarding the singularity of defense policy (or of national security, in a broader sense) in relation to other policies such as health, education, housing, etc. This discussion is attributed, according to the proponents of such singularity, to the fact that the policies related to defense have as their main objective the survival and security of the state. Insofar it makes the state less vulnerable to external threats, defense policy is considered, within the realism strand of International Relations, as “*high politics*”. It is not the scope of this article to discuss the validity of such argument. This work considers defense policy as a public policy, defined by Lynn as a combination of government actions that produce specific effects, or in Laswell’s terms for whom the decisions and analyses about public policy are related to the following questions: who wins what, why and what difference it makes (SOUZA, 2007). It is also worth noting that the deliberations concerning the closure and realignment of bases falls within what Sartori (1994) calls collective decisions and are, therefore, “political,” in the sense that they apply to and are imposed upon a collective group. Hence, they have considerable reach, independent of being decisions made by an individual, a group or majority. In essence, these are sovereign decisions (having the capacity of superior to any other power); inescapable (extending itself to the limits which territorially define citizenship) and sanctionable (for being sustained by a legal monopoly of force).

⁴ The closure of a base involves the end of all installations, while realignment consists of the reallocation of the functions and staff to another base, so that the former does not become completely inoperable.

⁵ In future studies, I intend to analyze the four rounds of closure and realignment of bases that occurred with the creation of the BRAC Commission of 1990. However, here my objective is to understand the initial efforts regarding the institutionalization of the decision making process involving this issue, which culminated with the creation of the BRAC Commission.

⁶ It should be noted that the process analyzed in this article only refers to military bases located within United States territory. In other words, the study will not be considering the closure of American bases located in other countries. The process of institutionalization associated with the latter is more recent and involves elements external to the American political system such as the relationship of Washington with the governments of the countries where the bases are installed. It is also worth mentioning that the Commission on the Overseas Military Structure of the United States was created in 2003. Before this, the decision regarding this issue were made in a more *ad hoc* manner.

security. The threat of closing a base, located in a congressman's district, can also be an effective instrument for presidents that hope to gain the support of Congress on a specific issue, as Sorenson (1998) claims. The DoD considers that any economies generated through the closure of obsolete and excessive bases can be transformed into investments that will further develop the efficiency and combative capacity of the Armed Forces.⁷ In addition, according to the model of bureaucratic politics (ALLISON, 1969), it is reasonable to expect that, within the Pentagon, each of the Military Departments will hope that the costs stemming from BRAC will not have a disproportionately higher weight on it, or, in other words, that the closure affects the bases of the Armed Forces be done more equitably (SORENSEN, 1998).⁸

On the other hand, congressmen who rely on bases within their districts fear that their closure will jeopardize their success at the polls. According to Sorenson (1998), the installation and maintenance of military bases is the most effective means of channeling resources to districts, given its widespread impact on the communities surrounding the bases.⁹ In addition to involving the flow of important resources from the federal government to the states where bases are located, the bases actually contribute to the creation of jobs and income, benefiting local groups of interest and workers. This is why Cox and McCubins (1993) claim that closing bases is a typical problem of collective action – in other words, the members of Congress individually seek to avoid the closure of bases within their districts, even if in this way they would produce an undesired collective result, which would be the maintenance of an expensive and obsolete infrastructure, inevitably costly for the public coffers.

These actors interact within an institutional context. In addition, each one of them has at its disposal institutional and organizational resources which they mobilize while carrying out their strategies.

Throughout time, many important changes occurred with regard not only to *how* the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process should be conducted, but also, and above all,

⁷ The following words by General John Herres clearly reflect the DoD's logic and the tension between the latter and politicians (particularly, congressmen): "The military is the dog that gets wagged by the tail when it comes to base closure... Operating base structure is expensive as hell. You don't win wars with base structure, but with weapons systems. *We always want to close more bases than we can get away with.* But we always get zinged by the political community" (Cited in: SORENSON, 1998:7; my emphasis).

⁸ Here, the discussion is based on the presupposition, as Allison (1969) claims, that the organizations have their own interests and pursue them when interacting with other actors. In this sense, it is worth noting the need, for analytic purposes, to decompose the DoD, or, in other words, not to treat it as a unitary actor. The Military Departments –the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force– compete for resources and pursue particular interests, which can eventually conflict with one another.

⁹ The efforts of congressmen to maintain their bases functioning are sometimes considered "pork-barrel politics", which refers to projects where the benefits are concentrated and the costs are diffuse, once they involve the channeling of federal resources to specific districts.

to *who* would deliberate on the issue. Two periods can be identified for analytical purposes: *i)* from the 1960s to the mid 1970s¹⁰, when the Pentagon kept exclusive control over the closing and realignment of bases; *ii)* from 1977 to 1990, when after a decade of constraints imposed by Congress to the closure of bases, the Executive and the Legislative agreed to create an independent and bipartisan Commission to deliberate on the closure of bases, following the approval of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act.

These periods will be observed by analyzing *how* and *why* the pendulum of power between the main actors involved in the process of closure and realignment of the bases shifted from the Executive to the Legislative and, finally, got more balanced. The reasons which led these actors to agree upon the creation of the BRAC Commission will also be investigated, as well as the impact of this institutional innovation upon the decision making process regarding the bases. As a hypothesis, it is believed that the pendulum shift between the Executive and Legislative in relation to the closure and realignment of the bases in this period can be attributed to endogenous and exogenous elements of/to the political process. The former would include elements such as institutional and organizational development inside the Legislative, while the exogenous elements would consist of not only domestic variables, such as public spending, but also international variables, such as wars and the cooling down of crises.

Another hypothesis for the case in question is that the installation of military bases creates several incentives for local actors (being they governmental or not) and might, together with the creation of new actors, create obstacles for the reversal of the same policy. This is true even if the moving force behind this (such as the need to reduce the nation's vulnerability to external threats at a given moment) is no longer present and the fact that other areas are being negatively affected by the continuation of obsolete or unnecessary bases¹¹.

