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AIR SOVEREIGNTY ALERT OPERATIONS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

HEARING HELD
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AIR SOVEREIGNTY ALERT OPERATIONS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE,
Washington, DC, Wednesday, April 22, 2009.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:05 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Solomon P. Ortiz (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SOLOMON P. ORTIZ, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM TEXAS, CHAIRMAN, READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE

Mr. ORTIZ. Good morning. And welcome to the hearing on air sovereignty alert (ASA) operations.

During the Cold War we had planes standing alert to protect us from potential air threats from the former Soviet Union. The Cold War ended, we felt safe, and we no longer really needed the ASA mission.

Our comfortable security suddenly changed on September 11, 2001. Following the tragic day, that tragic day, the Department of Defense (DOD) initiated Operation Noble Eagle. Now protection of our airspace from internal threats is our number one defense priority.

The Department issued several policy memos and gave the responsibility for carrying out the new ASA mission to the North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD. Although neither DOD nor NORAD ever specified which service should support the ASA mission, the Air Force currently provides 100 percent of the fighter aircraft. The mission is conducted at 18 ASA sites across the United States with the Air National Guard operating out of 16 of those sites.

The basic crews involved in the ASA mission have been tested several times, most recently when a plane was stolen in Canada and flown across the border into the United States. The plane was intercepted and finally landed on a Missouri—Missourah, I have to follow Chairman Skelton's pronunciation—highway. The pilot was caught after he tried to flee the scene.

All this should make us feel somewhat secure knowing that our space is well protected. So why are we here this morning? We are here because appearances are not always reality. This is a high-priority mission for which the Air Guard has volunteered, but the funding, which comes from active duty Air Force accounts, historically has not been allocated on a timely basis. This raises serious challenges for the Guard related to hiring personnel and providing

the necessary training to ensure the readiness of the crew supporting this mission.

Last year, because of our concern that this mission was being ignored by the active duty Air Force, the committee proposed language to address the funding and personnel situation. Section 354 of the fiscal year 2009—the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act requires the Secretary of Defense to provide in the Air Force budget justification documenting information on funding requirements for the mission and associated command and control elements, including military personnel costs and flying hours.

I would be interested to hear from our Air Force witness General Darnell this morning how the Air Force is complying with that mandate. I recognize that because the full budget has not been sent up here yet, we will not be able to discuss specifics on funding and aircraft availability. We will have those details for a later posture hearing. But I do expect to hear that the Air Force is on track to comply with that statutory language. And I am sure that General Wyatt, Director of the Air Guard, will have a few things to say about this, too.

With that congressional action, we believed we had fixed all the problems associated with the ASA mission. We soon found out we only scratched the surface. Congress has asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to do a review of the ASA mission. Their report which was issued in January was very troubling. I will let the GAO speak for itself and tell us in detail what they found, but I would like to highlight a few findings that bothered me the most.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 71.]

Mr. ORTIZ. Mission document statements do not include the ASA responsibility for the Air Guard. Since this is ignored in the mission statements, the readiness of the units for the ASA mission is not adequately considered. NORAD does not conduct routine operation risk assessments, so we do not have a good idea in terms of what is really needed in terms of personnel, aircraft and types of units to perform the mission. The Air Force has not implemented ASA operations as a steady-state mission because they felt it would not be a lasting mission.

I am also concerned that the Department's responses to the GAO's findings and recommendations were noncommittal. It is my understanding that NORAD and the Air Force provided comments to the Department on actions that they intended to take, but that those comments were not included in the DOD response. That might explain why the DOD response was unsatisfactory. According to DOD policy, the ASA mission is our number one priority. Mr. Verga can provide us a better explanation than what the Department gave to GAO on how the DOD intends to maintain ASA as DOD's number one priority mission.

Now I would like to turn to my good friend from the Commonwealth of Virginia, Randy Forbes, for an opening statement. Mr. Forbes.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ortiz can be found in the Appendix on page 33.]

STATEMENT OF HON. J. RANDY FORBES, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM VIRGINIA, RANKING MEMBER, READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE

Mr. FORBES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I just want to say that I share your concerns regarding this issue. And I would like to thank all of our witnesses for being here today and for sharing your expertise with us and for your service to our country.

As the Chairman mentioned, we learned a lot of lessons on September 11, 2001. We learned that a small group of nonstate actors could take thousands of American lives by attacking us from the skies above our homeland when they took a routine commercial flight operation and turned it into an extremely effective weapon.

According to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), there were nearly 680 million passengers on domestic flights last year and another 154 million flying between the U.S. and the rest of the world. To put it in perspective, that is more than the total populations of the United States, Japan, Russia, Mexico, Canada and the United Kingdom combined. And this number does not include nearly 28 million air hours flown by the fleet of more than 234,000 general aviation aircraft owned by private pilots and flight schools around the country.

Mr. Chairman, I raise this point because I think it is important that we all understand the scope of the problem and the enormous security challenges that we face. Although the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and their international counterparts have taken great strides to increase aviation security, it is imprudent to believe that their actions will completely mitigate the risk should someone attempt to do us harm. With over 830 million commercial passengers flying annually in and around the United States, the scope of the problem is too large, and the consequences are too great.

You mentioned the incident last week involving the general aviation aircraft that was stolen from Canada and flown into U.S. airspace. I certainly want to applaud all those involved in the response and the resolution of that situation.

I also want to highlight that just this Monday, a Canadian passenger jet with 159 passengers and 8 crew members on board was hijacked by a lone gunman who, according to initial press reports, somehow made it past security. Fortunately the police were able to gain control of that situation while the plane was still on the ground.

Although neither of these events appear to be linked to any terrorist organization, they do highlight that current security measures are not impenetrable. Our skies and our citizens are still vulnerable to those wishing to do us harm.

With that said, I find the issues at the heart of today's hearing concerning. The findings in the GAO report and the lackluster response from the Department of Defense require our attention. And I am thankful to you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I am hopeful that we have got the right set of witnesses here to address the issues, and I would like to welcome once again each of them to the committee today.

Today's hearing focuses on the policy and resourcing shortcomings between the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Air Force and the Air National Guard. But I know, Mr. Chairman, that we both agree that NORAD and Northern Command (NORTHCOM) also play a critical role in the execution of the air sovereignty alert mission. As we go through the course of the hearing today, we may find that we will also need to have a direct discussion about the air sovereignty mission with them as well.

Several of our subcommittee members have worked hard in this area, and we recognize their contributions. I thank Mr. LoBiondo for his work in this area. And we look forward to their continuing efforts. And, Mr. Chairman, I now look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and I yield back the balance of my time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Forbes can be found in the Appendix on page 37.]

Mr. ORTIZ. Thank you. I would like to welcome our witnesses, and thank you for taking the time to appear this morning. Today we have with us Ms. Davi M. D'Agostino, Director of Homeland Defense and Emerging Threats and Warfare, Defense Capabilities and Management Team, United States Government Accountability Office. Thank you very much for joining us.

Mr. Peter F. Verga, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense. Thank you, Mr. Verga.

Lieutenant General Daniel J. Darnell, United States Air Force, Deputy Chief of Staff for Air, Space and Information Operations, Plans and Requirements. Thank you, sir, for joining us.

And Lieutenant General Harry M. Wyatt, United States Air Force, Director of the United States Air National Guard.

Welcome, Ms. D'Agostino. Whenever you are ready, you can begin your testimony.

STATEMENT OF DAVI M. D'AGOSTINO, DIRECTOR, HOMELAND DEFENSE AND EMERGING THREATS AND WARFARE, DEFENSE CAPABILITIES AND MANAGEMENT TEAM, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Ms. D'AGOSTINO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Forbes and members of the subcommittee, I am pleased to be here before you this morning to discuss GAO's January 2009 report on opportunities to improve management of North American Aerospace Defense Command's, or NORAD, and Department of Defense's, or DOD, air sovereignty alert operations. We will be calling them ASA going forward.

NORAD and DOD have fueled and armed fighter aircraft and trained personnel on constant alert at 18 sites across the United States. Given the continued air threat, it is crucial for this capability to function at a high level of readiness.

As you noted, Mr. Chairman, currently the Air Force provides NORAD with personnel and equipment for these operations, including F–16 and F–15 aircraft. Air sovereignty alert units are tasked to conduct and train for both their overseas and homeland operations. ASA operations are ground operations that take place before the aircraft go airborne. These operations support multiple missions, including the Joint Staff's Operation Noble Eagle, in addition to NORAD's homeland defense contingency plans.

Today I will address the following three questions. First, does NORAD routinely conduct risk assessments to determine its ASA operational requirements? Second, has the Air Force implemented ASA operations as a steady-state mission in accordance with NORAD, DOD and Air Force guidance? Third, has the Air Force developed a plan to address the potential aircraft shortfalls to sustain ASA operations for the future?

First, NORAD had performed three risk assessments in response to individual DOD leadership requests about ASA operations, but the last one was done in 2006. Such risk assessments, if done on a routine basis, could help NORAD determine the appropriate levels and types of resources for the mission, and particularly, this is important, in a resource-constrained environment.

Second, at the time of our review, the Air Force had not implemented ASA operations as a steady-state mission. Because it is not treated as such, the Air Force programmed money for ASA operations in two-year increments. This has been the case even though DOD in December 2003 directed the Air Force to program money across the six-year future years defense program submissions.

This incremental funding, the two years versus a six-year approach, apparently has created several challenges for the ASA units. Unit commanders we interviewed identified funding, personnel and dual tasking of responsibilities as the top three factors affecting their ability to perform these operations. Seventeen of the twenty units that we talked to said that personnel issues were a moderate or great concern, and that recruiting, retention and promotion limitations were the primary issues due to the two-year funding approach. Some commanders even told us that they had lost some of their most experienced personnel due to job instability caused by the two-year funding approach.

Finally, a key consequence of not being a steady-state mission was that the readiness of the units to conduct these operations is not being fully assessed. NORAD partially assessed readiness through individual inspections that they do about every 20 months, but the Air Force, which is a force provider, is not monitoring readiness for these operations on an ongoing basis. And what is fundamentally important, as you noted, Mr. Chairman, this mission is not on the mission Designed Operational Capability (DOC) statements for the units, and therefore it is not being measured in the readiness system, or Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS).

Finally, at the time of our review, the Air Force did not have a plan to manage potential aircraft shortfalls to sustain ASA operations for the future. We identified a potential shortfall in the number of available aircraft that could affect units performing ASA operations. Our analysis does have some assumptions based on information that DOD provided us and assumes the Air Force would provide F–35s to all the Air National Guard units doing ASA operations. I would point out, though, we recently reported that the F–35 acquisition program may face schedule slippage risks because of this production schedule. Until we see Air Force plans for managing this difficult situation with the competing demands for the new aircraft, it is unclear to us whether replacement aircraft will

be available to mitigate the potential fighter shortfall for conducting ASA in the homeland.

I would like to just mention that we made several recommendations, which you went through briefly, sir, and even though DOD agreed or partially agreed with our report's recommendations, we couldn't tell what actions they were going to take.

Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement.

[The prepared statement of Ms. D'Agostino can be found in the Appendix on page 39.]

Mr. ORTIZ. Thank you. Mr. Verga.

STATEMENT OF PETER F. VERGA, DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY INTEGRATION AND CHIEF OF STAFF, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Mr. VERGA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Ortiz, Congressman Forbes, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today on the Department of Defense protection of the air sovereignty of the United States. As reflected in the National Defense Strategy, the core responsibility of the Department of Defense is to defend the United States from attack upon its territory at home and to secure its interests abroad. The U.S. Armed Forces protect the physical integrity of the country through an active layer of defense. They also deter attacks upon it directly and indirectly through deployments at sea, in the air, on land and in space.

Within the Department of Defense, our responsibility to defend the United States is assigned to the binational U.S.-Canada North American Aerospace Defense Command. NORAD provides aerospace warning, aerospace control, including air sovereignty, and maritime warning for all of North America. Consistent with the law, the Secretary of Defense assigns forces to the United States Element of NORAD to perform its assigned mission, and ensures that such assignments are consistent with the force structure prescribed by the President.

During the Cold War NORAD focused its defense of the United States on air threats, originating from nation states. Although the probability of a nation state air attack has greatly lessened, the Secretary of Defense has said, quote, the United States still has to contend with the security challenges posed by the military forces of other countries, from those actively hostile to those at strategic crossroads, and the United States military must be able to dissuade, deter and, if necessary, respond to challenges across the spectrum, including the armed forces of other nations.

Since the attacks of September 11th, 2001, when terrorists hijacked civilian airliners and used them as weapons against innocent civilians, NORAD's focus has expanded to include terrorist air threats originating from within as well as outside the United States. Terrorists remain the preeminent air threat to the United States. As observed by President Obama during his Inaugural Address, our Nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. NORAD's vigilance against potential attacks from within and from outside the United States is a critical distinction between our air defense posture pre-9/11 and post-9/11.

Collectively the interagency of the Government of the United States provides 20 layers of security to enhance the security in the aviation domain. And while no system is fail-safe, collectively these security measures have created multiple barriers, thereby reducing the likelihood of a successful attack using the air domain.

Through Operation Noble Eagle, NORAD defends the United States by surveilling U.S. airspace and the Nation's air approaches, and by positioning air defense alert fighters throughout the country. These alert fighters, whose numbers may be adjusted to meet changing threat levels, are capable of reaching targets threatening our Nation's major population centers and national critical infrastructure within minutes to dissuade, deter and, if necessary, defeat air threats. Supporting and complementing these alert fighters are defense and Federal Aviation Administration surveillance radars, airborne early warning aircraft and supporting tanker aircraft.

In addition, in defense of the National Capital Region, the seat of our government, Operation Noble Eagle conducts air patrols; maintains a dedicated 24-hour, 7-days-a-week alert fighter response at Andrews Air Force Base; and operates a dedicated around-the-clock ground-based air defense missile system. In addition, the United States Coast Guard supports NORAD with alert helicopters to intercept low- and slow-flying aircraft should they penetrate the National Capital Region air defense zone.

In 2005, DOD employed a unique visual warning system in the National Capital Region to supplement traditional radio communications to warn wayward pilots to contact FAA air traffic controllers immediately and to exit National Capital Region restricted airspace they may have violated.

Currently, to facilitate interagency cooperation, DOD maintains liaison officers in the TSA-hosted National Capital Region Coordination Center on a full-time basis and provides key interagency operation centers and the National Capital Region Coordination Center access to DOD's classified conferencing capability, which is used for DOD coordination and decisionmaking during their response to domestic air threats.

Operation Noble Eagle is a joint operation managed under the Global Force Management Plan to provide timely, risk-balanced resourcing to NORAD requirements for capabilities and forces. DOD ensures that the air sovereignty force furnishes capabilities consistent with U.S. national security objectives and a long established risk management system in conjunction with the Global Force Management Plan. Although the Global Force Management Plan currently directs the U.S. Air Force to support the Operation Noble Eagle mission, the majority of which is currently provided by the Air National Guard, the Department may draw upon capabilities of active duty Air Force or any other DOD component to fill the Operation Noble Eagle air sovereignty mission with U.S. Navy E–2 Hawkeye Airborne Early Warning aircraft or U.S. Marine Corps F/A–18s.

DOD will also continue to refine its risk management approach to ensure that military capabilities and resources are available to carry out its core responsibility to defend the United States. As stated in the National Defense Strategy, the challenges before us

will require resourcefulness and an integrated approach that wisely balances risks and assets, and that recognizes where we must improve.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. We appreciate your leadership, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, and your continued support for the Department of Defense, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Verga can be found in the Appendix on page 54.]

Mr. ORTIZ. Thank you, sir. General Darnell.

STATEMENT OF LT. GEN. DANIEL J. DARNELL, USAF, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR AIR, SPACE AND INFORMATION OPERATIONS, PLANS AND REQUIREMENTS, U.S. AIR FORCE

General DARNELL. Good morning, Chairman Ortiz, Ranking Member Forbes and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for calling this hearing and for the opportunity to discuss Air Force air sovereignty operations.

The January 2009 Government Accountability Office report focuses on a vital mission area that has been a part of the Air Force and Air National Guard for over 50 years. The GAO report provides useful recommendations the Air Force can take to better support ASA operations. We have analyzed the GAO findings and are working to comply with the recommended actions. The Air Force stands ready to win today's joint fight and plan for tomorrow's challenges.

I thank the subcommittee for allowing me to appear before you today and for your continued support of the Air Force. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Darnell can be found in the Appendix on page 58.]

Mr. ORTIZ. General Wyatt.

STATEMENT OF LT. GEN. HARRY M. WYATT III, USAF, DIRECTOR, U.S. AIR NATIONAL GUARD

General WYATT. Thank you, Chairman Ortiz, Ranking Member Forbes and members of the committee.

Secretary Gates wrote in the 2008 National Defense Strategy, and I quote, a core responsibility of the U.S. Government is to protect the American people, in the words of the framers of our Constitution, to provide for the common defense, closed quote. As we sit here today, nearly 3,000 men and women of the Air National Guard are protecting the skies over our heads. This includes Air Guard members manning first Air Force and its air defense sectors and operation centers; and the air crews, maintenance personnel and other support personnel at 16 of the 18 U.S. air sovereignty alert sites throughout the United States.

The January GAO report focused on the air sovereignty alert, those sites that were conducting steady-state ASA operations up through September of 2008. I would like to put a face to some of the Air National Guard challenges associated with ASA.

As, Mr. Chairman, you indicated, at 2:55 p.m. On April 6th, a Cessna 172 was stolen from an airport in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. It entered U.S. airspace over Michigan's Upper Peninsula

at 4:23, and at 4:43 it was intercepted by two F–16s from the 148th Fighter Wing, Duluth, Minnesota, Air National Guard. I would point out to the committee that the first responding aircraft are the oldest aircraft and the first aircraft to age out, which we anticipate will happen in fiscal year 2015.

As the pilot flew over Minnesota south through Wisconsin, Illinois and Missouri, escort duty was then handed off to the 115th Fighter Wing, Wisconsin Air National Guard. And we have a member of that unit with me today. Seated behind me is Staff Sergeant West Chadwick. He was a member of the air sovereignty alert team that performed that mission. And I will tell you more about Staff Sergeant Chadwick here in just a second.

Subsequent to the Wisconsin Air National Guard, the Louisiana Air National Guard F–15 picked up the mission, and throughout the mission tanker support, in-flight refueling was provided by the 117th Air Refueling Wing, Alabama Air National Guard. By the way, they were flying a 50-year-old aircraft.

While this incident ended well, it demonstrates several important points that the Chairman has already recognized: First, that the threat to U.S. sovereignty from the air has moved beyond Soviet bombers to include aircraft on domestic flights, as we learned on September 11, and slow-flying, low-altitude planes, such as the Cessna 172. What is next? Perhaps Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), cruise missiles launched from offshore, and surely the maritime threat.

We must not again underestimate the ingenuity and technological capability of our adversary. As the September 11th Commission aptly noted, beware the failure of imagination. These threats require different defensive capabilities, including modernizing and recapitalizing both our fighter and aerial refueling aircraft fleets, and rethinking about how this mission is sustained in the terms of funding and personnel.

I would submit to you that ASA is a system of systems, including surveillance radar, early warning systems, command and control and communication systems, certainly the fighters, which get a lot of the attention, but the tanker fleet also and the Airborne Warning and Control (AWAC) System. But I submit to you that the most important part of this system are the dedicated professionals, the people, that accomplish this mission.

You are well aware of the challenges that the U.S. Air Force has in modernizing and recapitalizing both its fighter and refueling fleets. We have been working closely with the Air Force and their planning, but to date there are no firm plans to replace the Air National Guard F–15 and F–16 fleet currently protecting our skies. The ASA fleet in the Air National Guard is among the oldest and therefore the most at-risk force that we have.

Over the last several years Congress has been very helpful in funding Air National Guard's ASA radar modernization program. This program requires continued attention if we are to meet today's threats and bridge capabilities to the next generation of fighter aircraft. ASA is essential to improve both capability and sustainment. For example, if the Cessna had entered U.S. airspace in a high-traffic area such as New York, it would have been very difficult for

the older F–16s to find, identify and track it with the older radar systems that they had.

The aging KC–135 fleet, as you are well aware, is especially critical for the Air National Guard not just for the ASA mission, but for the fight overseas. The ASA mission is dependent upon air refueling, and the Air National Guard has some of the oldest KC–135s in the total force fleet. Example: The 117th that performed in this mission with a 50-year-old aircraft.

The most important part of ASA, as I indicated, is our people. On an average day there are more than 1,600 Air National Guard men and women performing the ASA mission in Title 32 status. That includes not only fighter pilots, but aircraft weapons maintenance, life support specialists, intel specialists, security forces, and avionic specialists such as Staff Sergeant Chadwick.

The GAO report states the Air Force has not implemented ASA operations as a steady-state, ongoing and definite mission. For the Air National Guard this translates into two primary issues, the first, funding a lack of consistent predictable funding; and second, the equipment part that we mentioned earlier.

Funding affects our people in various ways. Many of those manning the alert sites are on temporary Active Guard and Reserve tours. Two-year funding means that these people are on two-year contracts that end at the end of September. The next one will be this September. They do not know if they will have a job after their contract ends. They don't know what to tell their civilian employers; are they returning to work, or are they not? In fiscal year 2008, only 772 of our required 922 Air Guard Reserve (AGR) positions were funded. The difference is filled with traditional guardsmen on mandates, and they are caught in that same predicament: Do they have a job, or do they not?

Staff Sergeant West Chadwick has joined me here today. He is an avionic specialist with the 115th Fighter Wing, Wisconsin Air National Guard. I would ask that he stand as I relate to you his personnel situation, but it is a situation that is echoed throughout the gallant people that are performing this mission. He helped prep and launch the alert birds that intercepted the aircraft intruder on 6 April. He is an example of the outstanding guardsmen who are personally impacted by the lack of consistent funding and planning for this mission.

