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Take the initiative from BRAC

San Antonio leaders are now giving serious consideration to my proposal (Express-News Insight, June 4) that Kelly AFB be returned to Kelly Field and become an international trade zone similar to Ross Perot's Alliance Airport outside Fort Worth.

This would not only save Kelly jobs, but also return the base to the dynamic activity it used to be — with a 21st-century mission.

This seemingly mutinous suggestion was based on two important facts:

- More than any other major city in Texas, we are dependent on the military budget.

- The military budget is shrinking.

We need to face this and deal with it rather than having our fate determined from outside. The next step is to set priorities. The higher the priority, the more important it is to us.

1) Brooke Army Medical Center and Wilford Hall Medical Center: Have you noticed how often a victim of a serious accident in San Antonio is taken to one of these two hospitals? When the victim needs quick, good medical attention, the odds are the delivery is made to either BAMC or Wilford

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Hall. We need these facilities, not only for revenue and employment, but also to serve our citizens.

2) Brooks AFB: It is the home of intellectual achievement. Our best and brightest are at Brooks. They are the kind who inspire us all. We need them.

3) Lackland AFB: Every Air Force recruit goes through Lackland. It is vital not only to the economy of San Antonio, but also to the defense of the nation. We need to keep Lackland for its long-term benefits and as a homestead for activities moving over from Kelly.

4) Fort Sam Houston: How we have managed to keep it off the closure list is a wonder. How many Army bases do you know that are too small for a rifle range? Fort Sam is a headquarters, however, and would continue to serve well in that capacity. The Army should have put the Southern Command that is leaving Panama here, but at least it did grant us one of the few remaining major continental commands.

5) Randolph AFB: This is only last because it should not be kept as is. Facilities at Randolph can be expanded and more effectively used by combining military with civilian aviation.

The San Antonio International Airport is surrounded by development, so its outer boundaries are fixed. Runways cannot be lengthened or added.

Nearby Randolph has twice the capability with its two parallel runways more than a half-mile apart. Two instrument landings can be handled simultaneously. And there is open surrounding land available to put in a cross runway.

This new location for the city's airport is perfect because it is in an area of major population growth. A better access from Interstate 35 would have to be built, but it would lead to an imposing sight.

The entrance to Randolph is a beautiful tree- and flag-lined road with the impressive chapel to the left, the "missing man" formation to the right and the glorious tower straight ahead as a guide.

Precedents exist for a mixed-use facility: Rhein Main Air Base and the Frankfurt Airport in Germany, and Hickham AFB and the Honolulu airport in Hawaii.

Here, again, we would bring back the original name: Randolph Field.

The city should take the offensive: Offer to buy Randolph for \$1, pay for its upkeep (through airport-generated revenue) and let the Air Force use it free.

That would eliminate their maintenance costs (a BRAC goal) as well as the usual closure costs. The savings would be immediate, without the usual multiyear delays at other affected bases.

Future commissions would be so disarmed by this generous proposal that they would be distracted from going after our higher priority installations. The result? The federal government saves money, San Antonio gets a better airport and we keep our hospitals.

Let's resolve that never again will we allow eight BRAC commissioners to determine our destiny. The initiative should not originate in Washington. We need to look far into the future. What is right for San Antonio and what is right for defense? It turns out the answer can be the same.

J. Ronald Carey is an associate professor of marketing at Our Lady of the Lake University.