¹⁰ While the installation of military bases on American soil originates in the first wars conducted by the United States, during the 18th century, choosing the Second World War as the initial point for the analysis is justified by the fact that it was after this conflict –the longest after the Civil War– that Washington made more systematic efforts to build bases and, consequently, to close them. The bases installed since the beginning of the Cold War were much more elaborated than their predecessors and their structures could not simply be abandoned as had been previously done. On this topic, see: Sorenson, 2007. It is also worth mentioning that after the decrease in military resources with the Vietnam War, the Armed Forces became less demanding with regard to the performance of functions within the bases. As a result, there was an increase in the number of civil employees in the bases. These employees started assuming functions related to base security, education, technical support (the maintenance of computers, for example) etc. This change, in addition to putting an end to the isolation between the military personnel who worked on the bases and the local community, had important consequences for the closure and realignment of bases in the following years (SORENSEN, 2007).

¹¹ It is important to call attention to the dilemma experienced by all the states and which in the United States is known as “guns or butter”. Given the eminently limited character of the resources available to any state to meet various ends (in the areas of health, education, transportation, security etc.), the destination of resources to a given sector or department necessarily entails a reduction in the resources which will be available for another sector or department, unless there is an economic growth which would allow for the increase in resources for one

This hypothesis stems from Pierson's (1993) idea that public policies can be considered as independent variables in the political process. For the author, public policies, once implemented, create resources and incentives for the political actors, altering the social, economic and political conditions regarding the issue. In this sense, they are not only *outputs* but also *inputs* of the political process.

The objective of this article is, basically speaking, to identify and analyze the consequences of the establishment of bases in districts and understand the complexity of the political process around the closure of these very bases. In order to do such, the study will employ concepts such as "policy feedback", which considers how previous decisions regarding specific policies can affect the political process and future developments regarding an issue, and "lock-in," which refers to the patterns of behavior that are difficult to reverse (PIERSON, 1993).

With that being said, this article is divided into two parts in addition to the introduction (the first part). The second section consists of a brief history of BRAC during the 1960s until the early 1990s,¹² focusing on the dynamics of the interaction among the President, the DoD and Congress, and, particularly, the shift in the balance of power between the Executive and the Legislative. Following this section, an analysis of the two periods highlighted will be conducted. Finally, a few final considerations regarding the case analyzed will be presented.

2 BRAC: from the 1960s to the early 1990s

2.1 The Executive as protagonist

The first series of military base closures in the United States to attract the attention of political actors took place during President John F. Kennedy's administration (GLOBALSEcurity, n.d; SORENSON, 2007). At that moment, the President and the Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, were determined to make the United States defense policy more flexible, reducing the emphasis given by Eisenhower to strategic nuclear threat (LIMA, 2008). Furthermore, given the rising associated with the conflict in Vietnam, the government recognized the need to cut military spending. In order to respond to these sector without reducing the resources of another. It should be noted that the question regarding the distribution of resources becomes even more important when analyzing the Department of Defense, an agency which will receive, in the fiscal year 2010, for example, 19 percent of the American budget.

¹² The first important and systemic closure of bases occurred during the Kennedy administration, during the 1960s, as will be discussed in the following section.

challenges, McNamara ordered the closure of various bomber bases of the Air Force (SORENSEN, 2007), a process which was exclusively conducted by the Pentagon.

In fact, Congress had no participation whatsoever in the BRAC process during this period (BEAULIER; HALL; LYNCH, n.d; GLOBALSECURITY, s.d; POWERS, 2003). However, this does not mean that congressmen did not worry about this issue, given that their states were being affected by decision made inside the *Office* of the Secretary of Defense. Another reason for the concern of the Legislative was the fear that the BRAC process would be used as a political maneuver by the President with a view to punishing his opponents (MAYER, 1995; POWERS, 2003; SORENSON, 2007).¹³ In all, more than 60 bases were closed during McNamara's administration (BEAULIER; HALL; LYNCH, s.d.; SORENSON, 2007).

The reaction of congressmen came in 1964, when, through the initiative of the President of the Commission of Armed Forces in the House of Representatives, the Legislative approved legislation demanding that the President report any decision of closing bases to the Legislative (POWERS, 2003). President Lyndon Johnson vetoed the measure. The same happened during the administration of President Gerald Ford, who rejected a project on similar terms. Congress, in turn, did not succeed in overturning the presidential vetoes.

2.2 Congress reacts

2.2.1 A decade without base closures

The BRAC process continued unaltered until 1976, the year in which Congress approved an amendment to the Project for Military Construction, requesting the DoD to notify the Legislative when a base with more than 250 civil employees was being considered for reduction or closure. The amendment also required the conduction of a study regarding the economic, environmental and military impacts of such closure by the Pentagon. The Legislative was given a deadline of 60 days to respond to the recommendations (SORENSON, 2007; POWERS, 2003). In addition, this measure determined the application of the National Environmental Policy Act's provisions whenever bases were closed. The

¹³ The series of closures conducted by McNamara coincided with suspicions that President Johnson had chosen as target bases those located in states which had supported his opponent, the Republican Barry Goldwater, during the 1964 elections. Later on, the decision to partially close two bases in Massachusetts, the only state to vote for Senator George McGovern, who was Nixon's rival, reinforced this idea (SORENSON, 2007).

project, known as the O'Neill-Cohen Law and approved unanimously by the Senate in 1977, was sanctioned by President Jimmy Carter. By placing important limitations on base closures, Congress managed to tie the DoD's hands and, as a result, no bases were closed during the following ten years (SORENSEN, 2007; PARKER; FLORA, n.d). During the same period, given the attachment of amendments to law proposals related to appropriation bills, congressmen of the effected areas denied the necessary funds for the closure and consolidation of specific bases, whose possible closure had been announced by the Pentagon (ARNOLD, 1990). Carter's efforts to close and realign bases during this time were in vain (SORENSEN, 2007).

The reduction in the military capacity was not a relevant concern during President Ronald Reagan's first term in which a significantly increase in military spending was observed (GLOBALSECURITY, n.d). The only initiative to promote the closure of bases was headed by Senator Barry Goldwater, who, after requesting the then Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger, to prepare a list of bases that were to be closed, sent a document to the Senate containing 22 bases. The efforts of the senator were not very significant in its effects, resulting in an alteration to the O'Neill-Cohen Law, which would then be applicable to bases with more than 300 civil employees or alignments involving more than a 50 percent reduction (SORENSEN, 2007).