From October 2005 to September 2007, Sergeant Chadwick worked ASA at Truex Field as a temporary AGR on Title 32 orders, but he didn't know if his job was going to continue past September 31st of that year because of a lack of funding. He therefore volunteered for his wing's Aerospace Expeditionary Force (AEF) rotation in the theater. And that is a key point, because these ASA alert sites flying F–16s and F–15s are also involved in the United States Air Force AEF rotation. It is not only an ASA fleet strictly, it is one that we use in the AEF rotations also.

But he volunteered to go to Balad in January through March of 2008. In the meantime, from October of 2007 to January of 2008, he entered college; no income, no health coverage, and he married in December of 2008. He returned from Iraq in April and was offered another temporary AGR tour from May through September of 2008, when the funding ended again. His orders were late arriving,

so he didn't go on duty until June 5th, so he went for two months without pay. He eventually received some back pay, but he lost TRICARE coverage during that period of time. He has deployed one other time on an AEF rotation, and, as he sits here today, has volunteered yet for a third time. Because his unit must sustain ASA even as the rest of the unit deploys for their AEF rotation, the unit must first find a volunteer to replace Staff Sergeant Chadwick in his ASA job.

I would like to personally thank Sergeant Chadwick for his dedicated service and perseverance. Thank you very much.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would submit that the homeland defense mission is the primary mission of the Department of Defense. ASA is a primary component of that homeland defense mission, but we in the Department of Defense need to work together to better ensure the long-term viability of the capability.

The United States Air Force today has the power and the ability to fix both of these problems, first by funding within the Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP), and, second, assisting in the recapitalization of the Air National Guard early, but not late. Recapitalization of ASA is recapitalization of the United States Air Force. It should not be viewed as competitive, but rather complementary to the recapitalization of the Air Force, because when you recapitalize the ASA fleet, you are recapitalizing those same jets that perform the AEF mission. The Air Force can have its cake and eat it, too, with early recapitalization of the Air National Guard.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I thank you for your time and support. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Wyatt can be found in the Appendix on page 63.]

Mr. ORTIZ. Thank you, General. Thank you so much for your dedication and your commitment. We are proud of you and other members of the Air Force, the National Guard and the Air Force, for doing a tremendous job in keeping our country free from an attack.

This reminds me. I come from Corpus Christi, and we are prone to hurricanes, and they can strike with a devastating force. But then after it strikes, there is a calm until the backside of the eye of the storm hits you again. And thank God that we have been—I guess because of the work that you have done—that we have not been attacked again.

But as I was listening to this mower cut the grass, I thought somebody was intruding into our airspace. But thank you so much for your testimony.

Now, I would like, beginning with Secretary Verga, to ask questions about how is the Air Force intending to comply with section 354 of the fiscal year 2009 and the double A?

Mr. VERGA. Well, Mr. Chairman, I know that it was our understanding that the Air Force was, in fact, preparing the necessary budget display materials to allow the committee the information that it required. I am actually not personally prepared to say what the Air Force is doing. I would ask that the General address that specifically. But that is what we need to do is to give you the information that is necessary.

Mr. ORTIZ. General Darnell.

General DARNELL. Mr. Chairman, we have read the language. Our intent is to comply. You should see the information broken out in the documents that come over for the budget, and we feel like it is exactly what the committee is looking for.

So as I said before, the intent is to comply. It is our first attempt to ensure you have got the information you need. We will certainly work with your staff if there is any other visibility that is required.

Mr. ORTIZ. And this very important to us. This committee has a huge responsibility, number one, to provide what you all need to defend our country, our skies, and be ready to dispose of anybody who might be trying to attack.

Let me ask GAO a question. Unless, General, do you have any comments? The GAO, I want to ask them a question to see do you believe DOD's comments to your report were responsive to your findings and recommendations?

Ms. D'AGOSTINO. Mr. Chairman, we noted that DOD did concur or partially concur with each recommendation, which we always appreciate. But normally when they really do concur, they tell us what they plan to do to implement the recommendation and when they plan to do it by. In this case we did not have a lot of that kind of response in the discussion or the narrative of the comments.

Mr. ORTIZ. And I wonder why there was not adequate response to the question from GAO.

Mr. VERGA. As Ms. D'Agostino said, we did—the primary office with responsibility for this bureaucratically in the Department of Defense is the Office of the Inspector General handles the staffing of GAO reports, and then it goes down to an office that has a substantive expertise on it. In this case it is the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and America's Security Affairs. That is the office that did, in fact, concur or partially concur in the recommendations, agreeing with the needs as stated by the GAO, but not necessarily the specific courses of action that were recommended.

We have, in fact, responded to a bunch of follow-up questions that we had with the GAO, trying to work together with them. My understanding is to date we have not had the sort of back-and-forth on those responses to the additional questions. But I assure you that when we concur with a recommendation or partially concur, partially concur meaning we agree with what you said but not necessarily the remedy that you suggested, that we will, in fact, follow up on them.

Mr. ORTIZ. I would like to ask GAO do you agree? It is not that I am trying to put anybody or picking on you guys. This is not our intent. But what we are trying to do is to get to the bottom of this so that we can give you what you need and so that we—and you all to comply with the direction of what the Congress gave you. So, ma'am, if you could.

Ms. D'AGOSTINO. If I could just draw on a specific example to explain.

Mr. ORTIZ. Could you get closer to the mike?

Ms. D'AGOSTINO. Sure.

If I could just draw on a specific example of the DOD comments to one of our recommendations that was a little confounding for us. We recommended that the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) direct

the Secretary of the Air Force to formally assign the air sovereignty alert mission to the units that are performing those operations at steady-state sites and then ensure that their readiness is measured. The DOD response was, we partially concur; we are furnishing clear direction through the Operation Noble Eagle execution order. And they indicated they might review the execution order at some later date. But our situation was you don't have to review the execution order to have the Air Force assign the mission to the unit.

So it was confounding to us, very confusing, in terms of why they brought up the execution order for Operation Noble Eagle, which isn't the only foundation for the ASA operations, as you know. And so it was very confusing to us, and it remains so today. So we just wanted somebody to direct the Air Force to assign the mission, it was pretty straightforward, and measure the readiness, and then we got this execute order (ex-ord) discussion, which doesn't really apply to the recommendation, because you can fix the problem without changing the execute order, okay? Does that help?

Mr. ORTIZ. That helped. But let me just ask one more question, and then I would like to allow some of our Members who have other important questions.

What concrete actions would the Air Force take after today's hearing to ensure that the ASA operations are implemented as a steady-state mission?

General Darnell.

General DARNELL. Mr. Chairman, I will answer that question. Ms. D'Agostino's point—and when you talk about ex-ord and the fact that she didn't feel like it really gave her the detail that she needed—what we really need to do is to assign the mission via DOC statements in the squadrons, which we are in the process of doing. Just talking with my staff this morning, Air Combat Command (ACC) has been working with the Air National Guard. All but two of the ASA units have submitted their recommendations for DOC statement tasking. We should have that wrapped up, we hope, by late summer, early fall.

But when you have a DOC statement that assigns a mission, then lots of other things fall in place. You are inspected on a regular basis. You are trained and organized and funded and resourced according to your DOC statements. This speaks to General Wyatt's point, frankly, about the funding not being long term. And I agree with his statement; I agree with the GAO's finding as well. So I already talked to the resource managers in the Air Force. We are already working to make this a long-term funding mission for the Air Force versus the two-year construct that we have right now.

Mr. ORTIZ. And we want to help. Anything that we can do to help, whether it is a personnel matter, is it equipment, let us know, because we want to work with you. We want to do everything we can to protect our country.

And with that, now I would like to yield to my good friend Mr. Forbes for any further questions that he might have.

Mr. FORBES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, first of all, let me start with Sergeant Chadwick. The Chairman and I both want to thank you for your service, and we appre-

ciate your attendance here today, and we owe you better than we have been giving you. And as the Chairman mentioned, we are not here to point fingers at anybody. We are here just to make sure that Sergeant Chadwick and the other people serving our country don't fall between these gaps sometime when we are trying to provide for resourcing them.

The other thing that sometimes frustrates us as we watch is we are in negotiations with China from time to time, and they always come in every time, and it is the same thing. They spend a long period of time just denying something happened, and then all of a sudden they start agreeing it happened, but we never see them change. And so what we are trying to do here in as friendly a way as we can is to say how do we just move this ball to make sure it happens?

And, General Darnell, your statement is probably the best statement that we will have here all day. If we can get that mission statement assigned, I think this hearing would have had a huge importance, because as I look at it, the bottom line is prior to September 11th, I think we had about 4 sites operable, and then after 9/11 we got, as you testified, about 18 sites going.

There is no question that this is a mission that is going to be ongoing, and eight years is probably long enough for us to get that picture and to assign it, because the three things we are concerned about you mentioned, General: the training, the inspection, but also the capitalization. I think if we can just assign those missions, the others will probably flow through. And so I am just optimistic of hearing that. And that was going to be my whole line of questioning, but you have answered that.

The one question I would have for Mr. Verga, just to clear up for me, you indicated, if I didn't understand you, that Operation Noble Eagle is managed under the Global Force Management Plan. I think that is a Joint Forces Command (JFCOM)-administered program; is it, or is it not?

Mr. VERGA. The Global Force Management Plan is the dynamic process by which the Secretary of Defense, advised by the Chairman of the Joint Staff, allocates forces to all the worldwide combatant commanders for the missions that are assigned to them. That is a process that is ongoing; when we decide to do more in Afghanistan, drawdown in Iraq, when we decide we have greater air threats against the United States, all of the forces worldwide are managed dynamically in terms of those which are assigned to the combatant commanders who bear responsibility for those various missions.

Mr. FORBES. Help me with the connectivity here, because, and I could be wrong, but as I understand it, when the airmen are on alert, they are in Title 32 status, which basically are under the States. How do we know that they are there? I mean, is this something we just kind of hope for, is it something that we kind of guess that they are going to be? How do we connect those dots to make sure that that is part of your plan if they are sitting in a Title 32 status?

Mr. VERGA. I will defer the specific answers to that, though. The Secretary holds the combatant commander who has responsibility for the mission responsible for the readiness and the ability of the

forces to do that mission. He then turns to the force providers, either the United States Air Force or the Air National Guard component of the Air Force, to organize, train and equip those forces for the missions that they may be assigned to do.

The dynamic nature of the Air National Guard providing ready day-to-day forces and this Title 32 while you are on alert and Title 10 as soon as you take off in the air is a process that has worked, to my understanding, very effectively over the years. It has never been brought to my attention that we have ever had a problem with being assured on the readiness. We see reports every day on the numbers of fighters and all those things like that, but I will turn to the general to give me the specifics.

General WYATT. Mr. Forbes, this may help a little bit. I think the root of the problem goes back as far as the Global Force Management (GFM). Global Force Management goes back to the issue with the DOC statements. The management of personnel through GFM relies heavily upon DOC statements for resourcing of the people. If you have a DOC statement, that is the beginning document that results in the assignment of manpower, assignment of equipment, determination of minimum essential task listings that the unit has to do, unit tasking codes; that sets up a reporting system that allows the commander then to report sometimes in a classified manner the status of forces as it relates to the DOC statement.

The problem in the past has been that these units have not had DOC statements. They have for their general purpose, but not for ASA. ASA has been an additional duty, if you will, kind of a pick-up game. And so without the DOC statement and the resulting support systems that flow from the Department of Defense and the United States Air Force, the manning of ASA when a unit goes AEF is basically left up to the Air National Guard and the Air Force and Air Combat Command to work their deals, if you will. And it is kind of an ad hoc system that, thanks to the great volunteerism that we have in the Air National Guard, we have not missed a lick, but we rely upon great support from the United States Air Force to continue that mission.

It would seem to me that the appropriate thing to do—and, as General Darnell indicated, we have already started writing those DOC statements. It is not anything that I can push up through the system. He can pull, I can push, and we can get these DOC statements done and then have the Air Force corporate system take a look at the importance of the mission. These units do not go unevaluated. NORAD does do AFE, alert flight evaluations, to make sure that they are trained, ready and capable to do the mission.

But I think the key is—I am from Oklahoma, and actions speak a whole lot louder than words. And when I hear comments about the mission not competing well against other missions that DOD or the Air Force may have, I kind of scratch my head. And I think that is reflected in the status that we currently have. But I kind of scratch my head, and I ask myself, what is more important than defense of the United States of America? And when we can match up the priorities that the Department of Defense and the United States Air Force give defense of the homeland with the resourcing, with the tasking, then I think we, no kidding, can step back and

say we are resourcing the number one mission for this country adequately.

Mr. FORBES. Should the assigned alert personnel be in Title 10 status, or do you think Title 32 status is adequate?

General WYATT. Title 32 works very well. It allows us to field a capability. As soon as that aircraft is launched, they go into a Title 10 status. This situation has worked very well for us in the past. It allows the type of flexibility that the local commanders need to man the mission, but yet it allows the pilots to be in the appropriate Title upon execution of the mission. It has worked very well for us in the past, and I would urge that it be continued.

Mr. FORBES. I want to just echo what the Chairman said, and that is if there is anything this subcommittee can do to help move that process along, we want to be here to do it.

Secondly, to also echo what he said in terms of thanking you for keeping us safe. Regardless of what blemishes, warts, remedies that we need to do, you have done a fantastic job from September 11th on. If you hadn't, people would have been in here pointing fingers. So we want to make sure we just take this opportunity to thank you.

And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ORTIZ. Thank you. And this is what is good about this panel. We put you together, GAO, Air Force, so that we can get to the bottom of what we need to do to correct anything that needs to be corrected.

Now Ms. Giffords.

Ms. GIFFORDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Forbes, as well for this hearing. And I truly believe, just like General Wyatt talked about, this is the number one mission of the United States Government, of representatives of the United States Government, and it is the number one mission of our military.

The job of protecting our homeland, General, falls squarely on your shoulders; it falls squarely on the Guard, and certainly on Staff Sergeant Chadwick and your colleagues, because the responsibility really lies within your parameters. And since 9/11, you have stood 24-hours-a-day alert for the last 397 weeks.

I believe that your mission is unquestionable. But the future of this mission, Mr. Chairman, I think is in question. And this hearing is so important because I am certainly not hearing the answers that I think are necessary for the people that we represent. I believe that the Air Force and the Department of Defense has failed to plan for the future of the ASA. And by failing to adequately study legitimate options for resourcing the mission, I believe that we are talking about a virtual reality and not about a real-case situation. I think our Air Force has generated report after report assuring us that serious consideration has been given to the issue, yet we have not seen specific planning, and certainly we have not seen the action necessary.

The Air Guard's largest fighter wing, the 162nd, is in Tucson, and Tucson is my hometown. It is responsible for the overflights of Phoenix, the fifth largest city in the country. Ensuring their viability is vital to more than four million people in the metro area. During the recent NORAD review of the 162nd, the inspection team lead said of our alert detachment, the 162nd, it is the best F–16

maintenance in NORAD. But unfortunately, when you look at the current glide slope—and I urge Members to really study this, and I will be passing it on to other Members that don't serve on the subcommittee or even the committee—unfortunately the 162nd will have no flyable aircraft in just six years, and Tucson is just the tip of the iceberg.

Our Arizona experience is indicative of Guard facilities across the country who face an uncertain future. As the Air Force continues to look over the horizon, they are ignoring the rapidly approaching fighter shortfall at home. In eight years, 80 percent of our Air National Guard aircraft will be unfit to fly. This is a hard fact that will result in a serious gap in domestic air sovereignty. On any scale measured by any metric, an 80 percent loss is simply unacceptable. When those aircraft are removed from service, our guardsmen, our pilots, our maintenance crews, our support crews in Tucson and across the country will principally be out of a job.

So we have to take this opportunity to prevent a dangerous and irreversible shortfall. This is going to require earnest leadership from the Air Force and from the Department to choose the right option based on the facts. To shore up our Air Guard's ability to secure the homeland, I believe that we have to choose to invest in more of the legacy aircraft that our guardsmen already know how to fly and to fix. We should reject service life extension programs that are penny-wise and pound-foolish. And while fifth-generation aircraft are undoubtedly the future for many units, relying solely on that aircraft that to this day only flies in the world of PowerPoint is equally shortsighted. These aircraft are not expected to be delivered to the Guard for more than a decade, and we simply can't wait that long.

My guard unit, my constituents, this committee, the people that they represent, the American people, deserve to have the answers that we have repeatedly requested from the Department and the Air Force. We are not simply concerned about force size. We have to sustain a balance in total force structure.

So with that I have some questions for General Wyatt. Specifically, when you look at the chart showing that the fighter waterfall will hit the Air Guard over the next 8 years, can you please address the consequences of an 80 percent reduction in capability and its negative impact on our national military strategy?

General WYATT. Yes ma'am, I would be happy to, and thank you for the question.

You are exactly correct. We have about—of the 16 fighter units in the Air National Guard that are pulling alert, 11 of those are F–16 units, and of those 11, 8 are scheduled to reach the service life of their aircraft in the fiscal year 2015 through 2017 year period, Tucson being one of those.

We have made some progress recently in working with Air Combat Command in addressing the recapitalization of those aging aircraft. We have not seen a flight plan yet for recapitalization that takes care of that problem. There have been statements made that the Air National Guard is written into the beddown of the F–22 and the F–35, and those statements are correct. But the timing of the beddown is what concerns me more than the numbers of the aircraft right now, because the only plan that I have seen that has

been published to date has the Air National Guard getting into these weapon systems, as you say, about 10 years late to need. So we have been working with Air Combat Command to push forward or accelerate the fielding of the F–35 and F–22 into Air National Guard units early, and we are making some progress there.

But the thing to consider is that the Air Force has other competing missions that they must weigh. And this goes back to my previous statement, that as we weigh and balance the importance of all of these very important missions, I have a hard time understanding why defense of the homeland is not the number one and should be focused on for early capitalization. If the Air National Guard could get into the earlier fielding of these weapon systems, this problem would be solved. If it is not solved, then some other force will have to pick up that mission, and it detracts from the Navy's mission, the Marine Corps' mission and the overseas fight that the United States Air Force has.

So I share your concern, and that is one of the three main issues that I think the GAO report and this committee should rightly be interested in.

Ms. GIFFORDS. Mr. Chairman, I know my time is up, but I would just like to emphasize that if we lose these guardsmen and guardswomen, we will not get them back. Right now we have a force that functions very well, highly trained, highly competent; obviously, as we heard from Staff Sergeant Chadwick's biography, very committed to the cause. But I think that we are headed in the wrong direction by changing course and not supplying our units with what they need.

Mr. ORTIZ. Thank you so much. And if necessary, we will have a second round of questions.

My good friend Mr. LoBiondo from New Jersey.

Mr. LOBIONDO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much for holding the hearing. I also would like to thank my colleague, Congresswoman Giffords from Arizona, for joining in with me in trying to raise the level of attention, should we say. And the level of frustration, at least from my part, and I think from some of my colleagues, is really growing. We for years now have been hearing that a plan will be unveiled, a plan will be developed, solutions will be laid on the table. And, Mr. Chairman, I don't know how long we wait on this, but the clock ticks.

We have heard what is going to happen in 8 years with 80 percent of our force. I represent the 177th Fighter Wing out of Atlantic City, arguably one of the most strategically located homeland security bases in the Nation by virtue of their proximity to New York City and Washington, D.C., and we have all of the same concerns without getting any of the answers.

Mr. Verga, would you say that protecting the homeland from direct attack is the number one priority as outlined by the National Defense Strategy as we know it?

Mr. VERGA. Yes, sir. I would agree with that. It also enjoys a very high priority in what is called the guidance for the employment of the force, which is what we do. We tell the services and combatant commanders how to actually employ the force.

I would say that I am a little bit disturbed—is probably the word I would use—about a direction I think I see some of the comments

going in, and that is the sort of fencing and dedicating of this mission to the Air National Guard. While we have traditionally employed the Air National Guard part of the total force to do this mission, I do think we must keep in mind that it is a mission broadly for the Department, not necessarily a mission limited to any single component of the Department. I personally do not think we are going to suffer a gap in the air defense of the United States any time in the foreseeable future due to the priorities that this is afforded.

I would separate that in my mind from the equipping and recapitalization of the aircraft currently assigned to the Air National Guard for their support of the total force mission. So that is just a comment I think I would like to make. The mission is not going to suffer.

Now can I say authoritatively that the fighter wings that you are concerned about are going to be first up for getting replacement aircraft? No, I can't say that. That is a master plan that the Air Force will have. But the assignment of sufficient forces to accomplish the mission of defending the air space of the United States and maintaining air sovereignty is unquestioned.

Mr. LOBIONDO. I am thrilled to hear that but maybe it is just my mind or maybe some of my colleagues can help me out or the chairman, if the mission is protected and guaranteed, then there has to be some ability to articulate how that is going to happen. Because unless the Air Force is going to dramatically increase its numbers, and we don't know what the tempo is going to be in Afghanistan or even maybe what it will be in Iraq or some other location around the world, and clearly the assets that the Air Guard is using are running to the end of their useful life, so we can say, well, okay, maybe we don't need Air Guard units, but in my mind, if an Air Guard unit goes away, it goes away. You can't flip a switch and bring it back. These folks are the best bang for the buck I think we have in the military. And part of my frustration is that we don't have an understanding of how the protection of the mission will be accomplished.

General Darnell, do you believe that we are going to have a problem in 6, 8, 10 years with the fleet reaching the end of its useful service?

