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Region bids for Air Force cyber effort

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By Robert Weisman, Globe Staff | April 10, 2008

High-tech and defense leaders from around New England are banding together in an organization that will seek to lure the new Air Force Cyber Command - and about 540 military and civilian defense jobs - to Hanscom Air Force Base in Bedford.

Air Force officials last September established the cyber command to respond to an escalating threat from hackers and suspected terrorists trying to penetrate computer networks at the Pentagon and Air Force installations around the world. The command is temporarily housed at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, which had coordinated previous efforts to protect sensitive defense data.

The service has designated Hanscom's electronic systems center as the acquisition arm for the cyber command. And, Governor Deval L. Patrick was formally notified on March 28 that Massachusetts is one of 18 states in the running to house the new command headquarters.

State officials will be asked to present data supporting their case for Hanscom by July 1, and the Air Force will come up with a short list of finalists by the end of the year. A decision on where to locate the cyber command headquarters is slated for September 2009.

"Both on the industry side and in academia, you have a lot of intellectual capital in this particular area, so this would be a good fit for the Air Force," said retired Air Force Brigadier General Donald Quenneville, the executive director of the Defense Technology Initiative in Waltham.

The group was launched yesterday to advocate for the cyber command and closer ties between military bases, defense contractors, and smaller high-tech vendors across New England. The broader goal is to expand the region's defense footprint and create jobs at a time when military bases and contractors in the region have been shrinking.

It replaces the five-year-old Massachusetts Defense Technology Initiative. That group led the fight to save Hanscom and the Army's Soldier Systems Center in Natick, which had been threatened in the Pentagon's most recent round of base closings in 2005.

While both bases won new leases on life, the defense technology group will now work with state officials to expand the high-tech missions of Hanscom and Natick, and other military installations such as the Navy bases in Newport, R.I., and Groton, Conn., and help shield them from future base closings.

Greg Bialecki, the Massachusetts undersecretary for business development, said the bases support a cluster of high-tech companies around the region, including software firms that specialize in network security. "In getting the attention of the federal government, we absolutely agree that grouping together and showing everything New England has to offer is going to be better for everybody," he said.

Waltham's [Raytheon Co.](#) disclosed Tuesday that it is beefing up its own cyber security business, targeting both government and commercial customers, though it is basing that business in Texas. Raytheon executives also cited an intensified threat from hackers.

In its expanded form, the Defense Technology Initiative will work with partners in other states, including the New Hampshire High Technology Council, the Rhode Island Economic Development Corp., TechMaine, and the Connecticut Technology Council, to strengthen the region's remaining military bases and contractor clusters.

"This will be a collaborative effort among the states," Quenneville said. "When you look at New England, and you look at the number of bases we have here, we don't have a lot left."

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