During Reagan's second term, the scene changed considerably. The cooling down of the Cold War was accompanied by an expressive and consistent decrease in spending on defense starting in 1985 in the United States (GLOBALSECURITY, n.d).¹⁴ It also reflected the incompatibility between the size of the forces and the infrastructure of the bases. In 1988, with the decline of the Soviet Union, the Pentagon sought to reduce its forces, improve its combative capacity and develop new armaments systems (POWERS, 2003). In turn, Reagan and Congress planned a cut in taxes which significantly raised the federal budget deficit (SORENSEN, 1997). In this scenario, the Executive was determined to cut spending, including military spending. The study entitled the "*President's Private Sector Survey on Cost Control*", conducted by the Grace Commission in 1983, already pointed out the need to loosen the limits imposed on the closure of bases when claiming that "... because Congress obstructs the closing of bases that the military wants to close, the three-year waste is \$367 million" (Cited in: SORENSEN, 2007: 16). The study concluded that savings could come from alterations in the structure of bases and recommended a creation of an independent non-

¹⁴ Between 1985 and 1990, the defense budget in dollars, adjusted for inflation, fell from \$402 billion to \$350, a tendency deepened throughout the 1990s (SORENSEN, 2007).

partisan Commission to evaluate the realignment and closure of bases (GLOBALSECURITY, n.d.; POWERS, 2003).

Throughout the 1980s, the estimated savings of \$2.5 billion, resulting from the closure of obsolete bases, stimulated the change of the BRAC process (BEAULIER; HALL; LYNCH, n.d.). Given the financial opportunities represented by the closure of bases, on the one hand, and an elevated deficit in the budget, on the other, Congress began reconsidering the question. Many congressmen started to believe that “the closure and sale of surplus bases could be an important source of savings and revenue” (Cited in: POWERS, 2003: 13). In addition, according to Beaulier, Hall e Lynch (n.d.: 3), it was believed that “smaller defense budgets made it impossible for all bases to continue being protected.” Still in 1987, a measure proposed by Richard Arme y, a member of the House of Representatives, which would authorize the closure of bases was rejected. The following year, the then Secretary of Defense, Frank Carlucci, supporting the efforts started by Arme y, instituted the BRAC Commission, which now had the responsibility of recommending what bases were to be closed. This initiative encouraged the defenders of base closures in Congress to put pressure on the creation of laws that would suspend the limits imposed in 1977.

2.2.2 The end of the gridlock: the creation of the BRAC Commission

The impasse regarding the closure and realignment of bases was partially overcome by the approval of the Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1988 which determined the process of which bases would be terminated. A list of bases composed by the Military Departments would be proposed and sent to a Commission of 12 members, indicated by the Secretary of Defense (BASE CLOSURE ACT, 1988). With the objective of reducing the impact of the “parochial politics” on the process, several congressmen affirmed that “it was important that the Commissioners be named prior to the [base closure] bill coming to the floor”, so that Congress could have “the opportunity to look over the [Commission’s] membership” (DICKINSON. Cited in: POWERS, 1993). Congress seemed to be determined, through the elaboration of the BRAC Act, to isolate the process of political considerations and particularly the influence of the DoD (LOCKWOOD; SIEL; HOLMAN, 2003). Carlucci indicated a Commission of two co-directors and ten members, including retired military personnel and political figures (SORENSEN, 2007).

The Commission, reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense, created a list of bases that would be closed. Having revised the Commission’s recommendations, and without the

authority to change them, the Secretary sent the list to the President. After confirming the Commission's list, it was sent to Congress, which would now fully accept or reject the list. The implementation of closures recommended by the Commission was authorized by the Legislative. The Commission's written report of 1988 recommended the closure of 86 installations, among which 16 were important bases –employing more than 300 people– and the realignment of 54 bases (BRAC REPORT, 1988). In all, 145 bases were impacted, affecting the electoral districts of 32 Senators and 21 Representatives (POWERS, 2003).

After this first round, Congress continued to be unsatisfied. There were three main reasons for the discontent of the congressmen, according to Powers (2003). The first reason was associated with the fact that the majority of the Commission's deliberations occurred behind closed doors.¹⁵ The second reason is related to the advantageous influence of the Secretary of Defense regarding the process, since he was the one who indicated the members of the Commission. The third reason was the belief that the late creation of the Commission in this process and its responsibility of evaluating more than 3,800 installations would compromise the capacity of the Commission in terms of visiting the bases selected and evaluating the information provided by the Pentagon. Such factors led to criticisms of the Commission's work. An example was the commentary by congresswoman Pat Schroeder, who when evaluating the criteria for base closures, stated that the Commission had used “inaccurate information, faulty computations, or bad modeling in many cases” (Cited in: POWERS, 2003).

Despite all this, Congress still seemed determined to become involved in the matters concerning the closure of bases. In 1990, the then Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney, acted unilaterally by sending a document which recommended the closure of 46 bases to the Legislative. Considered illegal, the list was rejected by the chair of the Armed Services Committee, Les Aspin (POWERS, 2003). The chairman rejected the list by claiming that many of the bases on it were located in democratic districts.¹⁶ He also stated that the new legislation should be drawn up with the objective of making the process more fair and of setting up a new Commission (LOCKWOOD; SIEL; HOLMAN, 2003). This is what consequently occurred.

¹⁵ Rudalevige (2005) emphasizes how elements such as transparency and publicity started to play a more important role for Congress in the years that followed the Nixon administration, given the generalized discontent with the secret nature of Executive actions that had marked the previous years.

¹⁶ According to Mayer (1995), of the 35 bases which were supposed to have all their operations terminated, 29 were in democratic districts. During this time, the Democratic Study Group produced a report which revealed that 99% of civil employment loss occurred in Democratic districts, being that 87% of the rise in employment occurred in Republican districts.