General DARNELL. Congressman, we will ensure that there is no problem, and our dilemma at this point right today is we have a Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) discussion coming up. We have to wait until we get on the back side of that to be able to definitively give you something as of today to say exactly where we will be at. But as General Wyatt said, we have been working very closely with the Guard, ACC has, and this is not something we are ignoring. We are trying obviously to ensure that the Nation has the safety and defense that it requires.

As Mr. Verga said, we will ensure, whether it be through the Air Force or a combination of forces, that this Nation is defended.

Mr. LOBIONDO. Thank you, General. But Congresswoman Giffords has a chart that is easily understood. And what we would like to see is that what you are telling us about basically don't worry, we are going to have a plan and it is all going to be okay, we would sort of like to see that. I think the chairman has articulated he

would like to see it. I think GAO talked about that a little bit. And I would feel a whole lot better if you could come to the full committee or to this committee and be able to articulate why it is that we shouldn't be concerned. Because if you look at the chart and you look at the aircraft that are coming offline, and you look at the challenges that the Air Force has, at least to me, as just an average Member of Congress, I can't connect the dots in my mind.

I know I am running tight on time, but General Wyatt, one question for you. Do you have an opinion as to what the solution would be for this fighter gap problem? If you had your ability to make your choice, not worrying about what somebody else was going to say, what would you say the choice would be to fix this problem?

General WYATT. Thank you for the question, sir, and let me try my best to answer that. And Mr. Verga makes a good point that this mission should not necessarily be fenced to the Air National Guard, although I would maybe counter that with the fact that the Department of Defense has sought willing participants for this mission from across the services, and the best resolution, primarily for expense purposes that you pointed out, the most efficient force is the Air National Guard. That is the solution in my mind that works the best.

I tried to make the point that recapitalizing the Air National Guard fleet should not be considered as competitive to recapitalizing the United States Air Force because these same units are rotated in and out of theater in the AEF rotation. So it is not strictly a fencing or dedication argument, as has been proposed, but rather a recapitalization of the United States Air Force, a portion of that recognizing the importance of mission number one and recognizing the unique ability and cost efficiencies of the Air National Guard in performing that mission. My preferences would be that when we recapitalize, "we" being the United States Air Force, that we recapitalize as a total United States Air Force, and we field these capabilities concurrently and proportionately between the active duty, the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard. And if we do that, we can take care of the issue that you have pointed out with the waterfall charts. We can do this through the concept of associations and recognizing that there is great benefit, especially in the ASA mission, of the distribution of locations offered by the Air National Guard. We are strategically located, as you pointed out, in Atlantic City, New Jersey, from your constituency, but if you take a look at the locations of all the ASA sites in the Air National Guard, they are located where they can quickly react to a threat that may come from any of the 360 degrees of air space that we protect. But through the construct, not only recapitalization, but construct of associations where we mesh active duty and Air National Guard and in some cases Air Force Reserve, I think that is an answer, too, in addition to the recapitalization issues that we have talked about.

Mr. LOBIONDO. I thank you, General. And I am in complete concurrence with your answer.

Mr. Chairman, I hope you will found ways to continue to keep the heat turned up on getting some of these additional answers. Thank you.

Mr. ORTIZ. I think that the gentleman has raised some very important points. We would like to see the replacement of these fighters that are getting old. We would like to see a budget. We would like to see the training. We would like to see what the National Guard is going to do. I think that you are raising some very important issues here.

Ms. Shea-Porter.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Thank you. Mr. Verga, you said that the mission is not going to suffer. And I grew up in a very large family. And we had work lists every single day twice a day because my mother knew the mission of that Shea household would suffer if we didn't all know who was doing what. And so I just wanted to take a little bit of the comments that were in the GAO report and perhaps Ms. D'Agostino will talk about it, but I am concerned NORAD had not conducted routine risk assessments to determine ASA operational requirements, including the appropriate level and types of unit personnel and aircraft for the mission, and that the Air National Guard units that are performing the ASA mission do not have the mission included in the designated operational capability statement. Is that so, Ms. D'Agostino?

Ms. D'AGOSTINO. Yes, ma'am. Yes, it is.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. And does that worry you, like it worries us?

Ms. D'AGOSTINO. It concerned us. Let me clarify that. NORAD did do three assessments in response to individual requests from the leadership at the Department largely looking to save money. And each time they did these risk-based assessments, the current number of units and assignment of aircraft, et cetera, and personnel were apparently validated. So that there was no reduction and no change from the 18-unit, the current configuration.

I guess our only concern is that you know things change and the threats are asymmetric, that it makes a lot of sense to do risk assessments on a routine basis and also in light of the current fiscal constraints that we are facing as a nation, it makes sense to take a good hard look at your requirements. And we think the best way to do this is through a risk-based assessment process, and that would consider threats, vulnerability, criticality, and then you have to consider resources as well and you would prioritize your needs or your requirements and then resource those highest priority requirements.

So that is why we suggested that they do a routine risk assessment process to determine their requirements and so they have valid justification for what they request.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Are you also concerned about a diffusion of responsibility when so many different groups have a piece of it?

Ms. D'AGOSTINO. We were very concerned that the air sovereignty alert mission was not on the DOC statements of these units and because of that, it really created, I don't want to use the "waterfall" thing, but it has a number of rolling consequences for the units in terms of, you know, their readiness, that is not put into the readiness system, they are not measured, their training isn't checked up on. So as an Air Force responsibility, we thought that they needed to formally assign the mission to those units, and that is why we recommended that.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Obviously I concur. And I would like to associate myself with the Congresswoman's comments. I have the same concern. I think the American public would be horrified to know, let me make sure I have the count right, but that in 2001 we had 14 aircraft designated for this mission, is that correct? And now we have 54.

So let me ask the next question, please. And I don't know if it makes any sense or not, but knowing that we are facing a problem with a shortage of aircraft and knowing the other circumstances, does it make any sense to have more active duty wings at Air National Guard bases? Would that in any way help alleviate some of the pressure at least for the planes themselves and maybe for some of the personnel?

I have absolutely no idea if that is a reasonable question or not but it occurred to me.

General WYATT. I think one way to answer your question would be to go back to a previous comment I made about associations. As the number of fighter aircraft available for the defense of the country and execution of all of our missions, including those overseas, I think it makes sense to look at ways to become more efficient in the recapitalization, in the placement location of those capabilities and in the different components, strengths and weaknesses as we try to figure out a better way to proceed forward.

The days of unconstrained capability are long gone. And I am very appreciative of the financial concerns that the country is experiencing right now. And I think one of the ways to make sure that we most efficiently meet the taskings of this mission, but all of our missions overseas, is to place a great importance upon the association construct that considers location and some of the ideal locations that the Air National Guard provides for these particular missions, but we also need to recognize that there are some ideal locations where the active duty Air Force can provide for these types of missions. And so I think location should not be determined based upon whether it is Air National Guard or United States Air Force but where the location best serves the interest of the country. And then as we put those units together because we have fewer air frames to fly but we need to maintain the pilot proficiency, the maintenance proficiencies, and we need to, especially in the Guard, we need to provide this country with a surge capability—I mean that is what makes the Air National Guard the most efficient force—is that not only do we handle the day-to-day ASA and our share of the AEF rotations, but we are also available for that surge capability. If we have limited numbers of airplanes, you nevertheless need a surge capability because pilots and maintainers cannot work 24 hours a day. If you have to deploy or you have a situation in the United States of America that requires 24-hour-a-day operations at a much greater level than the current steady state, you need to have access to that surge capability.

And I think the association construct, whether it is what we call active associations where the active duty comes to a Guard location or whether it is the classic association where Guard members go to the active duty, we need to do the smart thing. We need to do both of those in locations that make sense for air sovereignty alert,

but also makes sense for some of the other missions that the Air Force does.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Thank you. I know my time has run out but I would also like to thank the men and the women of the National Guard. We are still working on trying to make things right for their service. Thank you and I yield back.

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Coffman.

Mr. COFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General Wyatt, one issue I want to raise, a Colorado specific issue, is Buckley Air Force Base, which was a former National Guard facility, but it has our—we have the wing component or the F–16 component of the Air National Guard there. They are hopefully going to go to F–35 at some point. There is some concern, my district has the eastern edge of that coming up to the base and I think there is concern about encroachment onto, in and around the base where we might lose that flying mission. I wonder if you might comment on any efforts made there to preserve the flying mission there relative to development around the facility.

General WYATT. Congressman, as you are aware, the Colorado unit is one of those units that performs ASA. My good friend Mike Edwards, the Adjutant General of Colorado, himself a fighter pilot, is very attuned to the issues and challenges and in fact he contributes greatly to the expertise within the Air National Guard that addresses these issues.

You speak of encroachment. I have been to Buckley several times. I hate to admit the first time I was ever in an F–100, flown A–7s in there, been there on a number of different aircraft, and I remember the days when Buckley was kind of out there on its own. And you are right, there are encroachment activities. And that is true of some Air National Guard bases. It is also true of active duty bases. And I think we need to be cognizant of that as we look forward to forward basing.

But in talking to General Edwards, I am aware of some significant efforts by your leadership and the leadership, the local leadership in Colorado, to be cognizant of the encroachment issue and do what can be done to make sure that that does not adversely affect the possibilities of the Colorado Air National Guard in this recapitalization effort.

I hope that answers your question.

Mr. COFFMAN. General Wyatt, just another comment. I have introduced House Resolution 1879, the National Guard Employment Act of 2009. And it takes into account the folks that are called up within the United States as well as dealing with the five-year limit. I wonder if you might be able to comment on that.

General WYATT. Yes, sir, I would be happy to. And thank you very much for your interest in that particular area because it demonstrates sometimes what unintended consequences of some really good intentions to begin with. We talked about the status that guardsmen are in when they perform the ASA mission, and up until about 2005 it was Title 10 status for not only the pilots when they launch but also as they sat alert and for some of our maintenance crews and supporting personnel. In 2005, because Title 32 status gives the wing commanders a little more flexibility in providing manpower for that mission and handling their other

taskings, the law allowed Title 32 people to do that mission, converting to Title 10 when the mission was launched, which I think is the proper way to do that.

The provision in the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) that you talked about has a five-year limitation. The USERRA protection is only available for five years unless—there are some exceptions to that—unless you were called to Title 10 service or to serve in OCO, Overseas Contingency Operations, or any other similarly situated wars. When we went to the Title 32 status, that same protection was inadvertently, I think in my mind inadvertently not provided for our Title 32 folks, so that as they do the same mission they were doing in Title 10 but now simply because of their conversion to a Title 32 status, they lose that exception, and now after 5 years of doing ASA, they have no reemployment rights. I don't think that was the intention of the original legislation, but your legislation fixes that problem and provides that same sort of relief that we thought was the right thing to do under Title 10 for doing that same mission to Title 32 folks that are doing the ASA mission.

So I thank you very much for your attention to that problem and helping fixing it. Thank you, sir.

Mr. COFFMAN. Thank you, General Wyatt.

Any other comments by the panel? Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Taylor.

Mr. TAYLOR. General, very quickly, before I yield my time to Ms. Giffords, we had the unfortunate death of a National Guardsman the night of Katrina. Because he died while under Title 32 status, his widow and children received a smaller death benefit than had he died under Title 10. Now with the help of General Blum and General Casey, we were able to fix that. I am just curious. Is that still the norm, if one of your pilots dies on a training mission, is married, is his widow still, would his widow receive a smaller death benefit than if he died under Title 10 status?

General WYATT. Congressman, there still are differences in the benefits that are available under the varying different statutes, you know, active duty in support of operations, State active duty, Title 32 and Title 10. We are making some progress in equalizing those or making those more equitable. I think you will find guardsmen understand the difference that they are not full-time active duty members serving in Title 10 status, and certainly there will be some differences between the benefits that are available under the different statutes. But I think what they are looking for is an equitable treatment.

The particular issue that you point at is one of those areas where they—there needs to be equity because when a person gives their life regardless of the status, we as a country, in my opinion, need to take care of the survivors of that airman, soldier, sailor or Marine.

Mr. TAYLOR. If you feel free to do so, I am requesting you to put that statement in writing. I would like to have it. I think it is one of the things we ought to try to address this year in the defense authorization bill.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission I am going to yield the remainder of my time to Ms. Giffords.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 129.]

Mr. ORTIZ. Ms. Giffords is recognized.

Ms. GIFFORDS. Thank you, Congressman Taylor.

General Wyatt, given the Department's strategy in terms of closing the F–22 production line and reports of the Test and Evaluation Directorate, specifically for the delays in the Joint Strike Fighter program, can you please discuss in the limited time we have left the bridging strategy to continue to use the fourth generation aircraft until fifth generation solutions are available to the Guard?

General WYATT. I will be happy to give it a shot, Congresswoman. The question sometimes asked, you know, what platform is, would be good for this mission? And I have recognized that we are in a fiscally constrained situation. I am interested in capabilities. I am interested in being able to do the mission. The Air National Guard is going to do this mission with whatever platform Congress decides is the appropriate platform, because after all the Constitution provides that Congress raises and equips armies and air forces. And I appreciate that fact. I also appreciate the fact that sometimes what we would ideally like to have may not be affordable. I caution against having a separate platform for ASA from United States Air Force for the reasons that I previously discussed in that these units also perform AEF rotations and they need to—whatever platform is finally decided or whatever options are finally decided upon by Congress I would hope takes into consideration that these units also perform AEF rotations and need to be able to fuse with and use the same capabilities as any other unit in the United States Air Force or the Department of Defense.

As far as options, you mentioned some of those. We are looking at fifth generation fighters. I think the decision needs to be made, where does air defense and defense of the country range on the scale of priorities of the missions that the Air Force will be required to perform? And I think our decision on that should be driven by the importance of the mission.

In the fiscally constrained situation that we are in, if that is not possible, certainly there are fourth generation, 4.5 generation options out there. There is also service life extension options out there. Each one has their advantages over the other. Each one has disadvantages. And I prefer not, you know, there are a lot of different scenarios that we can get into, what if this happens or what if this happens. But my concern is that the capability is available for the country for the long term and that it not end in fiscal year 2015, 2016, or 2017.

So I think whatever options that Congress decides is the right thing to do, and I have every confidence that Congress, in its wisdom, will decide what is the right thing to do, that capability should be applied towards this mission set, whether it is the Air National Guard, United States Air Force, Navy or Marine Corps doing the mission. It needs to be a capability that the country expects for the number one mission for our military services.

Ms. GIFFORDS. General Wyatt, do you think upgraded models of fourth generation aircraft like the Block 50 F–16s have the sufficient capability to conduct the ASA now and also for the years ahead?

General WYATT. I think what you have to look at is the rising threats that we see out there with the maritime threat, with cruise missiles, with UAVs, whether they are sea base launched or launched within our borders or without our borders, with some of the capabilities of weapons of mass destruction that can approach the United States from any sector. This mission, this defense, is a lot different than an offensive mission overseas. Because if we have the option overseas, we decide the time, the place, and the method and the weapons systems of choice. We don't have that luxury in defense of the United States. We have to be ready 24 hours a day, 365. We have to defend from all axes of attack. We have to use our imagination, if you will, to think of platforms that, or capabilities that may be used to attack the United States. So as we try to answer that question, does fourth generation, 4.5 generation, have the capabilities to provide the defense we need, we must first of all look and try to analyze what sort of threat we are talking about. The use of radar, I mentioned that in my opening statement, is extremely important because it is a leap in technology that allows us to meet some of those challenges that I just talked about.

Again, if you consider, and I know cost is going to be a consideration, but if we are in the situation where Congress decides that we simply can't afford fifth generation airplanes, then we need to take a look at the capabilities necessary to meet those threats that I just talked about, and whether that be fourth generation, third generation fighters, whatever is the best answer, looking at the whole problem, not just ASA, but our other continuing missions, whatever answer Congress gives us will be what we use to defend the country in this its number one mission.

Ms. GIFFORDS. Thank you.

Mr. ORTIZ. My friend, Mr. Forbes.

Mr. FORBES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be brief. I was excited when I heard General Darnell's comment about the mission statement and including that for the Guard, and then, Mr. Verga, I heard your comments and I just want to clarify the two. I understand about not being fenced in. But I hope your statements were not to be interpreted to mean that you disagreed with General Darnell's position that the mission statement would be written to include that for the Guard because I don't know how else we would get the training, inspection and capitalization. I just wanted to clarify that if I could.

Mr. VERGA. Absolutely not. We fully support the Air Force's efforts in doing that. Their mission of organized training and equipping forces to provide to the combatant commander to carry out the missions that are assigned from the President through the Secretary to that commander is extremely important. My only point was that we need to not lose sight of the fact that it is a mission for the total forces of the Department of Defense of the United States, not any particular subcomponent of it. And I just wanted to make sure that we don't lose sight of that.

Mr. FORBES. And the last thing I will say is really more of a comment than a question. From the outset of this year we have been asking this question to try to get into the mindset of Department of Defense as to how you are setting your priorities so that we can know. General Wyatt said something incredibly important when he said that they would use whatever platforms Congress deemed to be appropriate in their wisdom in making those decisions. I have an enormous fear right now that we have had a sea change, and the big concern that I have, General Darnell had mentioned that you wanted to get on the back side basically of QDR when you are doing this planning. I fear that we have shifted now. Instead of having a strategy that is driving our budget, I think we are looking at our budget driving our strategy. And one of the things that I am very frightened when I see these gag orders coming out to the Department of Defense for this cone of silence where the people that are making this information and have the information, General Wyatt, that we need to make those decisions, and they can't even talk to us, that they are barred from doing that, I think that is an unconscionable action to take place. I think it is a dangerous action. It is one that I hope we will all stand up and say we can't afford to not get this information. And just one other thing, and the chairman of Seapower Subcommittee knows far more about this than I do, but when we begin to do things like moving the Inspection and Survey (INSURV) inspections and classifying those, the danger with that is that that information—we can get that communicated to us but we can't communicate it to the general public or to the press or anybody else. And I think that is a dangerous avenue for us to go down because, General, I think it keeps us from making the wisest decisions and getting those appropriate platforms.

And Mr. Chairman, with that, I will yield back.

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Coffman.

Mr. COFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just real quick, General Wyatt, prior to 2003, when we were flying combat air patrol, when the Guard, many Guard units were flying combat air patrol in Iraq in the no-fly zones, it obviously took a lot of resources relative to flying the ASA, I am assuming relative to flying the ASA mission, I assume we had more units deployed in Iraq than doing the ASA. I wonder if you can comment on that and then comment on our capability. It seems that in Iraq and Afghanistan right now that our fixed wing missions are not as robust as they normally would be in a conventional versus a counterinsurgency conflict. I am just wondering if we got engaged in a conventional conflict, does the Guard have the capability of performing both missions, ASA and a conventional mission, with the Air Force?

General WYATT. Thank you for the question, Congressman. The answer to your question is that our units do the ASA mission not as part of their DOC statement but as part of the mission assignment and we have addressed actions that we, as an Air Force and the Department of Defense, will take to correct that. But these units that pull ASA do do the AEF rotations. We are always striving to modernize the Air National Guard equipment that we have because, as you know, sometimes the Air National Guard doesn't

have what I call the front line capability that the active duty Air Force has. We try through our modernization programs and working with the Air Force to provide the capability that allows our systems to fuse with and become a relevant partner with the active duty force in these overseas rotations.

The best example I can give you would be out of my personal experience as a wing commander and as a young pilot that my leaders decided that it was important for the Air National Guard—we were in A–7s at the time converting to F–16s, and the Air National Guard had no precision guided targeting capability at that point in time. The Air Force recognized that as a requirement, but because of their budget limitations could not fund targeting pod acquisition for the Air National Guard. So thanks to Congress' insight in the need, relevant need for that capability, through the National Guard and Reserve Equipment Account (NGREA) we were able to acquire targeting pods and have continued to do so through today's date that allows our systems and our capabilities to more fully mesh with and be a part of the total force as we engage in combat.

We continue to do that today, and I would hope that one of these days we will get to that point where a capability may be funded across all three of the components proportionately and concurrently. That is what I am pressing for. But in the interim period of time we will continue our efforts—and it is not just the fighter fleet, it is the large aircraft fleet with the LAIRCM, the large aircraft infrared countermeasure systems. We are using NGREA funds to help these self-protective systems in these airplanes so they are more relevant in the warfight overseas. And we will continue those efforts with the help and support of Congress.

Thank you, sir.

Mr. ORTIZ. Thank you so much. I think that we had a very, very good hearing today. And you know, sometimes Congress makes up committees and they play a very important role. And sometimes in this case we do have a check and balance system and because we are all seeing it from the same page as you. There are some weaknesses on one side maybe the other side can correct it. But I want to thank all of you for being with us today. And we do have a good check and balance system. And thank you for being candid with us. Remember, we are all singing from the same page and if it is a budget problem, if it is an equipment problem, whatever you need, let us know. We are here to work with you. But you know we have huge responsibilities. We see the big, big picture being ready to defend this country. At times we see that air fighter has been grounded. Whether they are Navy, Air Force, or whatever, they are grounded. We want to be sure that we have the right equipment, the right personnel to defend this country.

One of our key members of this committee, Chairman Reyes, who is chairman of the Intelligence Committee, couldn't be here with us today. He had a death in the family. And his mother-in-law passed away, and this committee offers our condolences to Chairman Reyes.

Being no further business, this committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:40 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

April 22, 2009

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

April 22, 2009

OPENING STATEMENT for Chairman Solomon Ortiz

Readiness Subcommittee Hearing on

Air Sovereignty Alert Operations

April 22, 2009

Good Morning and welcome to today's hearing on Air Sovereignty Alert Operations.

During the Cold War, we had planes standing alert to protect us from potential air threats from the former Soviet Union. The Cold War ended. We felt safe and we no longer really needed an ASA mission. Our comfortable security suddenly changed on September 11, 2001.

Following that tragic day, the Department of Defense initiated Operation Noble Eagle. Now, protection of our airspace from internal threats is our number one defense priority. The Department issued several policy memos, and gave the responsibility for carrying out the new ASA mission to the North American Aerospace Defense Command (or NORAD).

Although neither DOD nor NORAD ever specified which service should support the ASA mission, the Air Force currently provides 100 percent of the fighter aircraft.

The mission is conducted at 18 ASA sites across the United States, with the Air National Guard operating out of 16 of those sites.

The planes and crews involved in the ASA mission have been tested several times – most recently when a plane was stolen in Canada and flown across the border into the U.S. The plane was intercepted and finally landed on a Missouri highway. The pilot was caught after he tried fleeing on foot.

All this should make us feel somewhat secure, knowing that our airspace is well protected.

So why are we here this morning? We are here because appearances are not always reality.

This is a high priority mission for which the Air Guard has volunteered. But the funding, which comes from active duty Air Force accounts, historically has not been allocated on a timely basis. This raises serious challenges for the Guard related to hiring personnel and providing the necessary training to ensure the readiness of the crews supporting the mission.

Last year, because of our concern that this mission was being ignored by the active duty Air Force, the committee proposed language to address the funding and personnel situation. Section 354 of the Fiscal Year 2009 Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act requires the Secretary of Defense to provide in the Air Force budget justification documents information on funding requirements for the mission, and associated command and control elements, including military personnel costs and flying hours.

I will be interested to hear from our Air Force witness, General Darnell, this morning how the Air Force is complying with that mandate. I recognize that because the full budget has not been sent up here yet, we will not be able to discuss specifics on funding and aircraft availability.

We will leave those details for a later posture hearing. But I do expect to hear that the Air Force is on track to comply with the statutory language. And I am sure that General Wyatt, director of the Air Guard, will have a few things to say about this too.

With that congressional action, we believed we had "fixed" all the problems associated with the ASA mission. We soon found out we had only scratched the surface. Congress asked

GAO to do a review the ASA mission. Their report, which was issued in January, was very troubling.

I will let the GAO speak for itself and tell us in detail what they found. But I would like to highlight a few findings that bothered me the most.

- Mission document statements do not include the ASA responsibility for the Air Guard. Since this is ignored in the mission statements, the readiness of the units for the ASA mission is not adequately considered.
- NORAD does not conduct routine operational risk assessments. So we don't have a good idea of what is really needed in terms of personnel, aircraft and types of units to perform the mission.
- The Air Force has not implemented ASA operations as a steady-state mission because they felt it would not be a lasting mission.

I am also concerned that the Department's responses to the GAO findings and recommendations were non-committal. It is my understanding that NORAD and the Air Force provided comments to the Department on actions they intended to take but that the those comments were not included in the DOD response. That might explain why the DOD response was unsatisfactory.

According to DOD policy, the ASA mission is our number one priority. Perhaps our DOD witness, Mr. Verga, can provide us a better explanation than what the Department gave to GAO on how the DOD intends to maintain ASA as DOD's number one priority mission.

Now I would like to turn to my good friend from the Commonwealth of Virginia, Randy Forbes, for an opening statement.

I would like to welcome our witnesses and thank you for taking the time to appear before us this morning. Today we have with us

Ms. Davi M. D'Agostino

Director

Homeland Defense and Emerging Threats and Warfare, Defense Capabilities

and Management Team

U.S. Government Accountability Office

Mr. Peter F. Verga

Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Integration and Chief of Staff

U.S. Department of Defense

Lieutenant General Daniel J. Darnell, USAF

Deputy Chief of Staff for Air, Space and Information Operations,

Plans and Requirements

U.S. Air Force

Lieutenant General Harry M. Wyatt III, USAF

Director

U.S. Air National Guard

Welcome. And please begin Ms. D'Agostino.

April 22, 2009

Ranking Member Randy Forbes Opening Statement for Hearing on Air Sovereignty Alert Operations

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to say that I share your concerns regarding this issue. We learned a lot of lessons on September 11, 2001. We learned that a small group of non-state actors could take thousands of American lives by attacking us from the skies above our homeland. They took a routine commercial flight operation and turned it into an extremely effective weapon.

"According to the FAA, there were nearly 680 million passengers on domestic flights last year and another 154 million flying between the US and the rest of the world.[1] To put it in perspective, that's more than the total populations of the US, Japan, Russia, Mexico, Canada and the United Kingdom—combined![2] This number does not include nearly 28 million hours flown by the fleet of more than 234,000 general aviation aircraft owned by private pilots and flight schools around the country.[3]

"I raise this point because I think it is important that we all understand the scope of the problem and the enormous security challenges we face. Although the Department of Homeland Security, the Transportation Security Administration, and their international counterparts have taken great strides to increase aviation security, it is imprudent to believe that their actions will completely mitigate the risk should someone attempt to do us harm. With over 830 million commercial passengers flying annually in and around the United States, the scope of the problem is too large and the consequences are too great.

"Mr. Chairman, you mentioned the incident last week involving the general aviation aircraft that was stolen from Canada and flown into US airspace. I want to applaud all of those involved in the response and resolution of that situation. I also want to highlight that just this Monday, a Canadian passenger jet with 159 passengers and eight crew members on board was hijacked by a lone gunman who, according to initial press reports, somehow made it past security. Fortunately, the police were able to gain control of that situation while the plane was still on the ground.

"Although neither of these events appear to be linked to any terrorist organization, they do highlight that current security measures are not impenetrable. Our skies and our citizens are still vulnerable to those wishing to do us harm.

"With that said, I find the issues at the heart of today's hearing concerning. The findings in the GAO report and the lackluster response from the Department of Defense require our attention and I'm thankful to you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I'm hopeful that we've got the right set of witnesses here to address the issues and I'd like to welcome each of them to the committee today.

"Today's hearing focuses on the policy and resourcing shortcomings between OSD, the Air Force and the Air National Guard. But I know, Mr. Chairman, that we both agree that NORAD/NORTHCOM also play a critical role in the execution of the Air Sovereignty Alert

mission. As we go through the course of the hearing today, we may find that we will also need to have a direct discussion about the air sovereignty mission with them as well."

[1] Federal Aviation Administration, *Aerospace Forecast Fiscal Years 2009-2025*, pg 11-16, (Washington, DC, March 30, 2009)

[2] CIA Word Factbook, *Country Comparison – Populations,* last updated April 9, 2009.

[3] Federal Aviation Administration, *Aerospace Forecast Fiscal Years 2009-2025*, pg 21 , (Washington, DC, March 30, 2009)

United States Government Accountability Office

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Readiness, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

For Release on Delivery
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HOMELAND DEFENSE

Actions Needed to Address Management of Air Sovereignty Alert Operations to Protect U.S. Airspace

Statement of Davi M. D'Agostino, Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

GAO
Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

GAO-09-612T

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here before you this morning to discuss GAO's recently issued report[1] on the North American Aerospace Defense Command's (NORAD)[2] and the Department of Defense's (DOD) air sovereignty alert (ASA) operations. According to the *National Strategy for Aviation Security*, issued in March 2007, and officials from U.S. intelligence agencies with whom we met, air attacks are still a threat to the United States and its people. To address this threat, NORAD and DOD have fully fueled, fully armed aircraft and trained personnel on alert 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, at 18 ASA sites across the United States, as shown in appendix I. Of the 18 sites, 16 are maintained by Air National Guard (ANG) units and 2 are maintained by active duty Air Force units. If warranted, NORAD can increase personnel, aircraft, and the number of ASA sites based on changes in threat conditions. The Air Force provides NORAD with personnel and equipment, including F-15 and F-16 aircraft, for these operations. ASA units are tasked to conduct and train for both expeditionary missions (e.g., military operations in Iraq) and ASA operations.

ASA operations consist of ground operations that take place before fighter aircraft take off, such as maintaining the fighter aircraft. They also include those activities that take place after a unit receives an alert from NORAD but before the aircraft are airborne. Once aircraft take off, "alert" operations end and the operation becomes a homeland defense air mission under Operation NOBLE EAGLE.[3] For example, aircraft and personnel from three ASA units—Duluth, Minnesota; Madison, Wisconsin; and New Orleans, Louisiana—responded to the April 6, 2009, cross-border incident in which a stolen Cessna aircraft entered into U.S. airspace from Canada without approval. When the transition occurs from ground operations to airborne operations, an ANG pilot converts from Title 32 status under the command and control of the state governor to federal Title 10 status,[4]

[1]GAO, *Homeland Defense: Actions Needed to Improve Management of Air Sovereignty Alert Operations to Protect U.S. Airspace*, GAO-09-184 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 27, 2009).

[2]NORAD is a binational United States and Canadian organization charged with the missions of aerospace warning and aerospace control for North America. DOD is responsible for providing forces to support NORAD's responsibilities in the United States.

[3]DOD's Operation NOBLE EAGLE was initiated after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, to address asymmetric threats.

[4]Title 32 and Title 10 refer to sections of the United States Code.

because they are performing a federal mission under the command and control of NORAD. Active duty units are always in a Title 10 status, but command and control of pilots and aircraft conducting ASA operations passes from the local commander to NORAD when performing air defense operations.

My testimony today, which is based on our January 2009 report on ASA operations,[5] will discuss whether (1) NORAD routinely conducts risk assessments to determine the appropriate operational requirements; (2) the Air Force has implemented ASA operations as a steady-state mission, which would require programming funding and measuring readiness, in accordance with NORAD, DOD, and Air Force guidance; and (3) the Air Force has developed a plan to address the recapitalization challenges to sustaining ASA operations for the future. I will conclude with some observations regarding our recommendations and DOD's response to our recommendations.

Our work on that report was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards from April 2008 to January 2009. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Our work included reviews of pertinent documents and structured interviews of the commanders of the 20 alert units at all 18 sites performing ASA operations. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. For this testimony, we also followed up with DOD offices on the status of our recommendations.

[5]GAO-09-184.

NORAD Had Assessed ASA Operational Requirements but Not on a Routine Basis as Part of a Risk-Based Management Approach

Although NORAD had performed some risk assessments in response to individual DOD leadership inquiries about ASA operations, it had not done routine risk assessments as part of a risk-based management approach to determine ASA operational requirements. Moreover, NORAD has not conducted similar assessments since 2006. For example, NORAD had completed three assessments that we determined could be part of a risk-based management approach. NORAD completed the first of these assessments after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when it worked with other federal agencies and determined, based on vulnerabilities and criticality, which sites should be protected by ASA operations. NORAD conducted two other assessments, in 2005 and 2006, primarily in response to the 2005 Base Closure and Realignment Commission process and efforts to cut costs for Operation NOBLE EAGLE. On both of these occasions, NORAD conducted a cost evaluation, considering aviation security improvements—such as secured cockpits and enhanced passenger screening—that were made by the Transportation Security Administration since 2001. At the time of our review, DOD had not required NORAD to manage ASA operations using a risk management approach, which includes routine risk assessments. By performing routine risk assessments, NORAD could better evaluate the extent to which previous threats have been mitigated by DOD or other government agencies, better evaluate current and emerging threats to determine which ones require the most urgent attention, and determine operational requirements to address changing conditions. Routine risk assessments could also help NORAD determine the appropriate level and type of resources, including units, personnel, and aircraft for ASA operations, especially in a resource-restricted environment. Furthermore, during the course of our review, Air Force and ANG officials acknowledged the benefits of performing risk assessments on a routine basis for determining operational requirements for ASA operations.

The Air Force Had Not Implemented ASA Operations as a Steady-State Mission in Accordance with NORAD, DOD, and Air Force Directives and Guidance

Although its units are conducting ASA operations, the Air Force had not implemented these operations as a steady-state mission in accordance with NORAD, DOD, and Air Force directives and guidance. For example, in response to a December 2002 NORAD declaration of a steady-state air defense mission, the Air Force issued a directive assigning specific functions and responsibilities to support the mission. According to the directive, the Air Force was to take 140 actions to implement ASA as a steady-state mission.[6] For example, the directive required the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel to ensure that ASA active personnel requirements were included in the Air Force submission to the Future Years Defense Program.[7] The directive also required Air Force major commands to develop the capability to report on the readiness of ASA activities in DOD's readiness system, and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel to work with the appropriate officials to limit adverse effects on the careers of personnel affected by the steady-state mission. However, the Air Force had not implemented ASA operations as a steady-state mission. For example, although the Office of the Secretary of Defense directed the Air Force to program ASA operations across the 6 years of its Future Years Defense Program submission, the Air Force decided to program ASA operations in 2-year increments.

According to headquarters Air Force officials, the Air Force did not implement ASA operations as a steady-state mission because (1) it has focused on other priorities, such as overseas military operations, and (2) it believed that ASA operational requirements, such as number of sites, might be decreased to pre-September 11, 2001, levels at some point in the future. As a result, the readiness of the units conducting ASA operations was not being fully assessed, and commanders of ASA units reported they were experiencing difficulties pertaining to a variety of factors, such as personnel and funding, which challenged their ability to perform both their expeditionary missions and ASA operations.

[6]Headquarters U.S. Air Force Program Action Directive (PAD) 2003-01-XOH, *Homeland Air Defense for Steady State Alert Posture for Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve Command, Air Mobility Command, Air Education and Training Command, Air Force Materiel Command, Air Force Space Command, Pacific Air Forces, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Combat Command* (Washington, D.C., Feb. 28, 2003).

[7]The Future Years Defense Program is the program and financial plan for the Department of Defense, and includes a projection of cost data, manpower, and force structure at least 4 years beyond the budget year, as approved by the Secretary of Defense. It is provided to Congress in conjunction with the President's budget.

Readiness of ASA Units Was Not Fully Assessed by the Air Force

NORAD partially assessed readiness through inspections; however, the Air Force, which as the force provider is responsible for measuring readiness for its missions by evaluating personnel, training, and the quantity and quality of equipment needed, has not done so for ASA operations.[8] Air Force officials said they do not perform such assessments because the service has not formally assigned the mission to the units.[9] Specifically, the Air Force issues mission Designed Operational Capability statements that identify the unit's mission(s) and related requirements (e.g., type and number of personnel).[10] However, the Air Force has not identified ASA operations as a mission in the operational capability statements of those units that conduct ASA operations on a daily basis. Unit commanders told us during our structured interviews that they did not evaluate and report the personnel, training, or quantity and quality of equipment to perform ASA operations because they had not been assigned the mission in their operational capability statements. As a result, the Air Force did not have complete information to assess readiness, and DOD and Congress lacked visibility of costs and other important information to inform decisions for these homeland defense operations.

Temporary Status of ASA Operations Creates Difficulties for Units and Hampers Cost Visibility

Because the Air Force did not implement ASA operations as a steady-state mission in accordance with NORAD, DOD, and Air Force guidance, at the time of our review ASA units were experiencing a number of difficulties that challenged their ability to perform both their expeditionary missions and ASA operations. The unit commanders we interviewed identified funding, personnel, and dual tasking of responsibilities as the top three factors affecting ASA operations. For example, during our structured interviews, officials from 17 of the 20 units stated that personnel issues were a moderate or great concern and that recruiting, retention, and

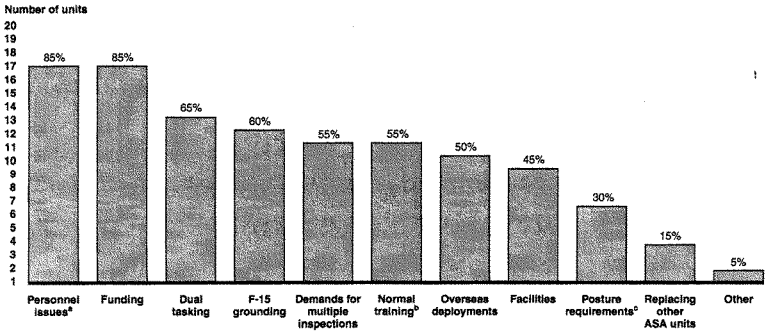
[8]Air Force Instruction 10-201, *Operations: Status of Resources and Training System* (Washington, D.C., Apr. 13, 2006); and Headquarters U.S. Air Force Program Action Directive (PAD) 2003-01-XOH.

[9]DOD currently uses a readiness system called the Status of Resource and Training System to identify the adequacy of personnel, training, and equipment assigned to a unit to conduct its assigned mission. DOD announced plans to implement the Defense Readiness Reporting System in 2002. In 2006, we reported on this system and stated that while it contained usable information and functionality, it was in the early phases of implementation and data validation. See GAO, *Force Structure: DOD Needs to Integrate Data into Its Force Identification Process and Examine Options to Meet Requirements for High-Demand Support Forces*, GAO-06-962 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 5, 2006).

[10]Air Force Instruction 10-201.

promotion limitations were the primary issues arising from the current practice of programming for ASA operations in 2-year increments. Commanders at the ASA sites that we visited told us that they had lost some of their most experienced personnel due to job instability caused by the manner in which ASA operations are programmed. Similarly, commanders at 17 of the 20 units stated that the Air Force treats ASA operations as a temporary mission and has not provided sufficient resources. Thirteen of the 20 units reported that dual tasking—training and conducting for their expeditionary mission and for ASA operations—was a moderate or great concern and that the Air Force was not adequately equipping units to conduct both missions. Headquarters Air Force and National Guard Bureau/Air National Guard (NGB/ANG) officials acknowledged the units' difficulties in conducting ASA operations. Figure 1 depicts units' responses regarding difficulties they have experienced in conducting ASA operations.

Figure 1: Factors Identified by ASA Unit Commanders as Moderately or Greatly Impacting Units' Ability to Conduct ASA Operations



Source: GAO analysis of structured interviews with ASA units.

[a]Includes consideration of 2-year assignments, promotion opportunities, career progression, and other personnel issues as indicated by units.

[b]Normal training conducted for their warfighting mission.

[c]Can include the number and quality of aircraft and personnel that are on alert 24 hours a day, 365 days a year as well as other posture requirements.

Because the Air Force has not programmed for ASA operations in its Future Years Defense Program submissions, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, NORAD, and Congress lack visibility into the costs of these operations. [11] This program is one of the principal tools used to inform DOD senior leaders and Congress about resources planned to support various programs, and reflects DOD decisions regarding allocation of federal resources. Implementing ASA operations as a steady-state mission may help to mitigate the challenges associated with ASA operations, as well as provide Congress and DOD leaders cost visibility into ASA operations, which support DOD's high-priority homeland defense mission.

The Air Force Had Not Developed a Plan to Address Fighter Aircraft Challenges for Units Conducting Both ASA Operations and Expeditionary Missions

Of the 18 ASA sites, 13 sites are currently equipped with F-16s, which, according to ANG estimates, will reach the end of their useful service lives between fiscal years 2015 and 2020. Five sites have F-15s, which were grounded for 3 months in late 2007 and early 2008 after an F-15 broke apart during a normal flying operation in November 2007. According to Air Force and ANG officials, the F-15s' useful service lives could end earlier than the expected time frame of 2025 if the aircraft are used increasingly for overseas deployments or other missions. Depending on when the F-16s reach the end of their useful service lives and on the availability of next-generation F-22 and F-35 fighter aircraft, a gap in the number of available aircraft may affect units performing ASA operations. Figure 2 shows the projected number of current ASA sites with and without viable aircraft to conduct ASA operations through 2032. [12] As the figure reflects, unless the Air Force modifies its current fielding schedules or extends the service lives of its F-15s and F-16s to the extent that this option is possible, [13] it will lack viable aircraft to conduct ASA operations at some of the 18 current ASA sites after fiscal year 2015. The figure also shows that 2 of the current ASA sites will not be equipped with viable aircraft and thus will be unable to conduct ASA operations even after the Air Force fields all of its currently planned F-22s and F-35s in fiscal year 2031. This figure is based on our analysis of documentation on the expected service lives of the F-

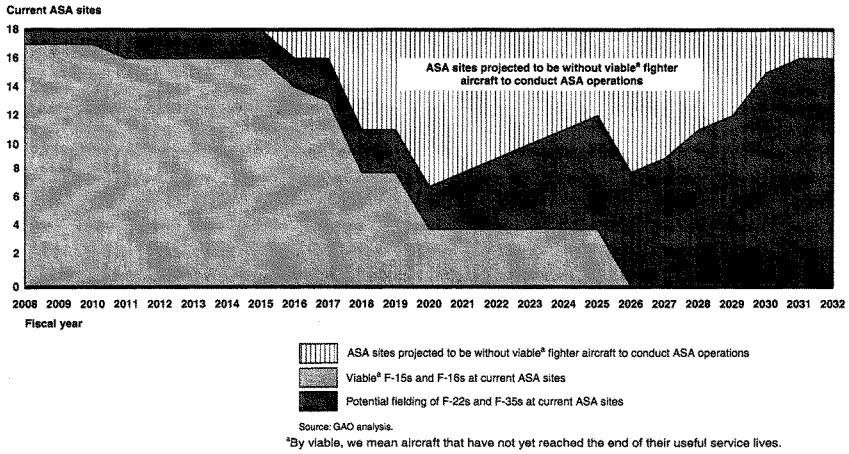
[11] In the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, Congress directed the Secretary of Defense to submit a consolidated budget justification covering all programs and activities of the ASA mission for the Air Force, beginning with the fiscal year 2010 budget submission. Pub. L. No. 110-417, § 354 (2008).

[12] By viable, we mean aircraft that have not yet reached the end of their useful service lives.

[13] In comments on a draft of our January 2009 report, DOD said that extending the service lives of its F-15 and F-16 aircraft is also an option; however, the Air Force had not determined the extent to which such actions were feasible.