In the same year, Congress approved a law which assigned the Pentagon the responsibility of evaluating all military installations in the United States according to the Structure Force Plan which contained the criteria for selecting bases as determined by Congress (DEFENSE BRAC ACT, 1990). Three categories of criteria of selection were established: the “Military Value,” “Return on Investments, and the “Impact on Communities”. An effort to standardize the process also occurred, beginning with the initiative by the DoD to use the model of Cost of Base Realignment Actions (COBRA) in order to identify the initial costs and savings associated with the different rounds of BRAC. It is important to note that the 1990 legislation assigned the Department of Defense the duty of helping all the communities and civil employees of the Pentagon affected by the closure of bases (DEFENSE BRAC ACT, 1990), in addition to the duty of guiding the Secretary of Defense in terms of assuring environmental clean-up in the impacted areas as quickly as possible (POWERS, 2003). Deadlines for the actions by the DoD, the President, the Commission, the General Accounting Office (GAO) and Congress were also established (DEFENSE BRAC ACT, 1990). The GAO then responsible for conducting a detailed study of the recommendations and the Pentagon’s selection process, as well as helping the Commission carry out its duties (BRAC REPORT, 1995). Another important requirement of the 1990 law was that the Commission conduct public audiences and that it allow public access to its information (DEFENSE BRAC ACT, 1990). At least one member of the Commission would have to visit at each one of the bases on the list and no more than one-third of its members could be from the DoD.

The Commission was then established by eight members appointed by the President, who, in doing that, was required to rely on the council and consent of the Senate (DEFENSE BRAC ACT, 1990). According to the 1990 act, when selecting members for the Commission, the President should consult with: 1) the President of the House of Representatives to appoint two members; 2) the majority leader of the Senate to appoint two members; 3) the minority leader of the House of Representatives to appoint one member; and 4) the minority leader of the Senate to appoint one member. When selecting the members of the Commission, the President should appoint one of them as the Chair of the Commission (DEFENSE BRAC ACT, 1990). With regard to the realignment and closure of bases, this would then be done in the following manner and order:

- 1) The Military Departments present a list of bases to the Secretary of Defense;
- 2) After revising the recommendations of the Military Departments, the Secretary of Defense sends the list to the Commission;

- 3) The Commission, with the authority to add or delete bases from the list, analyzes the recommendations of the DoD and sends them to the President;
- 4) The President accepts the Commission's recommendations and sends it to Congress or rejects the recommendations and requests a revision of the list; or, as an alternative, does not send the list to Congress, and thus puts an end to the BRAC process;
- 5) Finally, Congress fully approves the list or approves a Joint Resolution rejecting the Commission's recommendations (DEFENSE BRAC ACT, 1990; POWERS, 2003).

The Commission, created to monitor the three following rounds of BRAC (in 1991, in 1993 and in 1995), sent the President a list with recommendations for the closure and realignment of 82 bases on July 1, 1991. During the creation of the final list, the Commission accepted a majority of the recommendations given by the Secretary of Defense. Nonetheless, important changes were made. The Commission suggested the realignment of two bases (Ft. Chafee (AR) and Ft. Dix (NJ)), in addition to proposing that four other bases (Fort McClellan (AL), Naval Training Center Orlando (FL), Naval Air Station Whidbey Island (WA) e Moody Air Force Base (GA)) remain open. The DoD had recommended the closure of these six bases. In May 1991, the GAO produced a report clarifying the methods used by the Pentagon to reach its recommendations, which also contained information about the bases (LOCKWOOD; SIEL; HOLMAN, 2003).

The list proposed by the Commission was approved by President George Bush on July 10th. Twenty days afterwards, Congress rejected (by 60 votes in favor and 364 against) a resolution disapproving the Commission's list (in other words, it indirectly approved it). Nevertheless, it is important to note that many congressmen demonstrated their concern with the impact the closures would have on the people within their districts and the states in question, particularly with the growing possibility of unemployment. Some also questioned the validity of the evaluations conducted by the military personnel of the competing bases and pressured for the reversal of the Commission's decisions on various specific cases. The objective of Congress at that moment was to obtain more funds for assistance programs for those impacted by the closures (LOCKWOOD; SIEL; HOLMAN, 2003).

3 Analysis

3.1 Period I (1960-1976)

The prominent role of the Executive in relation to the process of closure and realignment of military bases in the period between the Kennedy administration and 1976 can be explained by at least four factors. The first factor refers to the expertise of the military personnel from the DoD with regard to defense and, particularly, to the capacity of this organization to gather information on the matter. This naturally (at least at first) favored placing the question within the Pentagon's scope of action, since the DoD is a government agency which reports to the President and whose Secretary is appointed by the Chief of the Executive. On the other hand, one notices the technical incapacity of Congress, at that moment, in what comes to questioning the decisions of the Pentagon (BLECHMAN, 1990).

The second factor is associated to the attributes of the United States political system and the institutional arrangements that make up such system. According to what authors like Weir (1996) and Moe (1993) have highlighted, the American political system is fragmented and governed by the concept of checks and balances, which reflects upon the rules and procedures that guide institutional relations and, in turn, influences the choices of political actors.¹⁷ In this sense, it is worth mentioning that the mechanism used by the Executive to frustrate Congress's main initiatives proposing alterations to the BRAC process was the presidential veto. This is an institutional resource granted to the President by the Constitution, which also attributes to the Legislative the right to overturn an eventual veto from the President, by a qualified majority (or by 2/3 of the votes). According to Krehbiel (1996), in his study on divided governments, the veto (not only presidential but also congressional), along with the filibuster, constitute the main cause of gridlock or non-decision in governments (be they united or divided) and explain the lack of change in policies. This corroborates with the argument that the proposal vetoed by Johnson had been presented and approved by a Congress that was predominantly democratic. In other words, the fact that the government was united did not prevent the President from using the veto and from preventing alterations in the BRAC process.

It is also worth pointing to the absence, during that period, of a legislation that would regulate the BRAC process and that would limit, to a certain degree, the great autonomy of the Executive in deliberations on the closure of bases. In this sense, Moe (1993:366) affirms that:

(...) in many spheres of government organization, the absence of specific legal directives about how to proceed means that presidents are able to make authoritative decisions on these matters.