15s and F-16s and the Air Force's fielding schedules for the F-22s and F-35s at the time of our review, and represents one possible scenario.[14]

Figure 2: Projected Number of Current ASA Sites with and without Viable Aircraft to Conduct ASA Operations between Fiscal Years 2008 and 2032 Based on Current F-22 and F-35 Fielding Schedules



Source: GAO analysis.

[a]By viable, we mean aircraft that have not yet reached the end of their useful service lives.

The House report accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 directed the Secretary of the Air Force, in consultation with the Chief of the National Guard Bureau and the Secretary of Homeland Security, to conduct a study on the feasibility and

[14]Our analysis contains a number of assumptions we made based on information that DOD provided us. However, because specifics are unknown, our analysis does not reflect the effects of the need for ASA units to backfill at sites that either lose aircraft or transition to F-22 and F-35 aircraft. It also does not reflect the effect of units going off-line if the Air Force places F-16s in a maintenance program to extend their service lives. Our analysis assumes that none of the current ASA sites will be adversely affected by the Air Force's proposal to retire the F-15s and F-16s earlier than originally planned because we were not given enough specific information to determine the current locations of the aircraft that will be retired early.

desirability of equipping certain ASA units with F-35s.[15] The Air Force study, which was submitted to Congress in December 2008, states that, although the F-35's capabilities make it a desirable platform to conduct air defense operations, a number of factors—such as fiscal, operational, and environmental considerations—will affect where F-35s are based. Consequently, it is unclear whether or when the current ASA sites will receive F-35 aircraft. For the purpose of our analysis, however, we assumed that the Air Force would provide the F-35s to ANG sites conducting ASA operations. Our March 2009 reports about the F-35 acquisition program have also questioned the reliability of its production schedule and cost estimates. [16] For example, we reported that despite the program's continued manufacturing problems and the infancy of the flight test program, DOD officials wanted to accelerate F-35 production from 485 to 654 aircraft over a 6-year time frame from fiscal years 2010 through 2015. On April 6, 2009, the Secretary of Defense announced that DOD intends to increase F-35 production to 513 aircraft across the 5-year defense plan. We continue to believe DOD's increased production approach is overly optimistic.

During our review, we discussed some options with Air Force and ANG officials that could reduce the potential gap between retired aging aircraft and the replacements needed to conduct ASA operations, but these options are not without challenges. The options we discussed included the following:

- Replace the F-16s with either F-22s or F-35s, both of which the Air Force is acquiring. However, according to the F-22 and F-35 fielding schedules at the time of our review, only 1 of the 12 units—Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina—will receive the new aircraft before its fleet of F-16s reaches the end of its useful service life.
- Replace the F-16s with F-15 models from the current inventory. However, F-15s, like F-16s, are beginning to reach the end of their useful service lives for reasons including structural problems and accelerated use for overseas deployments and other missions.

[15]H.R. Rep No. 110-146 at 111-112 (May 11, 2007). Congress did not request a corresponding F-22 study.

[16]GAO, *Defense Acquisitions: Assessments of Selected Weapon Programs*, GAO-09-326SP (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 30, 2009); and *Joint Strike Fighter: Accelerating Procurement before Completing Development Increases the Government's Financial Risk*, GAO-09-303 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 12, 2009).

- Extend the service life of the F-15 and F-16 aircraft. However, at the time of our review, the Air Force had not determined the extent to which such actions were viable.

Until the Air Force plans accordingly, the extent to which replacement aircraft will be available to conduct ASA operations and mitigate this fighter shortage is unclear. Given the importance of the capability to deter, detect, and destroy airborne threats to the United States, it is important that the Air Force address current and future requirements of the ASA mission to ensure its long-term sustainability.

GAO's Prior Recommendations and DOD's Response

In our January 2009 report, we recommended that DOD take a number of actions to address the issues that we identified during our review. In summary, we recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct

- The Commander of the U.S. command element of NORAD to routinely conduct risk assessments to determine ASA requirements, including the appropriate numbers of ASA sites, personnel, and aircraft to support ASA operations.
- The military services with units that consistently conduct ASA operations to formally assign ASA duties to these units and then ensure that the readiness of these units is fully assessed, to include personnel, training, equipment, and ability to respond to an alert.
- The Secretary of the Air Force to establish a timetable and implement ASA operations as a steady-state mission, to include:
  - updating and implementing the ASA program action directive;
  - updating Air Force guidance to incorporate and define the roles and responsibilities for ASA operations; and
  - incorporating the ASA mission within the Air Force submissions for the 6-year Future Years Defense Program.
- The Secretary of the Air Force to develop and implement a plan to address any projected capability gaps in ASA units due to the expected end of the useful service lives of their F-15s and F-16s.

In its written comments on our report, DOD fully or partially concurred with all of our recommendations. However, based on DOD's written response, it is unclear the extent to which DOD will implement these recommendations. For example, DOD partially concurred with our recommendation to employ a risk-based management approach, which would include routine risk assessments to determine ASA requirements.

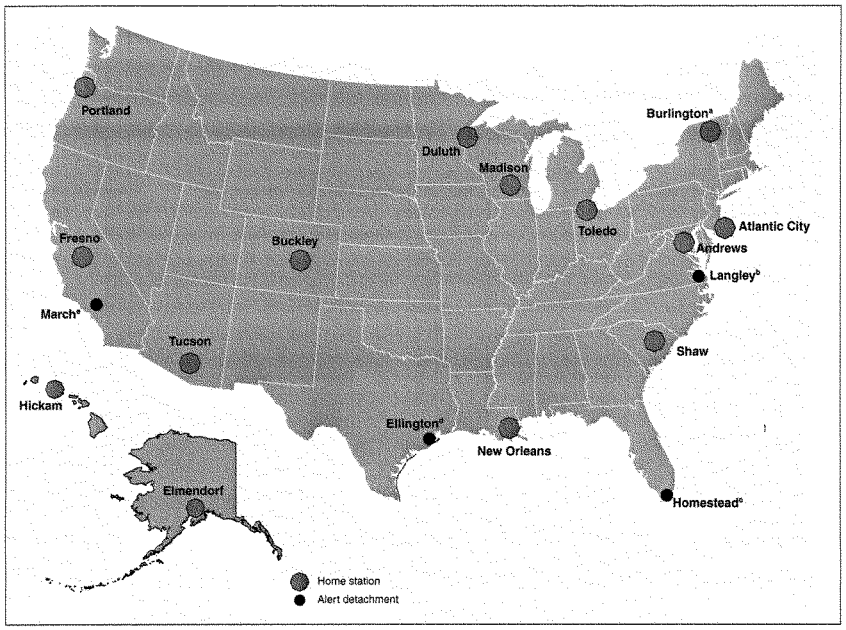
However, DOD stated that sufficient guidance and a long-standing risk-based process currently guide its decisions on ASA operations and, therefore, it does not plan on taking any further action.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.

Contacts and Acknowledgements

For further information regarding this testimony, please contact Davi M. D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or dagostinod@gao.gov. In addition, contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. Individuals who made key contributions to this testimony are Lorelei St. James and Marc Schwartz (Assistant Directors), Tommy Baril, Grace Coleman, Greg Marchand, Terry Richardson, Bethann Ritter, Kenneth Cooper, and Jane Ervin. In addition, Victoria DeLeon and John Trubey made significant contributions to the January 2009 report that supported this testimony.

Appendix I: Locations of the 18 ASA Sites in the United States as of October 2008



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

[a]The Vermont ANG unit at Burlington International Airport is conducting ASA operations until the Massachusetts ANG unit at Barnes Air National Guard Station assumes responsibility for ASA operations in fiscal year 2010.

[b]A detachment from the Vermont ANG conducts ASA operations at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia; the South Dakota ANG unit from Sioux Falls is assisting with ASA operations at this site until the Massachusetts ANG assumes responsibility for the New England ASA operations in fiscal year 2010.

[c]ASA operations at Homestead Air Force Base, Florida are conducted by a detachment from the Jacksonville, Florida ANG unit.

[d]ASA operations at Ellington Field, Texas are conducted by a detachment from the Tulsa, Oklahoma ANG unit.

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Statement by

Peter Verga

Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Integration

Before the 111th Congress

Committee on Armed Services

Subcommittee on Readiness

United States House of Representatives

April 22, 2009

Chairman Ortiz, Congressman Forbes, distinguished members of the Subcommittee: thank you for the opportunity to address you today on the Department of Defense's (DoD's) protection of the air sovereignty of the United States.

As reflected in the National Defense Strategy, "The core responsibility of the Department of Defense is to defend the United States from attack upon its territory at home and to secure its interests abroad. The U.S. Armed Forces protect the physical integrity of the country through an active layered defense. They also deter attacks upon it, directly and indirectly, through deployments at sea, in the air, on land, and in space."[1]

Within DoD, our responsibility to defend the United States is assigned to the bi-national U.S.-Canada North American Aerospace Command (NORAD). NORAD provides aerospace warning, aerospace control (including air sovereignty) and maritime warning for all of North America. Consistent with the law,[2] the Secretary of Defense assigns forces to the United States Element of NORAD to perform its assigned mission and ensures that such assignments are consistent with the force structure prescribed by the President.

During the Cold War, NORAD focused its defense of the United States on air threats originating from nation-states. Although the probability of a nation-state air attack has greatly lessened, the Secretary of Defense has said that "the United States still has to contend with the security challenges posed by the military forces of other countries -- from those actively hostile to those at strategic crossroads," and that "the U.S. military must be able to dissuade, deter, and, if necessary, respond to challenges across the spectrum -- including the armed forces of other nations." Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, when terrorists hijacked civilian airliners and used them as weapons against innocent civilians, NORAD's

[1] Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy*, June 2008, page 6.
[2] Section 162 of Title 10, U.S. Code.

focus has expanded to include terrorist air threats originating from within, as well as outside, the United States. Terrorists remain the preeminent air threat to the United States. As observed by President Obama during his Inaugural Address, "Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred." NORAD's vigilance against potential attacks from within and from outside the United States is a critical distinction between our air defense posture pre-9/11 and post-9/11.

Collectively, the interagency currently provides 20 layers of security to enhance security in the aviation domain. No system is failsafe, but, collectively, these security measures have created multiple barriers, thereby reducing the likelihood of a successful attack using the air domain.

Through Operation Noble Eagle, NORAD defends the United States by surveilling US airspace and the nation's air approaches and by positioning air defense alert fighters throughout the country. These alert fighters, whose numbers may be adjusted to meet changing threat levels, are capable of reaching targets threatening our nation's major population centers and national critical infrastructure within minutes to dissuade, deter, and, if necessary, defeat air threats. Supporting and complementing these alert fighters are defense and FAA surveillance radars, airborne early warning aircraft, and tanker aircraft.

In addition, in defense of the National Capital Region (NCR), the seat of the U.S. Government, Operation Noble Eagle conducts air patrols, maintains a dedicated 24-hours-a-day/7-days-a-week alert fighter response based at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland, and operates a dedicated, around-the-clock ground-based air defense missile system. In addition, the U.S. Coast Guard supports NORAD with alert helicopters to intercept low-and-slow aircraft in the NCR. In 2005, DoD employed a Visual Warning System in the NCR to supplement traditional radio communications to warn wayward pilots to contact FAA air traffic controllers immediately and to exit NCR restricted airspace they may have

violated. Currently, to facilitate interagency cooperation, DoD maintains liaison officers in the TSA-hosted NCR Coordination Center (NCRCC) on a full-time basis and provides key interagency operations centers and the NCRCC access to DoD's classified conferencing capability, which is used for DoD coordination and decision making during the response to domestic air threats.

Operation Noble Eagle is a joint operation, managed under the Global Force Management Plan to provide timely, risk-balanced resourcing to NORAD requirements for capabilities and forces. DoD ensures that the air sovereignty force furnishes capabilities consistent with U.S. national security objectives and a long-established risk management system in conjunction with the Global Force Management Plan. Although the Global Force Management Plan currently directs the U.S. Air Force to support the Operation Noble Eagle mission, the majority of which is currently provided by the Air National Guard, DoD may draw upon the capabilities of the active duty Air Force or any other DoD Components to fulfill the Operation Noble Eagle air sovereignty mission. In fact, in the past, DoD was prepared to reinforce the air sovereignty mission with U.S. Navy E-2 Hawkeye Airborne Early Warning aircraft and U.S. Marine Corps F/A-18s.

DoD will also continue to refine its risk management approach to ensure that military capabilities and resources are available to carry out its core responsibility to defend the United States. As stated in the National Defense Strategy, "The challenges before us will require resourcefulness and an integrated approach that wisely balances risks and assets, and that recognizes where we must improve."[3]

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. We appreciate your leadership, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, and your support for the Department of Defense. I look forward to your questions.

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[3] Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy*, June 2008, page 18.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

**PRESENTATION TO THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

SUBJECT: AIR SOVEREIGNTY ALERT

STATEMENT OF: LIEUTENANT GENERAL DANIEL J. DARNELL, AIR FORCE DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR AIR, SPACE AND INFORMATION OPERATIONS, PLANS AND REQUIREMENTS (AF/A3/5)

APRIL 22, 2009

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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

House Armed Services Committee
Subcommittee on Readiness

April 22, 2009

Subject: Air Sovereignty Alert

Statement of
Lt Gen Daniel J. Darnell (AF/A3/5)

I. Introduction

Chairman Ortiz, Ranking Member Forbes, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for calling this hearing, and for the opportunity to provide you with an update on Air Force Air Sovereignty Alert (ASA) operations. Protecting and defending the skies of the United States is a mission that has always been critical to our National Defense, and that mission has taken on an even greater importance since the events of September 11, 2001. I'd like to provide a few highlights of how your Air Force is working to accomplish the air sovereignty mission, and also how we're engaged at home and around the globe in the joint fight to defeat terrorism and protect the citizens and homeland of the United States.

II. Winning the Fight

When it comes to winning today's fight your Air Force is "all in." We fully support North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and US Northern Command (NORTHCOM) in their assigned responsibility to protect the United States homeland from attack. Following the events of September 11th, the ASA mission was converted to a 24/7, full-time operation assigned to specific units and sites, and many

ASA sites received facility improvements and equipment upgrades to better accomplish their mission. We also established the National Capital Region Integrated Air Defense System and conducted exercises to better integrate ASA operations into our overall command and control architecture. In addition to conducting ASA operations, your Air Force has been actively defending the homeland through combat operations overseas.

Partnering with the Joint and Coalition team to bring air power to bear whenever and wherever it's needed is an Air Force top priority, second only to reinvigorating our nuclear enterprise. Current Air Force operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa highlight over 18 consecutive years of planning, resourcing, and executing combat missions. These critical missions provide the Joint and Coalition team with a full complement of air capabilities ranging from aero-medical evacuation and unmanned aerial vehicle orbits, to close air support and strike missions. We currently have over 208,000 Airmen contributing 24/7 to Combatant Command operations, including 35,800 Airmen who are deployed to locations worldwide. Additionally, in direct support of the air sovereignty mission, your Air Force has flown over 54,410 total sorties under Operation NOBLE EAGLE, including 39,390 fighter sorties, 11,290 air refueling sorties, and 1,826 airborne early warning sorties. As a testament to the total force, the Air National Guard has flown more than 70% of these sorties and currently operates 16 of 18 Air Sovereignty Alert sites.

The apportionment of our Air Force sorties is a delicate balance between risk and operational necessity. For example, the 54,410 sorties we've flown for Operation NOBLE EAGLE were executed concurrently with 649,500 Air Force combat sorties

flown in support of Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and ENDURING FREEDOM, which accounts for greater than 80% of all joint/coalition sorties flown in support of these operations.

As we continue to accomplish our current mission sets and plan for future threats, we must remain mindful of the increasing age and costs of operating our air fleet. When approaching critical budget decisions, we face the same challenge of balancing between risk and operational necessity as we do when apportioning sorties. Our Air Force corporate structure is hard at work scrutinizing programs and budgets to find acceptable solutions to meet growing demands that are competing for limited amounts of funding. The January 2009 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report "HOMELAND DEFENSE: Actions Needed to Improve Management of Air Sovereignty Alert Operations to Protect U.S. Airspace," focuses on a vital mission area that has been a part of the Air Force and Air National Guard for over 50 years.

The GAO report provides five recommended actions the Air Force can take to improve ASA operations. We continue to analyze Air Force operations in view of the GAO findings and are working to adapt pertinent recommendations. For example, we are reexamining the long-term funding issues associated with ASA sourcing. We will initiate an update to documents that reflect Air Force homeland defense policy, homeland operations doctrine, and concept of operations to incorporate and define the roles and responsibilities for ASA operations. Finally, the Air Force supports the processes in place for air expeditionary force sourcing under the Secretary of Defense approved Global Force Management construct. These processes employ our Total Force and

provide the necessary flexibility to assist commanders in coordinating replacements for deploying units. We believe these actions, especially when synchronized with existing interagency efforts, will improve an already formidable Department of Defense capability assigned to protect and defend our homeland.

III. Closing

Your Air Force stands ready to win today's joint fight and plan for tomorrow's challenges. As our operating environment becomes increasingly uncertain and dynamic, dominance of air, space, and cyberspace continues to be requisite to the defense of the United States. We thank the subcommittee for your past support and look forward to working together in the future to strengthen your Air Force and defend our homeland. I look forward to your questions.

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STATEMENT BY

LIEUTENTANT GENERAL HARRY M. WYATT III
DIRECTOR OF THE AIR NATIONAL GUARD

BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

FIRST SESSION, 111TH CONGRESS

ON

AIR SOVEREIGNTY ALERT MISSION
FOR THE AIR NATIONAL GUARD

APRIL 22, 2009

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STATEMENT BY
LIEUTENANT GENERAL HARRY M. WYATT III
DIRECTOR, AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Chairman Ortiz, Ranking Member Forbes and members of the committee I wish to thank you for the opportunity to share information on the Air National Guard's contribution to the Air Sovereignty Alert Mission. Our Airmen proudly and admirably man this crucial component of our nation's last line of defense.

In 1953, units in Syracuse, NY and Hayward, CA began to sit on five-minute runway alert from sunrise to sunset. Within eight years it was 25 squadrons on alert around-the-clock and by 1992 Guard Airmen provided 100-percent of CONUS air defense. Today, your Air National Guard operates 16 of 18 Air Sovereignty Alert sites while accounting for 30-percent of fighter, 40-percent of tanker and 30-percent of airlift capability for the Total Air Force.

Their service displays a commitment to job number one—defense of the homeland; and I believe there are areas we could/should improve as part of our commitment to them. Their funding has been inconsistent and their equipment is quickly nearing the end of its service life.

Air Sovereignty Alert is not solely Air National Guard mission; it is a Department of Defense responsibility and we should keep that in mind when discussing its origin and its future. The Air National Guard has fit well in this mission set because of the inherent cost effectiveness of its force.

Historically the Air Sovereignty Alert mission has faced funding challenges. As we approached 9/11 many in the defense community believed the Air Sovereignty Alert mission was no longer relevant. In fact, there were plans to reduce the number of sites to four. Our nation had become comfortable following the Cold War and assumed no peer competitor would have the ability to threaten our borders. So, in a "resource

constrained environment" the reduction of the Air Sovereignty Alert mission became an "acceptable risk."

Following 9/11, we quickly expanded the number of sites to ensure there were no gaps in coverage and shifted from a temporary mission, conducted through rotations amongst several units, to a 24/7 mission at specific sites and units assigned to cover those sites. Even as we recognized this new reality, there still appeared to be a reluctance to accept Air Sovereignty Alert as an enduring mission and fund it as a steady-state mission. The program funding was year-to-year and we assigned the mission to units already committed to a wartime mission. This resulted in unpredictability for our Airmen within the already year-to-year funding stream. Our Airmen continued to sacrifice day-in and day-out without a firm assurance that on October 1st they would still have a job. Many struggled to hold firm while we in the Washington DC area annually debated their future well past September 30th. This is not an indictment on our processes; it is simply the situation those Airmen dealt with while standing guard on our nation's last line of defense.

Our reluctance to treat Air Sovereignty Alert as an enduring mission continues to impact the men and women serving in this very important mission area. There are still some who believe we can reduce the number of sites to pre-9/11 levels without any evidence to suggest we will be able to do so in the near future.

I think many falsely believe this mission area only includes a handful of fighter pilots. They forget about the maintainers, communicators, command and control, Life Support, intelligence officers, security forces, etc. that are also a critical component to the execution of this mission. In total, excluding tanker support, there are more than 3,000 Airmen responsible for the Air Sovereignty Alert mission. I am extremely proud of our Airmen and believe you are also. This hearing and the recent Government Accountability Office study are a testament to your commitment to their service and I am hopeful it will help bring to light possible solutions to some of the issues they face.

For the foreseeable future, I know of no other alternatives to Air Sovereignty Alert. As General Renuart, Commander, Northern Command, has testified, the threat is real and the requirement remains. We should ensure the program included in the fiscal years defense program reflects this reality.

By treating Air Sovereignty Alert as an enduring mission with steady-state funding across the fiscal years defense program, we would be able to solve some of the challenges associated with units supporting Air Sovereignty Alert and expeditionary missions. These issues impact retention, readiness, employer and family support. Recognition that Air Sovereignty Alert is within the steady-state portion of the Global Defense Posture, requiring long-range planning and consistent funding, is extremely important to providing predictability to the units supporting this mission area.

Taking care of our people includes fielding equipment that is capable of meeting any threat. The aging of the Air Force's fighter fleet is a concern to our entire Total Force and was identified in the recent Government Accountability Office study on Air Sovereignty Alert. The CSAF, SECAF and CNGB understand this and we are all searching for solutions. We need solutions for what we in the Air National Guard refer to as the "mid-term gap," and, for long-term recapitalization. Neither of these can be sacrificed. If we sacrifice the mid-term, we risk uncovering a critical line of defense. If we sacrifice the long-term or fifth generation, we risk what can best be referred to as our children and grandchildren's critical edge. Everything has to be on the table.