¹⁷ Weir (1996) adds that the decentralized structure of American political institutions favors the mobilization of coalitions on a short-term basis in opposition to policies.

They can organize and direct the presidency as they see fit, create public agencies, reorganize them, move them around, coordinate them, impose rules on their behavior, put their own people in top positions, and otherwise place their structural stamps on the executive branch.¹⁸

A fourth factor, and of a more cyclical character, is related to the configuration of the balance of power between the Executive and Legislative during the period in question. During the mid 1950s and mid 1960s, one observed a high concentration of power in the Executive and Congress's evident deference for the President in the realms of foreign policy and defense policy (LINDSAY, 1994; BLECHMAN, 1990). The strengthening of the White House, without precedents in the United States, inspired Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. to coin the term "imperial presidency" (SCHLESINGER Jr., 1973). However, with the end of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandals, during Richard Nixon's presidency, public opinion and congressmen began questioning the role of the Executive (BLECHMAN, 1990; RUDALEVIGE, 2005). It was at this point that Congress reverted the pendulum of power in its favor and "resurged" (JORDAN; TAYLOR Jr.; KORB, 1989; LINDSAY, 1994).

According to Blechmen (1990), the more assertive role of Congress in foreign policy, in general, and in defense policy, in particular, was acquired through the institutional and organizational development produced within the Legislative. This development involved, among other measures, the formal limitation of the President's autonomy to send American troops abroad, according to the War Powers Act,^{19 20} approved in 1973; the restriction of the capacity to manipulate the use of federal resources by the Executive, with the approval of the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974;²¹ and the creation of mechanisms for the gathering and analysis of information, including information on defense policies.²² Such initiatives not only strengthened Congress in relation to the Executive, but

¹⁸ The figure of the President, as strong actor within the political system, is also discussed by authors such as Kingdon (1995) and Weir (1996).

¹⁹ The document required the President to consult with Congress before sending American troops abroad and determined that the withdrawal of troops could be required by Congress within 60 days of their commitment (or 90 days, in the case the President guaranteed that the security of the troops would demand an extension of the deadline). Nixon's veto of the measure was overturned by Congress.

²⁰ Hersman (2000: 3) states that "legislation can shape the landscape of executive-legislative relations in dramatic ways, especially when it appears to signify a major shift in the foreign policy powers". One of the examples the authors gives is precisely the approval of the War Powers Act.

²¹ This law, which was known as the Budget Act, demanded that the President send a report to Congress before confiscating funds (in other words, before deliberating on the non use of determined resources). If the confiscation was temporary, it could be rejected at any moment by the House or the Senate. A permanent confiscation would, in turn, be conditioned to the approval of both the House and the Senate within a period of 45 continuous sessions. On the contrary, the funds would be completely liberated (FISHER, 1998).

²² These mechanisms consisted not only of the Congress's requirement of reports on programs in progress by the Executive, but also of the creation of agencies with the goal of carrying out independent analyses, such as the Office of Technology Assessment and the Congressional Budget Office. These ended up strengthening the already existent Congressional Research Service and the General Accounting Office (this last one played an important role in the creation of the BRAC Commission, as will be later discussed). Jordan, Taylor and Korb (1989) discuss the striking extension of the congressional staff, which from 1947 to 1987, went from 2,500

also, increased the institutional resources of the former, allowing for Congress to become better capable of participating in the decision-making process related to defense policy.

3.2 Period II (1977-1990)

3.2.1 A decade without base closures

The situation changed dramatically with the approval of the amendment of the Military Construction Project of 1977.²³ Why and how did such a change occur? What were the consequences in terms of “policies” and of “politics”? The answers to these questions will be given according to an analysis of the preferences and resources of the multiplicity of actors involved which, in turn, influence the behavior and strategies of the latter.

First, one observes that Congress was institutionally stronger at the end of the 1970s than in the previous decade, due to the creation of various internal agencies and the expansion of its staff. Given this situation, the Legislative became more apt to influence the process of closure and realignment of bases.

The members of Congress were interested in influencing the BRAC process and this can be attributed to two main reasons: the concern with the possibility of punishment at the ballots²⁴ and the possibility of being punished by a President of a rival party. Naturally, the fact of being elected by districts makes the congressmen vulnerable to specific and local interests, reducing the interest in promoting policies that are coordinated and coherent (ARNOLD, 1990; MAYHEW, 1974).²⁵ Furthermore, the installation of bases in a district, which is a governmental action that generates effects and therefore a public policy, creates, in Pierson’s (1993) terms, resources and incentives for many actors, be they political actors or not. Specifically, for congressmen, the maintenance of bases allows for the continuation of financial flows to their districts, while the termination of base operations would not only

people to 17,000 (JORDAN; TAYLOR Jr.; KORB, 1989).

²³ It is worth noting that one of the most important resources withheld by congressmen is the exclusive competence to elaborate laws. In this sense, it is interesting to highlight that the United States differs from Brazil, whose 1988 Constitution grants the President extensive prerogatives. These would include the strong presence in the legislative process through the right to propose laws (which can also be requested upon urgency) and constitutional amendments, and the ability to edit provisional measures. This is why one can say the Brazilian political system is remarkably concentrated, having the Executive as its “center of gravity” (AMORIM NETO, 2007).

²⁴ As Mayhew (1974) and Arnold (1990) claim, congressmen act according to the intention of increasing their chances for reelection.

²⁵ The American federal system is another factor Weir (1996) points out as being a constraint to choices about policies in the United States. This is given the fact that the interest of actors at distinct levels should be compatible, to some degree, so that the policy can be effectively implemented.

interrupt this flow but would imply the decrease in both the jobs and income for the local populations and in benefits for politicians and local interest groups. Given this scenario, it is clear why Congress had motives for having a say in the decision making process of BRAC. In other words, the establishment of bases became a source of valuable political dividends for this actor and accepting the termination of bases situated in their district would mean an abdication of such benefits.