Under current planning assumptions, more than eighty-percent of our Air Sovereignty Alert fleet will begin reaching the end of its service life in eight years. Every day without a solution, this situation becomes more and more urgent. The risk of doing nothing is unacceptable and we are examining all options to address recapitalization of these aircraft.

Our Airmen are leaning forward, standing side by side with their joint and coalition partners, to maintain the safety of our skies and our borders. We, all of us, have a

responsibility to add stability to their funding and to bridge the equipment capability gaps that exist on the horizon.

Chairman Ortiz, Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to your questions.

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

April 22, 2009

United States Government Accountability Office

GAO

Report to Congressional Requesters

January 2009

HOMELAND DEFENSE

Actions Needed to Improve Management of Air Sovereignty Alert Operations to Protect U.S. Airspace

GAO

Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

GAO-09-184

GAO
Accountability·Integrity·Reliability
Highlights

Highlights of GAO-09-184, a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

According to U.S. intelligence, the threat to U.S airspace remains. The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) is to defend U.S. air space and the U.S. Air Force has 18 sites in the United States that conduct air sovereignty alert (ASA) operations. ASA operations support fighter aircraft in conducting homeland air defense operations. GAO examined the extent to which (1) NORAD has adopted a risk-based management approach to determine ASA operational requirements; (2) the Air Force has implemented ASA operations as a steady-state mission in accordance with Department of Defense (DOD), NORAD, and Air Force directives and guidance; (3) the Air Force assesses the readiness of units conducting ASA operations; and (4) the Air Force faces challenges in sustaining ASA operations for the future and what plans, if any, it has to address such challenges. GAO reviewed relevant ASA guidance, directives, and planning documents; and interviewed DOD officials, including the commanders of all 18 ASA sites.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD conduct routine risk assessments, implement ASA as a steady-state mission, and develop plans to address future challenges. DOD agreed with some and partially agreed with other recommendations. GAO clarified the recommendations based on DOD comments on a draft of this report.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on GAO-09-184. For more information, contact Davi M. D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or dagostinod@gao.gov.

January 2009

HOMELAND DEFENSE

Actions Needed to Improve Management of Air Sovereignty Alert Operations to Protect U.S. Airspace

What GAO Found

Responding to individual requests from DOD, NORAD has done some assessments to determine ASA operational requirements. NORAD has not adopted a risk-based approach to determining ASA requirements, including routine risk assessments. Although GAO previously reported on the benefits to organizations that routinely do risk assessments to determine program requirements, NORAD does not conduct such assessments because DOD does not require NORAD to do so. However, such assessments could enhance NORAD's ability to determine and apply the appropriate levels and types of units, personnel, and aircraft for the ASA mission.

The Air Force has not implemented ASA operations in accordance with DOD, NORAD, and Air Force directives and guidance, which instruct the Air Force to establish ASA as a steady-state (ongoing and indefinite) mission. The Air Force has not implemented the 140 actions it identified to establish ASA as a steady-state mission, which included integrating ASA operations into the Air Force's planning, programming, and funding cycle. The Air Force has instead been focused on other priorities, such as overseas military operations. While implementing ASA as a steady-state mission would not solve all of the challenges the units must address, it would help them mitigate some of the challenges associated with conducting both their ASA and warfighting missions.

NORAD has partially assessed the readiness of ASA units; however the Air Force has not evaluated personnel, training, and quantity and quality of equipment. Readiness measures are designed to ensure that DOD forces are properly trained, equipped, and prepared to conduct their assigned missions. For example, while NORAD evaluated the extent to which aircraft were maintained for ASA operations and the units' ability to respond to an alert and to locate and intercept aircraft, it did not evaluate training. Because the Air Force has not implemented ASA as a steady-state mission or formally assigned the mission to the units, it does not assess ASA readiness. By assessing the readiness of units that consistently conduct ASA operations, DOD would be better assured that these units are organized, trained, and equipped to perform ASA operations.

The Air Force faces two challenges to sustaining its ASA capabilities over the long term—(1) replacing or extending the service life of aging fighter aircraft and (2) replacing ASA units with equipment and trained personnel when they deploy. For example, if aircraft are not replaced by 2020, 11 of the 18 current air sovereignty alert sites could be without aircraft. The Air Force has not developed plans to mitigate these challenges because it has been focused on other priorities. Plans would provide the Air Force information that could assist it in ensuring the long-term sustainability of ASA operations and the capability of ASA units to protect U.S. airspace.

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Abbreviations

AFB	Air Force Base
ANG	Air National Guard
ANGB	Air National Guard Base
ANGS	Air National Guard Station
ASA	Air Sovereignty Alert
DOD	Department of Defense
EXORD	Execution Order
NGB/ANG	National Guard Bureau/Air National Guard
NORAD	North American Aerospace Defense Command
NORTHCOM	U.S. Northern Command
PACOM	U.S. Pacific Command

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

January 27, 2009

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate

The Honorable Christopher S. Bond
United States Senate

The Honorable Gene Taylor
House of Representatives

The Honorable Frank A. LoBiondo
House of Representatives

In the hours after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) [1] engaged in efforts to defend the air sovereignty of the United States against a new type of air attack—one that was initiated from within our own borders. Although federal agencies responsible for protecting domestic airspace have taken measures to deter such attacks, the *National Strategy for Aviation Security*, issued in March 2007, recognizes that air attacks are still a threat to the United States and its people.[2] U.S. intelligence agencies have also stated that the threat to U.S air sovereignty remains.

The commander of NORAD is charged with the missions of aerospace warning and aerospace control for North America.[3] To accomplish these missions, NORAD has fully fueled, fully armed aircraft and trained personnel on alert 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, at 18 air sovereignty

[1] NORAD is a binational United States and Canadian organization charged with the missions of aerospace warning and aerospace control for North America. Aerospace warning includes the monitoring of man-made objects in space, and the detection, validation, and warning of attack against North America whether by aircraft, missiles, or space vehicles, through mutual support arrangements with other commands. Aerospace control includes ensuring air sovereignty and air defense of the airspace of Canada and the United States.

[2] The White House, National Security Presidential Directive 47/Homeland Security Presidential Directive 16 (NSPD-47/HSPD-16), *National Strategy for Aviation Security* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 26, 2007).

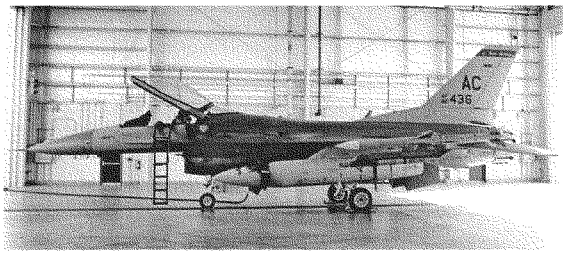
[3] The current NORAD commander is also the commander of U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM).

alert (ASA) sites across the United States. The Air Force provides NORAD with personnel and equipment for these operations including fighter aircraft, which include F-15 and F-16 aircraft as shown in figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: F-15s on Alert at Portland, Oregon ASA Site

Source: U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt John Hughel.

Figure 2: F-16 on Alert at Atlantic City, New Jersey ASA Site



Source: U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt Andrew Moseley.

ASA units, which include both Air National Guard (ANG) and active duty Air Force personnel, are dual tasked to conduct both expeditionary

missions and ASA operations. ASA operations consist of ground operations that take place before fighter aircraft take off, including such activities as maintaining the fighter aircraft. They also include those activities that may take place after a unit receives an alert from NORAD but before the aircraft are airborne. For example, pilots and maintenance personnel may rush from their nearby lodging facility to the alert aircraft facility, where maintenance personnel conduct final preparations while the pilots sit in their aircraft awaiting further instruction (battle station). Alternatively, pilots may taxi the aircraft to the end of the runway and await further instruction (runway alert) or take off in response to the alert (scramble).

Once aircraft take off, "alert" operations end and the operation becomes a homeland defense air mission under Operation NOBLE EAGLE.[4] When this transition occurs, an ANG pilot converts from Title 32 status under the command and control of the state governor to federal Title 10 status under the command and control of NORAD.[5] If warranted, NORAD can increase personnel, aircraft, and the number of ASA sites based on changes in the threat conditions. According to DOD documents, day-to-day, or steady-state, operations consist of the current personnel and aircraft at the 18 ASA sites scattered throughout the United States. This report focuses on the 20 units at the 18 sites that were conducting these steady-state ASA operations up through September 2008.[6]

Given the importance of the capability to deter, detect, and destroy airborne threats to the United States, it is important that the Air Force address current and future requirements of the ASA mission to ensure its long-term sustainability. This includes ASA units' ability to ensure that units conducting ASA operations are also able to train for and perform their expeditionary missions. Further, the Air Force should ensure that it has fighter aircraft available to conduct ASA operations, since the F-15s

[4] DOD's Operation NOBLE EAGLE was initiated after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, to address asymmetric threats.

[5] Title 32 and Title 10 refer to sections of the United States Code.

[6] In October 2008, ASA operations transferred from Selfidge Air National Guard Base (ANGB), Michigan to Toledo Express Airport, Ohio, as a result of DOD's 2005 Base Closure and Realignment process. Although we talked with unit commanders from Toledo, we did not include their responses in our analysis since the unit was not conducting ASA operations at the time of our discussion.

and F-16s used for these operations are beginning to reach the end of their useful service lives.

We have previously reported that one widely accepted method to effectively determine requirements and manage risk for a mission or operation is through a five-phase risk management approach.[7] For example, one phase of this approach is a risk assessment phase, which includes evaluating threats, vulnerabilities, and consequences; another phase includes evaluating alternatives based on different costs and other factors.

In light of these issues, you asked that we review the management of ASA operations. In conducting our review, we examined the extent to which (1) NORAD has adopted a risk-based management approach to determine ASA operational requirements; (2) the Air Force has implemented ASA operations as a steady-state or ongoing and indefinite mission in accordance with NORAD, DOD, and Air Force directives and guidance;[8] (3) the Air Force assesses the readiness of units conducting ASA operations; and (4) the Air Force faces challenges in sustaining ASA operations for the future and what plans, if any, it has to address such challenges.

To determine the extent to which NORAD has adopted a risk-based management approach to determine ASA operational requirements, we

[7] The five phases include determination of strategic goals, objectives, and constraints; risk assessment; evaluation of alternatives; management selection; and implementation and monitoring. See GAO, *Homeland Security: Key Elements of a Risk Management Approach*, GAO-02-150T (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2001); *Homeland Security: Further Actions Needed to Coordinate Federal Agencies' Facility Protection Efforts and Promote Key Practices*, GAO-05-49 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 30. 2004); *High-Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-05-207 (Washington, D.C.: January 2005); *21st Century Challenges: Reexamining the Base of the Federal Government*, GAO-05-325 (Washington, D.C.: February 2005); *Defense Management: Additional Actions Needed to Enhance DOD's Risk-Based Approach for Making Resource Decisions*, GAO-06-13 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 15, 2005); and *Risk Management: Further Refinements Needed to Assess Risks and Prioritize Protective Measures at Ports and Other critical Infrastructure*, GAO-06-91 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 15, 2005).

[8] Although DOD uses the term "steady state" in multiple documents, we were unable to find an official DOD definition. However, headquarters Air Force officials told us that DOD generally refers to a steady-state mission as one that is ongoing and indefinite. Implementing ASA operations into a steady-state mission would include a number of actions, including baselining the operations across the Air Force's Future Years Defense Program.

compared a widely accepted risk-based management framework to assessments that NORAD conducted on ASA operations. To determine the extent to which the Air Force has implemented ASA operations as a steady-state mission, we reviewed NORAD, DOD, and Air Force guidance regarding how ASA operations are to be managed. We also interviewed DOD and Air Force officials and obtained ASA documents that contained information about the management of ASA operations, including oversight and funding of the operations. We then compared how the Air Force had implemented ASA operations to NORAD, DOD, and Air Force guidance. To determine the extent to which the Air Force assessed the readiness of units performing ASA operations, we obtained and analyzed DOD guidance and reviewed the readiness reports of all units that conduct ASA operations. We reviewed the readiness reports and interviewed unit officials and determined how well these reports reflected the extent to which these units were organized, trained, and equipped to conduct ASA operations. To determine the extent to which the Air Force faces challenges in sustaining ASA operations for the future and what plans, if any, it has to address such challenges, we interviewed DOD and Air Force officials and obtained and reviewed DOD reports that identified challenges the Air Force will face in sustaining future ASA operations. We also interviewed DOD and Air Force officials and obtained their views on the challenges they will face, and we requested any plans addressing these challenges. We also conducted structured interviews with the commanders of the 20 alert units located at all 18 ASA sites and asked them to respond to a variety of questions regarding aspects of all four objectives.[9] We conducted this performance audit from April 2008 to January 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Additional information on our scope and methodology appears in appendix I.

[9] We also interviewed commanders from two additional sites that were scheduled to conduct ASA operations after fiscal year 2008 as a result of DOD's 2005 Base Closure and Realignment process. An ANG unit located at Toledo Express Airport, Ohio started conducting ASA operations in October 2008 and an ANG unit located at Barnes Air National Guard Station (ANGS), Massachusetts, is scheduled to take over ASA operations during fiscal year 2010. However, since the two units were not conducting ASA operations at the time of our discussion we did not include their responses with those from the 20 units that were conducting ASA operations at the time of our discussion. Therefore, throughout the report, we refer to 20 alert units located at 18 alert sites.

Results in Brief

While NORAD has performed some risk assessments, it has not adopted a risk-based management approach to determine ASA operational requirements. In our prior work on management practices, we noted that an on-going, risk-based management approach, which would include routine risk assessments, could help effectively manage risk and determine requirements for federal programs. NORAD has completed three assessments that we determined could be part of a risk-based management approach. NORAD completed the first of these assessments after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when it worked with other federal agencies and determined, based on vulnerabilities and criticality, which sites should be protected by ASA operations. This assessment could be considered to be part of the risk assessment phase of a risk management approach. NORAD did two other assessments, in 2005 and 2006, primarily in response to the 2005 Base Closure and Realignment Commission process and efforts to cut costs for Operation NOBLE EAGLE. On both of these occasions, NORAD conducted a cost evaluation, taking into consideration aviation security improvements—such as secured cockpits and enhanced passenger screening—that were made by the Transportation Security Administration since 2001. However, these assessments were not completed as a result of an established risk-based management approach intended to routinely manage risk and determine operational requirements for ASA operations. Instead, NORAD performed these assessments in response to individual DOD leadership inquiries about ASA operations. NORAD has not conducted similar assessments since 2006 because DOD does not require NORAD to manage ASA operations using a risk management approach, which includes routine risk assessments. By performing routine risk assessments, NORAD could better evaluate the extent to which previous threats have been mitigated by DOD or other government agencies, better evaluate current and emerging threats to determine which ones require the most urgent attention, and determine operational requirements to address changing conditions. Moreover, it could also help NORAD to evaluate alternatives to current operations, especially in a resource-restricted environment. Further, such assessments could enhance NORAD's ability to determine and apply the appropriate level and type of resources—including units, personnel, and aircraft—for the ASA mission. Therefore, we are recommending that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of the U.S. command element of NORAD to conduct routine risk assessments to determine ASA operational requirements.

The Air Force has not implemented ASA operations as a steady-state (i.e., ongoing and indefinite) mission in accordance with current NORAD, DOD, and Air Force directives and guidance. In August 2002, the Air Force issued planning guidance to establish permanent ASA sites to support homeland defense rather than continuing to conduct ASA actions on a temporary basis,[10] as it had been doing since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Then, in response to a December 2002 NORAD declaration of a steady-state air defense mission, the Air Force took further action to establish ASA as a steady-state capability and issued a directive assigning specific functions and responsibilities to support the mission. According to the directive, the Air Force was to take 140 actions to implement a steady-state mission. For example, the directive required the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel to ensure that ASA active personnel requirements were included in the Air Force submission to the Future Years Defense Program.[11] The directive also required the Air Force major commands to develop the capability to report on the readiness of ASA activities in DOD's readiness system, [12] and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel to work with the appropriate officials to limit adverse effects on the careers of personnel affected by the steady-state mission. Further, in December 2003 the Office of the Secretary of Defense directed the Air Force to assess and resource long-term ASA mission requirements in its submission for the 2006 through 2011 Future Years Defense Program.[13] However, the Air Force has not implemented ASA operations as a steady-state mission because, (1) according to headquarters Air Force officials, it has focused on other priorities such as overseas military operations, and (2) it believed that ASA operational requirements, such as

[10] In August 2008, the Air Force issued an updated template in an effort to establish a standard for construction projects at ASA sites.

[11] The Future Years Defense Program is the program and financial plan for the Department of Defense, and includes a projection of costs data, manpower, and force structure at least 4 years beyond the budget year, as approved by the Secretary of Defense. It is provided to Congress in conjunction with the President's budget.

[12] DOD currently uses a readiness system called the Status of Resource and Training System to identify the adequacy of personnel, training, and equipment assigned to a unit to conduct its assigned mission. DOD announced plans to implement the Defense Readiness Reporting System in 2002. In 2006, we reported on this system and stated that while it contained usable information and functionality, it was in the early phases of implementation and data validation. See GAO, *Force Structure: DOD Needs to Integrate Data into Its Force Identification Process and Examine Options to Meet Requirements for High-Demand Support Forces*, GAO-06-962 (Washington, D.C.: Sep. 5, 2006).

[13] DOD, Program Budget Decision No. 727 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 12, 2003).

number of sites, might be decreased to pre-September 11, 2001, levels at some point in the future. ASA units have thus far carried out these operations when called upon to do so, but have experienced difficulties since the Air Force has not implemented ASA as a steady-state mission. For example, officials at 17 of the 20 ASA units that we interviewed told us their units were adversely affected by short-term personnel assignments, uncertainty about the future of the mission, and limited opportunities for career advancement. According to ANG officials who coordinate ASA operations within the National Guard Bureau (NGB/ANG) and unit officials conducting ASA operations, while implementing ASA as a steady-state mission would not solve all of the challenges that the units must address, it would help them mitigate some of the challenges associated with conducting both their ASA and expeditionary missions, including uncertainties regarding personnel issues. Such uncertainties in employment have led to difficulty in recruiting and retaining personnel. Therefore, we are recommending that DOD establish a timetable to implement ASA as a steady-state mission, according to NORAD, DOD, and Air Force guidance; update the Air Force homeland defense policy, homeland operations doctrine, and concept of operations to incorporate and define the roles and responsibilities for ASA operations; and incorporate the ASA mission within the Air Force submissions for the 6-year Future Years Defense Program.

While NORAD and PACOM partially assessed the readiness of the units that carry out ASA operations, the Air Force, as the force provider, has not evaluated personnel, training, or quantity and quality of equipment. NORAD conducts two types of assessments that evaluate the extent to which aircraft are maintained for ASA operations and the units' ability to respond to an alert and to locate and intercept aircraft. However, these NORAD evaluations only assess personnel on duty at the time of the inspection; they do not assess and report the extent to which all of the unit's personnel involved in the conduct of ASA operations are adequately trained. Although the Air Force is responsible for measuring a unit's readiness to perform its missions by evaluating personnel, training, and quantity and quality of equipment, it does not assess these factors specifically with respect to ASA operations. The Air Force has not evaluated these aspects of readiness because it has not formally assigned ASA as a mission to the units and included it on the units' mission lists,[14]

[14] The Air Force issues mission designed operational capabilities statements that identify the unit's mission(s) and related requirements (e.g., type and number of personnel). The unit's readiness is based on these requirements.

which would be done as part of implementing ASA operations as a steady-state mission. Additionally, the Air Force has been focused on other priorities and headquarters Air Force officials believe that ASA operations might be decreased to pre-September 11, 2001, levels at some point in the future. In its comments on a draft of this report DOD pointed out that other military services could perform ASA operations when circumstances warrant. Therefore, we are recommending that DOD direct the military services with units that consistently conduct ASA operations to (1) formally assign ASA duties to these units and (2) ensure that the readiness of these units is fully assessed, to include personnel, training, equipment, and ability to respond to an alert.

The Air Force faces two significant challenges to the long-term sustainability of its ASA capabilities, and has not developed plans delineating the actions it will take to mitigate these challenges. First, according to Air Force documents and personnel, many of the service's aircraft are the oldest in Air Force history, and they have become more difficult and expensive to maintain over time. For example, if aircraft are not replaced within the next few years, our analysis of Air Force documentation indicates that 11 of the 18 current ASA sites could be without viable aircraft by 2020.[15] In comments on a draft of this report, DOD indicated that extending the service life of its F-15 and F-16 aircraft is also an option; however, the Air Force has yet to determine the extent to which such actions are viable. Second, while continuing to deploy units for overseas operations and supporting units that are receiving replacement aircraft, the Air Force must ensure that units are trained, available, and ready to perform ASA operations. Currently, when ASA units are deployed, unit commanders typically try to independently find units to replace them, and unit officials told us that this can be difficult to do. Similarly, 14 of the 18 current ASA sites will have to suspend ASA operations for a period of time between 2010 and 2020, as their aircraft reach the end of their useful service lives or they are equipped with new fighter aircraft. According to Air Force officials, the Air Force has not addressed these challenges because it has been focused on other priorities. Failure to develop detailed plans to address these challenges could jeopardize the Air Force's ability to protect U.S. airspace in the future. Therefore, we are recommending that DOD develop and implement a plan to address any projected capability gaps in ASA units due to the expected end of useful service lives of the F-15s and F-16s. We are also recommending that DOD develop and

[15] By viable we mean aircraft that have not yet reached the end of their useful service life.

implement a formal method to replace deploying units that still provides unit commanders flexibility to coordinate replacements.

DOD provided written comments on a draft of this report. DOD agreed with some and partially agreed with other recommendations. However, in its comments, DOD did not commit to taking actions on the steps we were recommending. Therefore, we clarified some of our recommendations. We clarified our recommendation to use a comprehensive risk-based management approach in determining ASA operational requirements to specify the need to routinely conduct risk assessments to better ensure ASA operational requirements are appropriately determined. We also clarified our recommendation to implement ASA as a steady-state mission to suggest that the Air Force establish a timetable for implementing ASA since DOD's response did not set a timetable for doing so. Regarding assigning ASA duties to Air Force units performing ASA operations and ensuring their readiness, we clarified the recommendation to make it clearer that the military services that have units consistently conducting ASA operations formally assign ASA duties to these units and ensure their readiness to conduct these duties. Responding to our recommendation that the Air Force develop and implement a plan to address fighter capability gaps, DOD did not clearly agree to ensure the fighter gaps we identified would be addressed in Air Force plans. We continue to believe that our evidence supports the need to address these capability gaps in Air Force planning. Lastly, on our recommendation to develop and implement a formal method that includes ASA unit commanders' flexibility to replace deploying units, we believe DOD's plan should be responsive to our recommendation, if the ASA mission is formally assigned to the performing units. A summary of DOD's comments and a summary of our response to these comments follow the conclusion section of this report. DOD's written comments are attached to this report as appendix II.

Background

Protecting U.S. airspace has changed over the years. During the Cold War, DOD focused its air defense operations to protect U.S. airspace from air threats originating from the former Soviet Union. Today, several DOD organizations are involved in air defense and ASA operations, which have expanded to include the defense of U.S. airspace from air threats originating from within the United States. Because ASA operations are considered the last line of defense against air threats, it is crucial for this capability to be functioning.

History of ASA and Current Roles and Responsibilities

During the Cold War, NORAD positioned fighter aircraft across the United States and Canada to protect North America from a strategic attack by Soviet bombers. Alert fighter aircraft were manned by a dedicated force that was not assigned to other missions, and aircraft were armed, fueled, and ready at all times. As many as 5,800 aircraft were on alert in 1958, but the number of aircraft diminished over the years, as did the number of designated alert sites. By 1997 officials had suggested a "four corners" defense, maintaining alert sites in Massachusetts, Oregon, California, and Florida. By September 11, 2001, only 14 interceptor aircraft were sitting alert in the United States.

According to DOD's 2008 *National Defense Strategy* and its 2005 *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support*,[16] protecting the U.S. homeland from direct attack is DOD's highest priority. After the events of September 11, 2001, DOD initiated Operation NOBLE EAGLE, which shifted NORAD's responsibilities to include protecting U.S. airspace from air threats originating from within the United States.

NORTHCOM is the military command responsible for executing DOD's homeland defense and civil support mission within its area of responsibility—including the continental United States, Alaska, and territorial waters. The commander of NORTHCOM also commands NORAD. The NORAD commander is responsible for the command and control of homeland air defense and delegates much of this command and control function to one of its three regional commanders.[17] Although neither NORAD nor the Secretary of Defense specifies which military service must provide fighter aircraft to conduct ASA operations, the Air Force is currently providing 100 percent of the fighter aircraft. The Air Force is responsible for organizing, training, and equipping Air Force units. With regard to ASA operations, the Air Force has delegated the responsibility of organizing, training, and equipping combat-ready forces to its major commands. Specifically, Air Combat Command is responsible for providing air defense forces to NORAD and Pacific Air Forces

[16] DOD, *National Defense Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: June 2008); and *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support* (Washington, D.C.: June 2005).

[17] The three regional commanders include the Commander of the Continental NORAD Region, which includes the airspace over the 48 contiguous states; the Commander of the Alaskan NORAD Region, which includes the airspace over Alaska; and the Commander of the Canadian NORAD Region, which includes the airspace over Canada. Air sovereignty for Hawaii is the responsibility of U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) and does not fall within the NORAD command structure.

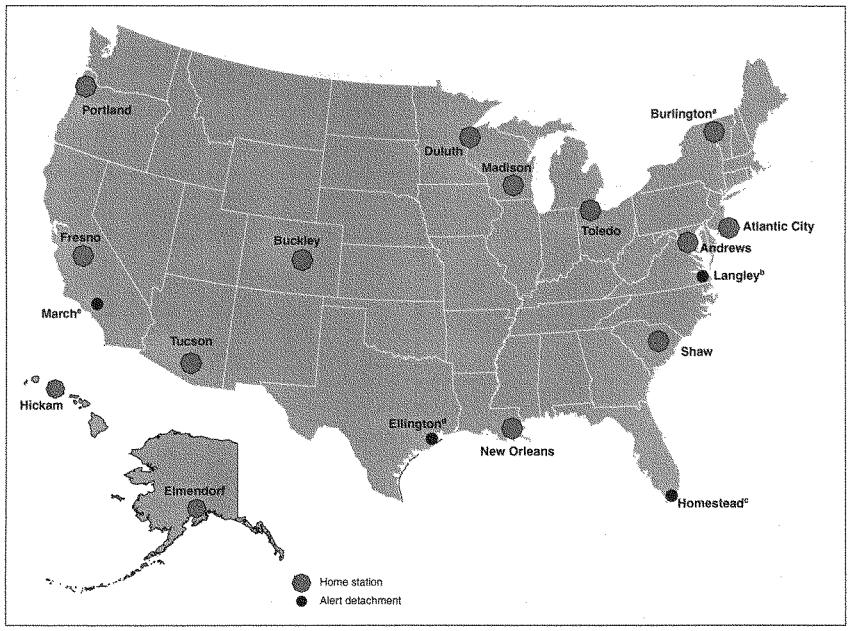
Command is responsible for providing air defense forces to Hawaii. Alert forces deployed in Alaska are provided by PACOM. NORAD has established a binational subcommand under the leadership of a general officer who is responsible for both NORAD and PACOM activities.

The commander of First Air Force is also the commander of the Continental NORAD Region and the Air Forces Northern Command. In each of these capacities, the commander has different responsibilities with regard to ASA operations. For example, as a numbered Air Force commander (i.e., First Air Force), the commander has the responsibility of ensuring the readiness of forces for air sovereignty and air defense of the continental United States. As the commander of the Continental NORAD Region, the commander is responsible for providing airspace surveillance and control and directing all air sovereignty activities for the continental United States. The role and responsibilities of being the commander of Air Forces Northern Command include air component planning, execution, and assessment of support to civil authorities (e.g., air operations during hurricane recovery) and command of air forces in support of NORTHCOM homeland defense missions. While the First Air Force, Continental NORAD Region, and Air Forces Northern Command have these responsibilities, the ASA units that conduct ASA operations are assigned to different numbered Air Forces within the Air Force's Air Combat Command, Air Education and Training Command, or Pacific Air Force Command for their expeditionary missions.[18]

There are currently 20 units at 18 designated steady-state alert sites in the United States, as shown in figure 3. The ANG provides the personnel and equipment at 16 of the 18 ASA sites while the active duty Air Force provides the personnel and equipment at the remaining 2 sites.

[18] The Air Force has assigned a numbered air force to support each combatant command or major command. The intent is to have the units assigned to each numbered air force properly equipped and manned with trained personnel to conduct that particular commander's missions. Current ASA units are assigned to the following numbered air forces (and assigned combatant or major command): First Air Force (NORTHCOM), Ninth Air Force (U.S. Central Command), Eleventh Air Force (U.S. Pacific Command), Twelfth Air Force (Air Combat Command), and Thirteenth Air Force (U.S. Pacific Command).

Figure 3: Locations of the 18 Steady-State ASA Sites in the United States as of October 2008



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

[a]The Vermont ANG unit at Burlington International Airport is conducting ASA operations until the Massachusetts ANG unit at Barnes ANGS assumes responsibility for ASA operations in fiscal year 2010.

[b]A detachment from the Vermont ANG conducts ASA operations at Langley Air Force Base (AFB), Virginia; the South Dakota ANG unit from Sioux Falls is assisting with ASA operations at this site until the Massachusetts ANG assumes responsibility for the New England ASA operations in fiscal year 2010.

[c]ASA operations at Homestead AFB, Florida are conducted by a detachment from the Jacksonville, Florida ANG unit.

[d]ASA operations at Ellington Field, Texas are conducted by a detachment from the Tulsa, Oklahoma ANG unit.

*ASA operations at March Air Reserve Base, California are conducted by a detachment from the Fresno, California ANG unit.

ANG units fulfilling different roles are potentially subject to different authorities under the United States Code and state laws.[19] ANG units conduct ASA operations in a Title 32 status, meaning that they are under the command and control of the governor of the state but federally funded. However, pilots and aircraft of the same unit engage in an actual airborne air defense operation in a Title 10 status, because they are performing a federal mission under the command and control of NORAD. Active duty units are always in a Title 10 status, but command and control of pilots and aircraft conducting ASA operations passes from the local commander to NORAD when performing air defense operations, as shown in figure 4.

[19] ANG units may operate under the authority of Title 10 or Title 32 of the United States Code, or fall under state laws. For a brief discussion of respective roles and responsibilities for each status, see Air Force Doctrine Document 2-8, *Command and Control* (Washington, D.C.: June 1, 2007); and GAO, *Homeland Security: Enhanced National Guard Readiness for Civil Support Missions May Depend on DOD's Implementation of the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act*, GAO-08-311 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 16, 2008).

Figure 4: Differences Between ASA Operations and Homeland Defense Air Missions

F-16 sitting alert at Langley, VA ASA site.

Air Sovereignty Alert Operations

Fully fueled, fully armed fighter aircraft sitting alert 24 hours a day for 365 days a year.

- Command and control of personnel and equipment remains with the local commander.
- Costs to maintain alert are supposed to be funded through unit's normal funding methods.
- Air National Guard personnel are in Title 32 status. Active duty personnel are in Title 10 status.

F-15 alert aircraft scrambles at Hickham, HI ASA site.

Homeland Defense Air Missions

An alert aircraft transitions from ASA operations to homeland defense air operations when it takes off in response to an alert or for scheduled and random air patrols at important national events and public gatherings.

- Command and control of personnel and equipment transition to NORAD command structure.
- Units pay for costs to scramble against "real world threats" while Air Force may reimburse units for training or scheduled air patrols, such as the Super Bowl.
- Air National Guard personnel transition to and active duty personnel remain in Title 10 status.

Source: GAO analysis; U.S. Air Force photos by (left) Technical Sgt William Parks, (right) Master Sgt Kristen Stanley.

Because ASA units are dual tasked for their expeditionary missions and ASA operations, other units fill in to conduct ASA operations when an ASA unit deploys. ANG units can, on their own, find replacements. Finding replacement for a unit's ASA operation can entail finding personnel and aircraft from multiple units.

Risk-Based Management

GAO has previously reported that a risk-based management approach helps policymakers make informed decisions and prioritize resource investments. Risk-based management is a widely endorsed strategy for helping decision makers make decisions about allocating finite resources and taking action under conditions of uncertainty. We have previously recommended a five-phase approach to risk-based management as shown in table 1.

Table 1: A Five-Phase Risk-Based Management Framework[a]

Phase	Description	Example of elements
Strategic goals, objectives, and constraints	Addresses what the strategic goals are attempting to achieve and the steps needed to attain those results	• Overall results desired, i.e., "end state" • Hierarchy of strategic goals and subordinate objectives related to those goals • Specific activities to achieve results • Priorities, milestones, and outcome-related performance measures • Limitations or constraints that affect outcomes

Risk assessment	Addresses identification of key elements of potential risks so that countermeasures can be selected and implemented to prevent or mitigate their effects	• Analysis of threat gained from available sources (This threat information will be used to develop scenarios. See below.)
		• Estimation of vulnerability of an asset based on standards, such as
		  • availability/predictability
		  • accessibility
		  • countermeasures in place, and
		  • target hardness
		• Identification of consequence of a terrorist attack on a specific asset and criticality, or the relative importance, of the asset involved

Alternatives evaluation	Addresses the evaluation of alternative countermeasures to reduce risk being considered with associated costs	• Specific countermeasure(s) to reduce risk • Use of external sources to improve decision making, such as consultation with experts and threat scenarios • Cost-benefit analysis of countermeasure(s)
Management selection	Addresses where resources and investments will be made based on alternatives evaluation and other management criteria, such as availability of funds	• Management's preferences and value judgments associated with expenditure of countermeasures and funds, such as distribution of antiterrorism measures over assets • Organizational risk tolerance • Resource allocations • Documentation of decisions, including rationale

Phase	Description	Example of elements
Implementation and monitoring	Addresses how countermeasures will be applied and mechanism to keep security measures updated	• Implementation of countermeasures according to strategy • Periodic testing of countermeasures • Linkages to other risk management strategies, state, local, or private entities (horizontal) • Linkages to other strategies, both departmental and national (vertical) • Mechanisms for alterations in system based on current threat data • Periodic evaluation to assess efficiency and effectiveness of program

Source: GAO.

[a]GAO, *Risk Management: Further Refinements Needed to Assess Risks and Prioritize Protective Measures at Ports and Other Critical Infrastructure*, GAO-06-91 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 15, 2005).

The framework should be considered a starting point, and the entire cycle of risk-based management activities should be viewed as a goal. The process is dynamic and new information can be entered at any phase. The framework can be used to inform agency officials and decision makers of the basic components of a risk-based management system or can be used as a stand-alone guide. The risk-based management approach as outlined above is designed to be flexible, in that the approach may be applied at various organizational levels from a department or a multiagency organization down to specific projects or operations such as ASA operations.

As we previously reported, because there is no one uniformly accepted approach to risk-based management, terms and activities may differ across applications. In addition, any approach that omits the substance of the steps may result in resources that are not targeted to the highest security needs. We also reported that failing to monitor the implementation of countermeasures, including those implemented by other agencies, may result in a misallocation of resources. Similarly, failing to conduct routine or periodic assessments of programs or operations could result in missed opportunities to increase their efficiency and effectiveness.

NORAD Has Assessed ASA Operational Requirements but Not on a Routine Basis as Part of a Risk-Based Management Approach

We identified three NORAD assessments of ASA operations; however, NORAD did not perform these assessments—or conduct other actions that would be part of a risk-based management approach—on a routine basis. According to our prior work, an ongoing risk-based management approach is a best practice that enhances an organization's decision making, including determining operational requirements, and helps to guide the use of limited resources. A critical phase of implementing a risk-based management approach is the risk assessment phase, which helps decision makers identify and evaluate potential risks facing key assets or missions so that countermeasures can be designed and implemented to prevent or mitigate the effects of the risks. In addition to the risk assessment phase, alternatives to current requirements are evaluated while considering cost and other factors in the alternatives evaluation phase. Rather than performing these assessments as part of an adopted comprehensive management approach to manage risk or determine ASA operational requirements, NORAD performed these assessments in response to individual DOD leadership inquiries about ASA operations. While NORAD is not required to conduct risk assessments on a routine basis, doing so could allow it to enhance its ability to determine the appropriate level and types of resources—including units, personnel, and aircraft—for ASA operations.

In the first assessment we identified, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, NORAD, in working with other U.S. government agencies, developed a list of what it believed to be the most critical locations and infrastructure across the United States requiring its protection. We determined this assessment could be considered as part of the risk assessment phase of the overall risk management approach in which vulnerabilities and critical assets are evaluated. NORAD has not reevaluated this list since it created it in 2001 even though according to experts in the intelligence community, the type of threat has and continues to evolve, and other U.S. agencies have taken a number of measures to mitigate against aviation threats.

We identified a second assessment that NORAD conducted in 2005 that we considered could be part of the alternatives evaluation phase in which alternatives are considered. Specifically, NORAD's air component—First Air Force—provided input to the 2005 BRAC process regarding which sites it would prefer to conduct ASA operations. First Air Force measured how long it would take a fighter plane to respond to a threat over a

specific location—both from the current ASA site and from the proposed alternative sites—and the level of risk that would be posed under each alternative.[20] After the BRAC decisions were made in 2005, First Air Force assessed the impact of the commission's decisions on ASA operations. For example, the commission recommended that ASA operations at Selfridge, Michigan, be transferred to Toledo, Ohio. First Air Force evaluated the impact of response times to cover high population centers and infrastructure in the area.

In the third assessment we identified, in 2006 the Office of the Secretary of Defense, requested that NORAD and other commands evaluate costs and identify measures to reduce Operation NOBLE EAGLE costs. We considered this assessment could also be included in the alternatives evaluation phase of a risk management approach. In this third assessment, NORAD identified a number of classified actions that it could take to reduce the cost of Operation NOBLE EAGLE but stated that in order to continue to fully support the homeland air defense mission, it would be necessary to maintain the current number of ASA sites based on proximity to critical infrastructure. NORAD's assessment included a risk-based assessment of ASA requirements based on current and emerging threats. The assessment also took into consideration aviation security improvements that had been made by other federal entities since 2001, for example, the Transportation Security Administration's use of Federal Air Marshals on selected flights. NORAD has not undertaken an assessment of alternatives since 2006.

In prior work, we have reported that the goal of risk-based management is to integrate systematic concern for risk into the existing cycle of agency decision making and implementation. Adopting such a risk-based management approach could help NORAD to better assess risk and determine operational requirements by addressing vulnerabilities and by presenting alternatives that could be implemented to address changing conditions. Adopting a risk-based management approach to include actions in all five phases, could also allow NORAD to evaluate the extent to which previous threats have been mitigated by DOD or other government agencies and to evaluate current and emerging threats to determine which ones require the most urgent attention. Routine risk assessments could help NORAD evaluate the extent to which current ASA

[20] The assessment also evaluated the locations of aircraft, such as airborne early warning aircraft, that support ASA fighter aircraft.

operational requirements—including the levels and types of sites, forces and equipment, and contributions from other DOD and non-DOD organizations—are needed to address threats as conditions change. NORAD officials stated that it has not adopted a risk-based management approach primarily because DOD does not require NORAD to use a risk-based management approach to determine ASA operational requirements. The use of a risk-based management approach could help NORAD to assure DOD, Congress, and others that it has considered risks in making decisions about how to apply the level and types of capabilities and resources needed to conduct the ASA mission in an increasingly constrained fiscal environment. Air Force and NORAD officials responsible for ASA operations acknowledged that an ongoing cycle of risk-based management, including a routine risk assessment of ASA operational requirements, would be beneficial to both the service and the command.

The Air Force Has Not Implemented ASA Operations as a Steady-State Mission in Accordance with NORAD, DOD, and Air Force Directives and Guidance

The Air Force has not implemented ASA operations as a steady-state mission in accordance with NORAD, DOD, and Air Force directives and guidance because it (1) has focused on other priorities and (2) believes that ASA operational requirements, such as the number of sites, might be decreased to pre-September 11, 2001, levels in the future. As a result, ASA units have experienced difficulties in conducting ASA operations and Congress and DOD lack cost visibility for decision making. Implementing ASA operations as a steady-state mission may help to mitigate these challenges. In addition, if ASA operations are not implemented as a steady-state mission, Congress and DOD leaders will not have visibility of costs and other important information to make decisions for these homeland defense operations.

The Air Force Does Not Operate ASA as a Steady-State Mission

Although its units are conducting ASA operations, the Air Force has not implemented these operations as a steady-state mission in accordance with NORAD, DOD, and Air Force directives and guidance. Specifically, in August 2002 the Air Force convened a working group that issued guidance for planning to establish permanent ASA sites in support of the mission in support of homeland defense rather than continuing to establish sites on a temporary basis, as it has since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In addition, in response to a December 2002 NORAD declaration of a steady-state air defense mission, the Air Force took further action in

February 2003 to establish ASA as a steady-state capability by issuing a directive assigning specific functions and responsibilities to support the mission.[21] This directive identified 140 separate actions[22] to be taken by Air Force organizations to support the steady-state mission at all 18 ASA sites; these actions included addressing personnel, equipment, funding, and facility issues. For example, the directive required the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel to ensure that ASA active personnel requirements were included in the Air Force submission to the Future Years Defense Program. This program is one of the principal tools used to inform DOD senior leaders and Congress about resources planned to support various programs, and reflects DOD decisions regarding allocation of federal resources. The directive required the Air Force Major Commands to develop the capability to report on the readiness of ASA activities in DOD's readiness system, and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel to work with the appropriate officials to limit adverse effects on the careers of personnel affected by the steady-state mission. In addition, it required the Deputy Chief of Staff for Air and Space Operations to provide policy and programming guidance and staff necessary issues through appropriate offices. Further, in December 2003, the Office of the Secretary of Defense directed the Air Force to assess and resource long-term ASA mission requirements in its submission for the 2006 through 2011 Future Years Defense Program.

Although NORAD, DOD, and the Air Force issued directives and guidance to establish a steady-state ASA mission, the Air Force did not take the steps needed to establish the mission. For example, although the Office of the Secretary of Defense directed the Air Force to program ASA operations across the 6 years of its Future Years Defense Program submission, the Air Force decided to program ASA operations in 2-year increments. Air Force, NORAD, and NGB/ANG officials told us that this decision has been the primary cause for the personnel difficulties ASA units are experiencing. Headquarters Air Force officials told us that they made this decision because they believed that the number of sites might decrease to the pre-September 11, 2001, levels and placing ASA operations

[21] Headquarters U.S. Air Force Program Action Directive (PAD) 2003-01-XOH, *Homeland Air Defense for Steady State Alert Posture for Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve Command, Air Mobility Command, Air Education and Training Command, Air Force Materiel Command, Air Force Space Command, Pacific Air Forces, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Combat Command* (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 28, 2003).