As Sorenson (2007) clearly points out, other actors should be considered when discussing the analysis of the BRAC process. These would include the state government, local governments and the industry involved in base closures. Not only do state and local governments have an interest in the preservation of bases in their backyards, but they also develop strategies in the sense of trying to avoid closures or realignments than can hurt them. The strategies adopted by the former include the process of directing the installation of bases to rural areas, with the intention of avoiding complaints from the population (with regard to noise, for example). In addition, some states create groups to strengthen the base and to lobby Congress with the objective of increasing their installations (SORENSEN, 2007). In relation to local governments, these carry out campaigns with slogans such as “save our bases” in order to collect pertinent information and to promote encounters with members of the BRAC Commission when their bases seem to be a target of the Commission.²⁶ The list of actors interested in the preservation of bases also includes, at the local level, businessmen, workers and labor unions.²⁷

In turn, the industry of closing bases was composed of another important group of actors who had an advantage with the incentives created from the installation of bases. This industry is made up of businesses who work for the DoD and, in general, develop research on questions related to defense. A majority of its staff is, nonetheless, made up of specialists.²⁸ Another actor which constitutes this industry would include law firms that work for the state, providing information about economic and political aspects regarding defense policies (particularly of BRAC). In addition, they also provide states with strategies geared towards the maintenance of bases and also lobby the Pentagon and the BRAC Commission to allow

²⁶ It is worth mentioning that actors at this level (the local) generally do not have many resources, since in most of the cases, the bases are located in rural areas.

²⁷ Sorenson (2007:11) discusses two interesting cases where political actors and local interest groups actively participated in the process of establishing bases in their areas. During the 1920s, given Congress’s hesitation to “take” a training base to Texas, local political leaders and the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce raised funds, bought lands and donated them to the Army Air Corps. In the previous year, in Alabama, local leaders also bought and donated ranches to the Whright brother so that an aviation school in Montgomery be built. This developed into the Maxwell Air Force Base.

²⁸ Examples of such businesses would include the Science Applications International Corporation, the Center for Naval Analysis and Rand Corporation (SORENSEN, 2007).

for the implementation of these strategies. One can thus observe the wide range of benefits that the installation of bases creates for many actors at distinct levels. This also makes the process more complex and creates a situation characterized as a “lock-in”, meaning that is difficult to reverse pre-established policies.

Once the preferences and the resources of the actors in the interaction process of BRAC have been exposed, it is important to understand why Congress succeeded in making the process more difficult in 1976, by pointing out the strategies used by congressmen. One of these strategies was, effectively, the idea of associating the closure of bases (until now seen as an eminently military issue) with other arenas, or, in other words, the promotion of “linkages”. The approved legislation placed a limit of a maximum of civil employment loss at 250 employees with the closure of bases (that is to say, according to economic criteria). It was also established that the process of closure and realignment of bases should be submitted to the Environmental Protection Act. Congress guaranteed the ex-post control of the process, since it was entrusted with approving the Pentagon’s recommendations after evaluating the study on environmental, economic and military impacts presented by the Secretary of Defense. Finally, it is worth observing that the so-called “power of the purse” (or the competence to deliberate on the liberation or not of federal funds), withheld by Congress and strengthened throughout the 1970s and 1980s, was another mechanism used by congressmen to create obstacles for BRAC, once they would deny the DoD the resources necessary for the closure of specific bases.²⁹

In addition to being a successful strategy, the incorporation of economic and environmental aspects to the BRAC process could be considered an innovation in the policy of base closures, which was no longer guided exclusively by military criteria and involved other spheres that would be affected by the policy. Considering the concept of institutions, in a broad sense, as that which includes rules of the game (be they formal and/or informal) or limits that constrain human interaction and affect the result of policies (PIERSON, 1993; MENICUCCI, 2007), one can claim that there was an *institutional* alteration in the game referring to the closure of bases in 1976. The Military Construction Program effectively established new rules which started to structure the behavior of the actors involved in the BRAC process and, therefore, the process which was once conducted in an informal manner was now guided by a legal framework. As a result, in terms of policies, no base was closed for the following ten years after the adoption of this new legislation. In addition, by altering the

²⁹ Various actors emphasize the relevance of the “power of the purse” and analyze how this concentration in the hands of Congress is reflected on the relationship between the Executive and the Legislative. To see more on this respect, see Fisher (1998) and Hamilton (2004).

scope of action taken by actors with regard to BRAC, the Military Construction Program remodeled the political game in terms of producing a gridlock with regard to the production of policies in this area. In this sense, Kingdon (1995) points out that changes in the dynamics among actors, due to the redefinition of competence in relation to a specific issue, can culminate in governmental immobility. This is exactly what happened in the period being analyzed.

This impasse can be considered as a *lock-in* situation in the sense Pierson (1993) describes. Insofar as it constitutes a Pareto equilibrium (in other words, no other point would leave *all* the actors in a better situation, considering the permanence of the same conditions), it would tend to perpetuate the trajectory (or the previous policies), constrain the behavior of actors and limit the possibilities for reforms. In Weir's terms, this gridlock can be understood as a moment characterized by the prevalence of "inertial forces", which limit the capacity of politicians to influence determined processes, basically because "interests attached to established policies can obstruct later efforts to reorganize policy along new lines" (1996, p.194). In this case, what explains the change in 1988? In other words, what elements contributed to the process of overcoming this inertia or paralysis?

Weir (1996) and Kingdon (1995) consider the role exogenous factors in the political process can have on the process of creating policies and the promotion of innovations in policies, respectively. For Weir, variables such as social movements, economic changes or even changes in international politics can affect the support given by politicians for a determined policy, contributing to the process of overcoming these "inertial forces". According to the author, "by creating a new context, such events can change the meaning of a policy, linking it with a different set of issues and tying its fate to new forces" (p. 195). Kingdon, in turn, claims that an issue can be considered a "problem" with the presence of three basic mechanisms: indicators; events, crises and symbols; and feedback from governmental agencies.

The strong increase in the constraints to BRAC, starting in 1976, led to the exclusion of the policy of base closures from the "decisional agenda" of the government – defined as questions ready for an effective decision by the policy makers. The end to government immobility regarding the issue would demand the presence of factors that would fall into some of the mechanisms identified by Kingdon. Two of these can be identified in the second half of the 1980s: the alarming rise in public spending (an indicator, in Kingdon's terms, or economic change in Weir's terms), worsened by the cut in taxes that took effect a few years earlier and the coming of an end to the cold war (events or crises for Kingdon, or events in

international politics for Weir) that made the increase of the level of spending or even its maintenance seem unjustified.

The imperative to reduce public spending, together with the idea that the maintenance of a wide structure of obsolete bases was counterproductive for national security, became a central issue when concerning the preferences of congressmen. Considering Congress's position at that moment, Sorenson (1998: 15, my emphasis) claims that:

Congress had the authority to either keep bases open or close unnecessary ones, but the individual needs of its members made it impossible to shut down as many bases as the military sometimes desired. But *Congress, as an institution, seemed to recognize that there are times when the surrender of power is necessary to prevent policy paralysis.*

In this sense, in the mid 1980s, a change in the *conception* of congressmen occurred as the relative concerns at the federal level took on greater relevance in the calculation of these actors.³⁰ What contributed then to the change in priorities in terms of Congress's preferences?

While it is impossible to precisely measure the impact of the report –elaborated by specialists from the Grace Commission upon the President's request– on the opinion of congressmen, it is believed that the document had a significant impact on Congress. This impact can be attributed to basically three elements: *i*) the indicators produced by the Commission which made the problem (of increased public spending) more evident and implicitly attributed a character of urgency to the adoption of measures with a view to solve such problems; *ii*) the link between public spending, in general, and defense spending, in particular, by claiming (in the report) that the decrease in the former would occur with the reduction of the latter; and *iii*) the proposal to create an independent Commission to deliberate on BRAC as an alternative to end the impasse at hand. These points relative to the BRAC case reinforce not only Weir's (1996) claim that specialists can play an important role in the configuration of new ideas that, in turn, start to influence the political process³¹, but also Kingdon's (1995), for whom specialists compose "policy communities", or communities that create alternatives.

³⁰ Here, as corroborated by the text above, there is no contradiction. This is due to the fact that while it is expected that Congress dedicates itself, most of the time, to defending the interests of its electorate, who elect their representatives in districts, it is safe to assume that, in times of government paralysis and/or crises (internal or external), the national level gains more importance in relation to the local level. It is still worth mentioning that Jordan, Taylor Jr. and Korb (1989; Cap.5) highlight the correlation between periods of crisis and the expansion of presidential power, or, in other words, the strengthening of the Executive in relation to the Legislative.

³¹ Among the studies that deal in a more in-depth manner with the action of the network of specialists (or the so-called "epistemic communities") as communities that create alternatives which can eventually be adopted by governments, you have Borzel (1997); Campbell (2000); Hass (1992).

3.2.2 An end to the gridlock: the Creation of the BRAC Commission

An alternative found by the Executive and the Legislative to continue the process of closing bases was the one suggested by the Grace Commission, which affirmed the establishment of an “independent” and bipartisan Commission that would have the duty of recommending bases for closure and realignment. Why was such measure adopted? In other words, why did Congress, which had set the terms of the decision making process of BRAC (or its interruption) for a decade, agree to share power with (and delegate authority to) other actors, being one of them the very Commission? One can begin with the understanding that this question is directly associated with the ideas that marked the behavior of congressmen at that moment, as well as their expectations with regard to the functioning of the Commission.

Basically speaking, two factors can explain Congress’s behavior. The first one refers to the shared belief, by many congressmen, that the creation of the BRAC Commission would result in the isolation of deliberations regarding the future of bases from political influences (MAYER, 1995; SORENSON, 2007). As seen before, it was clear congressmen were concerned with the fact that the closure of bases would be the object of the Executive’s manipulation to punish congressmen from a rival party. This concern was clearly expressed after the first round of closures sponsored by the DoD, or even after the creation of a commission to determine the closures and realignments of military installations in 1988. (It is interesting to note, as Mayer (1995) claims, that the congressmen seem determined to protect BRAC from the parochial interests of their peers, which according to the author, contributed to the success of the BRAC process starting in 1990). Another factor is associated to Congress’s capacity to minimize the risks involved in the delegation of responsibilities to an administrative agency through the mobilization of two mechanisms (MAYER, 1995). These include: the limitation of the scope of authority of the agent and the obscuring of the connection between legislative action and the result of policies.

The BRAC law of 1990 circumscribed the Commission’s actions and determined that its decisions be based on a series of pre-determined criteria, divided into three categories: “Military Value”, the “Return on Investments” and the “Impact on Communities”. In other words, there was an attempt to embed a technical character in the Commission, reducing the possibilities for actions that are markedly political. In addition, other measures were taken with a view to monitoring the decision making process within the Commission and of creating an independent source of analysis that could evaluate the process. With the law of 1990, it was determined that all the information at the Commission’s disposition should be at the

public's disposition and that the meetings of the members should be open as well (DEFENSE BRAC ACT, 1990). It is also important to mention that the General Accounting Office (a congressional agency) was now held responsible for (1) following the process of selecting data from both the DoD and from within the Commission and (2) publishing reports on the information gathered. These measures promoted a sense of transparency with regard to the deliberations related to BRAC, which, as Mayer (1995) points out, contributed to the public's perception that the process was not arbitrary but legitimate.

For Sartori (1994), all collective decisions involve internal costs (for the decision makers) and external risks (for those affected by the policies). Internal costs basically imply those associated with time and the energy devoted by the participants, or in other words, those linked to the decision making process. By the creation of the Commission, these costs were transferred to another actor, together with the responsibility of the eventual effects of the policies (at least a great majority of the responsibility). With regard to external risks, the theory elaborated by Sartori allows one to conclude that the decisions related to BRAC and delegated by a Commission of eight members contributed to the increase in these risks, since there was also a decrease in the number of people deliberating on them and that the number of decision makers has an inversely proportional relationship to the external risks. It should be noted that the members of the Commission are not necessarily elected by the population (they can be employees of the DoD, for example), therefore, they are not held directly responsible to the latter.

As a result, the creation of the Commission consisted in an efficient strategy to "hide the tracks" of the congressmen, in Arnold's (1990) terms. By passing on the authority to decide on the future of military bases to an Executive Commission, congressmen were freeing themselves from the risky possibility of carrying out unpopular decisions associated with the allocation of spending on a geographic basis. Thus, they dramatically reduced their chances of being electorally punished in their districts³².

In relation to the Executive, the legal determination that the President, by appointing the members of the Commission, would consult with leaders of the House and Senate, constrained, to some extent, the capacity of the Chief of the Executive to influence the BRAC process and obtain political leverage in relation to Congress. It should be emphasized that the Executive's motivation to accept that a commission conduct the decision making process

³² Considering that Congress is an important actor in the political process and that its members are elected by districts, even after the creation of the BRAC Commission the electorate can hold the Legislative responsible for its decisions. Nevertheless, one needs to consider that the establishment of the Commission obscures, to some extent (even if not completely), the ties between congressmen and the decisions taken by the Commission. The impact of this obscurity should not be neglected.

related to BRAC was clear: this scenario was the only which would allow for the continuation of military base closures, and, as a result, would reduce public spending and improve national security.

Another element to be considered is the fact that Congress, by defending its right to reject the recommendation of the BRAC Commission, maintained *ex-post* control over the process.

The analysis of this case allows one to verify that the congressmen's alleged expectation that the BRAC process would become more impermeable to political influences did not come true, even though the impasse related to this question was, in fact, overcome. According to Sorenson (1998), this was due to the capacity of politicians to use their strategies with the objective of maintaining bases installed in their districts. Some of these strategies would include the increase in the base's monetary value, through the construction and improvements to its structure,³³ and the change in the base's mission. This change makes the base more important and its maintenance more attractive (for example, improving its armaments as the ones in the base start becoming obsolete). It is worth noting, as previously mentioned, that the local actors also have their own strategies to influence the BRAC process.

Another manner in which actors from the Executive and the Legislative can influence the process of realignment and closures of bases – found in the BRAC legislation – consists of the recommendation of members for the Commission, chosen by the President and with the consent of Congress. It is not reasonable to consider that the composition of the Commission is based only on technical considerations or considerations of a nature that is not political. In the beginning of the decision making process, however, one can see the attempt of the main political actors to influence the process. This attempt continues throughout the process and is also verified in its end, when Congress finally accepts or rejects the Commission's deliberations.

4 Final considerations

³³ An example that best reflects this is the adoption of Representative Robert Mtsui's (D-CA) strategy, which claimed in 1995 that "The gentleman from California [Mr. Fazio] and I have worked to get \$400 million of construction programs for McClellan (Air Force Base) in the last decade and a half... The gentleman did a tremendous job in doing whatever he could to save McClellan Air Force Base" (Cited in: SORENSON, 1998: 29). Another example, in this same sense, can be seen in the efforts made by Representative William Dickenson (R-AL) to keep Air Force Base Gunter in Montgomery open. Given the vulnerability of the closure of this base, which, aside from being small, did not represent any special mission since 1960, Dickenson, a minority leader of the Armed Forces Committee in the House of Representatives, redefined this base as an annex to base Maxwell. In practical terms, the change meant that both would have to be closed at the same time. Since this was not enough, the congressman was able to bring new constructions and missions to the base (SORENSON, 1998).

The case study referring to the realignment and closure of bases in the United States allows one to understand how public policies can, in Pierson's (1993) terms, be constituted as independent variables, determining the political process. The policy of installing bases in a district, once established, creates a series of incentives for political actors and private actors, both local and federal, which make the reversal of this policy (the closure of bases) more difficult. The chances of producing a "lock-in" are thus elevated. This was exactly what one can observe from 1977 to 1987, when Congress, through the establishment of legislation that started to determine the BRAC process, succeeded in withdrawing the question related to the closure of bases from the government's decisional agenda. One can recognize here that the endogenous elements of the political process, related to the institutional and organizational strengthening of Congress which began after the Vietnam War, were fundamental to overlap the Executive (particularly the DoD) as the *locus* of decisions. The approval of the Military Construction Project, in 1977, conditioned the BRAC process and included economic and environmental criteria, increasing the constraints for the discontinuation of the bases. Previously, this process had been informally conducted by the Pentagon, which exclusively considered military matters (or, in other words, technical matters).

In this sense, one can claim that, in addition to being an institutional advance, there was an innovation with regard to the BRAC's decision making process, since the problem associated with base closures was then defined in a wider frame, as it started incorporating criteria related to economics and the environment.

It was also possible to observe that, while congressmen have an increased interest in the maintenance of bases located within their districts, which, in turn, create income and employment for the communities and local groups and improve the chances of victory at the ballots, the congressmen can eventually behave in a non-particularistic manner. In this sense, they would be favoring international interests in detriment of local interests. This belief corroborated with Arnold's (1990) claim that policies which involve concentrated benefits and diffuse costs do not tend to withstand through time. In the BRAC case, the particularistic behavior of Congress members contributed to the impasse characterized by the blocking of the closure of bases during a decade. Overcoming this inertia can be primarily attributed to exogenous elements of the political process (such as the cooling down of the Cold War, in the international arena, and the need to reduce government spending, in the domestic arena), which provoked a change in the congressmen's beliefs regarding base closures. The Grace Commission report played an important role in the sense of making the problem of high government spending more evident, of pointing to the decrease in spending as an important

measure for solving the problem and of suggesting the creation of an independent BRAC Commission. The role of this Commission reinforces Kingdon's (1995) claim that specialists can play a relevant role in defining alternatives for a problem.

The establishment of the Commission ended up unlocking the BRAC process, once the main actors involved granted the Commission the competence to deliberate on the closure of bases. It should be noted that Congress, by consenting to the establishment of the BRAC Commission, broke the connection between the action of congressmen and adopted policies, often seen, in this case, as unpopular. Hence, in this sense, they eliminated (or drastically reduced) the chances for punishment at the ballots. This was precisely why Congress gave up its role as protagonist when concerning BRAC. Furthermore, the creation of the Commission did not make the process of closing bases immune to political influences, as politicians alleged to desire, since the main political actors continued to have formal and informal mechanisms for influencing the decision making process.

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