[22] The directive did not identify specific time frames to accomplish these actions.

across all 6 years would require the Air Force to offset another service program. However, Air Force officials also acknowledged that they could still have programmed it across the 6-year time frame since the Future Years Defense Program is a planning tool that could be modified if the number of sites were decreased in the future.[23] In addition, the Air Force did not fully fund ASA operations in the two previous 2-year programming cycles. For example, the Air Force did not program for 122 of the 922 ANG personnel (13 percent) identified as being needed to conduct ASA operations for fiscal years 2006 and 2007 and did not program for 150 of the 922 ANG personnel (16 percent) identified as being needed to conduct ASA operations for fiscal years 2008 and 2009. As a result, the Air Force had to use temporary funds and temporary orders to cover these personnel shortfalls since they are necessary to conduct ASA operations. According to headquarters Air Force officials, the Air Force focused on other priorities, such as overseas military operations; furthermore, it believed that future ASA operational requirements might be decreased to pre-September 11, 2001, levels. These officials stated that the lack of implementation was also attributable to a lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities in Air Force homeland defense documents, and a limited corporate understanding of ASA operations and the units performing them. Our analysis showed that none of the Air Force's key homeland defense documents—the Air Force homeland defense policy directive, the Air Force homeland operations doctrine, and the Air Force homeland defense concept of operations—fully defines the roles and responsibilities for or accurately articulates the complexity of ASA operations.[24] For example, the Air Force's homeland defense policy directive, which is supposed to provide overarching guidance to enable the Air Force to organize, train, and equip by applying the principles, capabilities, and competencies of air and space power to homeland defense, does not mention or define ASA operations or outline the roles and responsibilities for managing these operations. In addition, the Air Force's homeland defense office, which was responsible for overseeing the implementation of the homeland defense directive, lost its general officer, was downsized,

[23] In the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, Congress directed the Secretary of Defense to submit a consolidated budget justification covering all programs and activities of the ASA mission for the Air Force, beginning with the fiscal year 2010 budget submission. Pub. L. No. 110-417, § 354 (2008).

[24] Air Force Policy Directive 10-8, *Homeland Defense and Civil Support*, (Washington, D.C.: Sep. 7, 2006); Air Force Doctrine Document 2-10, *Homeland Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 21, 2006); U.S. Air Force, *Homeland Defense and Civil Support (HDCS) CONOPS* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 1, 2006).

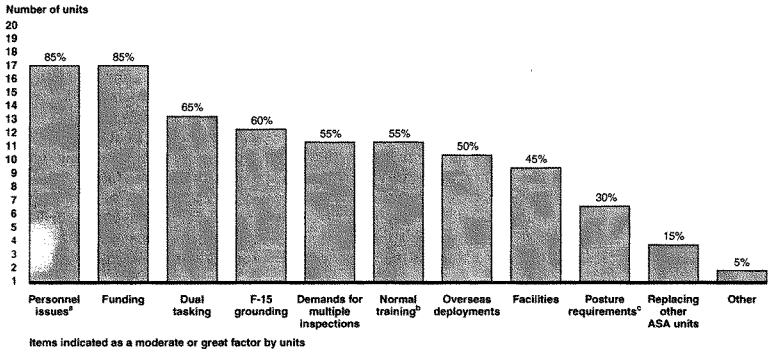
and organizationally realigned several times shortly after the directive was issued.

Temporary Status of ASA Operations Creates Difficulties for Units and Hampers Cost Visibility and Oversight

Since the Air Force did not implement ASA operations in accordance with NORAD, DOD, and Air Force guidance, at the time of our review ASA units were experiencing a number of difficulties that challenged their ability to perform both their expeditionary missions and ASA operations. The unit commanders we interviewed identified funding, personnel, and dual tasking of responsibilities as the top three factors affecting ASA operations. Figure 5 depicts units' responses regarding difficulties they have experienced in conducting ASA operations. For example, during our structured interviews, officials from 17 of the 20 units[25] stated that personnel issues were a moderate or great concern and that recruiting, retention, and promotion limitations were the primary issues arising from the 2-year programming for ASA operations. Commanders at the ASA sites that we visited told us that they had lost some of their most experienced personnel due to job instability caused by the manner in which ASA operations are programmed. Similarly, commanders at 17 of the 20 units stated that the Air Force treats ASA operations as temporary and has not provided sufficient resources. This situation has resulted in an increase in the unit's administrative and support requirements. For example, units are required to issue temporary orders for personnel as funds become available. The need to issue such orders would not be necessary if the operations were not treated as temporary. Thirteen of the 20 units indicated that dual tasking—for their expeditionary mission and for ASA operations—was a moderate or great concern and that the Air Force was not adequately equipping units to conduct both missions. Headquarters Air Force and NGB/ANG officials acknowledged the units' difficulties in conducting ASA operations.

[25] There are currently 20 units conducting ASA operations at the 18 steady-state sites.

Figure 5: Factors Identified by ASA Unit Commanders as Moderately or Greatly Impacting Units' Ability to Conduct ASA Operations



Source: GAO analysis of structured interviews with ASA units.

Note: The percentages shown represent the percentage of the 20 ASA units that identified the factors as moderate or great factors.

[a]Includes consideration of 2-year assignments, promotion opportunities, career progression, and other personnel issues as indicated by units.

[b]Normal training conducted for their expeditionary mission.

[c]Can include the number and quality of aircraft and personnel that are on alert 24 hours a day, 365 days a year as well as other posture requirements.

Because the Air Force has not programmed for ASA operations in its Future Years Defense Program submissions, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, NORAD, and Congress lack visibility into the costs of these operations.[26] Implementing ASA operations as a steady-state mission may help to mitigate these challenges. In addition, implementing ASA operations as a steady-state mission would provide Congress and DOD leaders cost visibility into ASA operations, which support DOD's high-priority homeland defense mission.

[26] Congress directed the Secretary of Defense to submit a consolidated budget justification covering all programs and activities of the ASA mission for the Air Force, beginning with the fiscal year 2010 budget submission. Pub. L. No. 110-417, § 354 (2008).

Readiness of Units Performing ASA Operations is Partially Assessed by NORAD and PACOM but Not by the Air Force

DOD is to evaluate personnel, training, and quantity and quality of equipment to determine the readiness of units to perform their missions. NORAD and PACOM partially assessed the readiness of the units that carry out ASA operations. For example, NORAD assessed the quantity and quality of available fighter aircraft and the ability of the personnel to respond to an alert on the day it conducted the assessment. However, NORAD only assessed personnel on duty at the time of the inspection and did not assess the extent to which all of the unit's personnel that are involved with ASA operations are trained to support and conduct these operations. Moreover, the Air Force, as the force provider, did not evaluate personnel, training, or the quantity and quality of equipment needed and used for ASA operations because it has not formally assigned the mission to the units.

NORAD conducts two separate assessments of ASA equipment (such as the condition of the fighter aircraft) and operations (unit's ability to respond to different types of alerts). The first is a preasssessment conducted by the Continental NORAD Region commander. This preassessment evaluates the quality of alert aircraft, to include the overall condition of the aircraft, and the units' ability to respond to different air sovereignty scenarios, such as intercepting various types of aircraft. This preassessment is performed prior to the official ASA assessment that NORAD headquarters conducts. For example, in a March 2008 preassessment, Continental NORAD Region evaluated the New Orleans ASA site's aircraft condition and the unit's ability to respond to different scenarios within specified time frames. In the second type of assessment, NORAD officially evaluates, generally every 20 months, the sites using the same factors as the preassessment. In the April 2008 official assessment of the New Orleans ASA site, NORAD evaluated its ability to respond to aircraft flown by pilots who had not filed flight plans and were not responding to Air Force pilot signals to land. NORAD found that New Orleans site personnel were able to perform ASA operations under this and other scenarios. In examining these assessments, we observed that NORAD did not evaluate and report the extent to which all of the unit's personnel involved with ASA operations are trained to support and conduct these operations. PACOM conducts a similar assessment for the ASA unit located at Hickham Air Force Base (AFB), Hawaii. As a result, these assessments do not reflect the complete readiness of the units that conduct ASA operations.

The Air Force, as the force provider, is responsible for measuring readiness for its missions by evaluating personnel, training, and quantity and quality of equipment; however, it did not assess these factors specific

to ASA operations.[27] NORAD officials stated training for ASA operations is especially important given the differences in conducting wartime flight operations overseas versus conducting ASA operations in the United States. ASA commanders stated that ASA training includes specific tactics, techniques, and procedures that are not always included during their wartime training. As a result, they stated that many of the units have constructed their own ASA training plans to ensure their personnel are adequately trained to perform ASA operations. In addition, the Air Force has not evaluated the number of personnel it needs for ASA operations; however, NGB/ANG officials told us they are reviewing the number of personnel the ANG needs to perform ASA operations. The officials told us that they were uncertain as to when this assessment would be completed.

Our structured interviews with the commanders of units that conduct ASA operations showed that they did not evaluate and report the personnel, training, or quantity and quality of equipment to perform ASA operations because the Air Force has not formally assigned ASA as a mission to the units and it has not declared the operations as a steady-state mission.[28] Additionally, according to headquarters Air Force officials, the Air Force has been focused on other priorities, such as overseas military operations and it believed that ASA operational requirements, such as number of sites, might be decreased to pre-September 11, 2001, levels. Formally assigning ASA operations to the units would require the units to fully assess their readiness—personnel, training, and quantity and quality of equipment—to perform ASA operations. DOD officials told us that other military services could perform ASA operations when circumstances warrant. By assigning the mission to those units that consistently conduct the mission—regardless of the services they represent—and assessing the extent to which they have the personnel, training, and equipment to conduct this mission, DOD would be better informed about the readiness of ASA units.

[27] The Air Force and other military services use DOD's Status of Resource and Training System to evaluate the adequacy of unit personnel, training, and quantity and quality of equipment.

[28] The Air Force issues mission designed operational capabilities statements that identify the unit's mission(s) and related requirements (e.g., type and number of personnel). The unit's readiness is based on these requirements.

ASA Operations Face Significant Challenges to Long-Term Sustainability, but the Air Force Has Not Developed Plans to Mitigate These Challenges

We identified two key challenges to sustaining ASA operations over the long term. However, the Air Force does not have plans to manage or deal with these key challenges. First, our analysis of Air Force documents and statements from Air Force officials familiar with the service's recapitalization efforts indicates that even if aging aircraft are replaced according to Air Force aircraft schedules, gaps in fighter aircraft at current ASA sites will arise within the next 7 years. Specifically, by fiscal year 2020, 11 of the 18 current ASA sites could be without viable[29] aircraft to conduct ASA operations.[30] Second, the Air Force must ensure that units are available and ready to perform ASA operations and support units receiving replacement aircraft, while simultaneously continuing to deploy units for overseas operations. Currently, when ASA units are deployed, the ANG must find units to replace them, which officials told us can be difficult. While Air Force officials have acknowledged the challenges we identified to the long-term sustainability of ASA operations, they have not developed plans to address them because the service has been focused on other priorities, such as overseas operations. Plans would provide the Air Force with information that could assist it in its efforts to ensure long-term sustainability of ASA operations and the capability of ASA units to protect U.S. airspace.

Expected Retirements of Aging Aircraft Will Create a Challenge in Sustaining the ASA Mission

According to Air Force documents and personnel, many aircraft in the service's current inventory are the oldest in Air Force history, and the older they get the more difficult and expensive they are to maintain. According to NGB/ANG, F-15s and F-16s are aging aircraft that cost more to maintain as they age. Of the 18 ASA sites, 12 are currently equipped with F-16s, which will reach the end of their useful service lives between fiscal years 2015 and 2020. One option is to replace the F-16s with either F-22s or F-35s, both of which the Air Force is acquiring. However, according to the current F-22 and F-35 fielding schedules, only 1 of the 12 units—Shaw AFB, South Carolina—will receive the new aircraft before its fleet of F-16s

[29] By viable we mean aircraft that have not yet reached the end of their useful service life.

[30] The following ASA sites are scheduled to be equipped with viable fighter aircraft after 2020: Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, and Hickham AFB, Hawaii, will have F-22s; Homestead AFB, Florida, Barnes ANGS, Massachusetts, New Orleans Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base, Louisiana, and Portland International Airport, Oregon, will have F-15s; and Shaw AFB, South Carolina, should have switched from F-16s to the F-35s. While the associated active-duty units at Langley AFB, Virginia (1FW and 192FW) will have F-22s, these units do not currently conduct ASA operations. The Vermont ANG unit that conducts ASA operations at Langley AFB (158FW) is not currently scheduled to have viable aircraft after 2018.

reaches the end of its useful service life. The House report accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 directed the Secretary of the Air Force, in consultation with the Chief of the National Guard Bureau and the Secretary of Homeland Security, to conduct a study on the feasibility and desirability of equipping certain ASA units with F-35s.[31] Although the House report directed the Air Force to submit the results of its study to Congress by October 1, 2008, the Air Force had not issued the study by that date, and we were unable to obtain a draft copy.

Another option for the Air Force is to replace the F-16s with some of the more modern F-15 models. However, F-15s, like F-16s, are beginning to reach the end of their useful service lives. Also, all F-15s, including those flown by five ASA units, were grounded for 3 months in late 2007 and early 2008 after an F-15 broke apart during a normal flying operation in November 2007. The Air Force found a structural problem in one of its F-15 models and retired the aircraft that they found with structural problems. The remaining F-15s returned to service by spring 2008, but Air Combat Command officials told us that in light of the accident and subsequent grounding they are concerned about the number of F-15s that will be able to remain in service and meet the Air Force's operational needs up to their scheduled retirement date in 2025. When we discussed this issue during the exit conference of our review, Air Force and NGB/ANG officials acknowledged that the end of the F-15s' useful service lives could occur earlier than 2025 if the aircraft are increasingly used for overseas deployments or other missions. During discussions for the fiscal year 2010 programming cycle, the Air Force sought approval from the Office of the Secretary of Defense to retire 137 F-15s and 177 F-16s earlier than originally planned. Depending on when and where the Air Force retires these F-15s, removing them from service early could further affect the number of aircraft that will be available for units performing ASA operations. In comments on a draft of this report, DOD indicated that extending the service life of its F-15 and F-16 aircraft is also an option; however, the Air Force has yet to determine the extent to which such actions are viable.

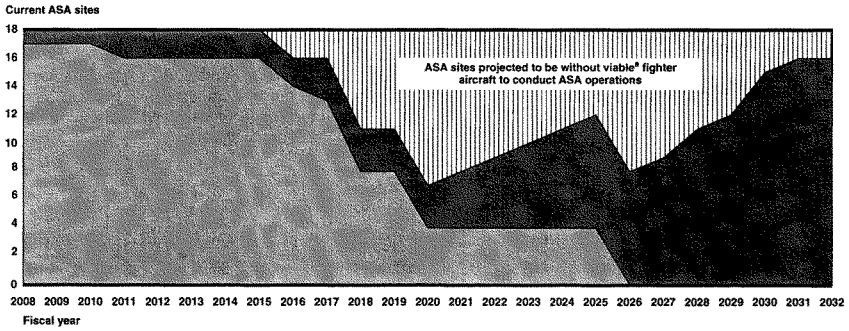
Figure 6 shows the projected number of current ASA sites that may or may not have viable aircraft to conduct ASA operations through 2032. As the figure reflects, unless the Air Force modifies its current fielding schedules,

[31] Congress did not request a corresponding F-22 study. H.R. Rep No. 110-146 at 111-112 (May 11, 2007).

it will lack viable aircraft to conduct ASA operations at all 18 current ASA sites after fiscal year 2015. The figure also shows that 2 of the current ASA sites will not be equipped with viable aircraft and thus will be unable to conduct ASA operations even after the Air Force fields all of its currently planned F-22s and F-35s. This figure is based upon our analysis of documentation on the expected service life of the F-15s and F-16s and the Air Force's fielding schedules for the F-22s and F-35s at the time of our review, and certain assumptions we made in our analysis of these data.[32] Our intent was to determine whether the new aircraft would be available before the F-15s and F-16s exceed their expected service life. See appendix I for the full methodology of our analysis.

[32] Air Force officials told us that a fielding schedule reflects the projected fielding of equipment and that the fielding dates could be postponed if the equipment is not developed, tested, and produced according to schedule. Since the F-35 fielding schedule does not identify specific locations, for the purposes of our analysis we assumed that ASA units, given their homeland defense mission, would be the first ANG units to receive new aircraft. Our projection is also based on the assumption that none of the current ASA units will be adversely affected by the Air Force's proposal to retire the F-15s and F-16s earlier than originally planned. If any of these assumptions are inconsistent with Air Force actions, the number of current ASA sites without viable fighter aircraft could increase.

Figure 6: Projected Number of Current ASA Sites with and without Viable Aircraft to Conduct ASA Operations between Fiscal Years 2008 and 2032 based on current F-22 and F-35 Fielding Schedules



Source: GAO analysis.
[a]By viable we mean aircraft that have not yet reached the end of their useful service life.

In addition, as aging aircraft are replaced, ASA units will have to suspend their ASA operations to be trained and equipped to support the replacement aircraft. In order to maintain ASA operations without interruption, the Air Force will have to find another trained unit to conduct ASA operations while the home unit is being trained and equipped on the replacement aircraft. A NORAD official stated that the Air Force will need to ensure that replacement units are trained in tactics, techniques, and procedures that are unique to domestic air defense.

Air Combat Command officials responsible for providing fighter aircraft to Air Force units acknowledged that there is a gap between the expected end of the useful lives of aging aircraft and their replacement with next

generation fighter aircraft.[33] Nonetheless, there are currently no plans to address this gap in aircraft, at least as it relates to ASA operations.

Providing Personnel to Replace Deploying Personnel and Support Units Receiving Replacement Aircraft May Further Complicate Sustaining the ASA Mission

Providing personnel to replace deploying personnel is currently a challenge and replacing those personnel as they transition to different aircraft may further complicate sustaining the ASA mission. ASA units also are called on to deploy overseas to conduct combat operations. In our structured interviews, 17 of the 20 ASA unit commanders told us that their units had deployed at least once since January 1, 2005. When an active duty unit conducting ASA operations deploys, responsibility for ASA operations is transferred to other personnel and aircraft on the same base. For example, ASA commanders at Shaw AFB, South Carolina told us that when their units are deployed overseas or are in training for their expeditionary mission, they must leave some of their personnel and equipment at home to conduct ASA operations. When an ANG unit deploys, officials told us, its commander typically finds another ANG unit to either cover its ASA responsibilities or provide substitute personnel and equipment for its deployment. For example, the ASA unit at Andrews AFB, Maryland which is responsible for protecting the National Capital Region,[34] deployed to Iraq in 2006. The unit's commander asked commanders of other ASA units to provide F-16s and personnel to help him meet his deployment requirements, so that he could keep some of the unit's aircraft and personnel at Andrews AFB to conduct ASA operations in the National Capital Region. After contacting multiple commanders, he was able to both meet his deployment requirements and keep some of the unit's F-16s on alert for ASA operations. After considerable effort, substitutes were ultimately found from 22 different units.

Although the number of units providing substitutes was not typical, other ASA unit commanders told us that the process for finding replacements

[33] As we previously reported, DOD has long-term plans to replace aging legacy aircraft with fewer, more expensive but more capable and stealthy aircraft. However, recapitalizing and modernizing tactical air forces within today's constrained budget environment is a formidable challenge. GAO, *Tactical Aircraft: DOD Needs a Joint and Integrated Investment Strategy*, GAO-07-415 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 2, 2007).

[34] The National Capital Region includes the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and has additional air defense needs. In July 2005, we testified about the interagency coordination and information sharing that is necessary to address violation of restricted airspace, including airspace over the National Capital Region. See GAO, *Homeland Security: Agency Resources Address Violations of Restricted Airspace, but Management Improvements are Needed*, GAO-05-928T (Washington, D.C.: July 21, 2005).

can be inefficient and burdensome. While Air Force officials said that Air Combat Command is responsible for finding replacements, there is no consistent formal process for doing so. ASA units requiring replacements to cover a deployment currently have two options available through Air Combat Command—i.e., to either decline or accept the entire mission. Unit commanders are reluctant to tell combatant commanders that their units cannot fully deploy—or deploy at all—because they feel obligated to fulfill their ASA responsibilities while also meeting their assigned expeditionary responsibilities. Thus, ASA unit commanders have often "volunteered" to find their own replacements, though they are not required to do so. ASA unit commanders told us that it would be useful for the Air Force to develop a process that allows unit commanders to turn over the process of finding replacements to the appropriate Air Force organization if it becomes too complicated for the unit to find a replacement using its informal networks.

Although we did not identify any instances in which either deployment or ASA requirements were not met, ASA unit commanders indicated that finding replacements will continue to be a challenge as aircraft age—even if overseas operations decrease. Fourteen of the 18 current ASA sites will have to suspend ASA operations for a period of time between 2010 and 2020 as their aircraft reach the end of their useful service lives or they are equipped with new fighter aircraft. For example, the ASA unit at Hickam AFB, Hawaii, is scheduled to suspend ASA operations for 3 months in 2010 so that the unit can transition from F-15s to F-22s. During this 3-month period, another unit will need to conduct ASA operations at the base. In order to meet ASA requirements, the Air Force would have to provide a trained ASA unit to remain on alert in Hawaii while also leaving aircraft and personnel at its home station to both sit alert and train for its expeditionary mission. For example, if the Duluth ASA unit sits alert at Hickam AFB, Hawaii when the Hawaii ANG unit transitions to its new fighter aircraft in fiscal year 2010, the Duluth ASA unit will still need to maintain aircraft and personnel in Duluth, Minnesota, to conduct ASA operations there while also training for its expeditionary mission. Officials from another ASA site told us that the transition period for their unit could be as long as 9 months to train on the replacement aircraft. The remaining 4 sites are currently equipped with F-15s and could have to suspend ASA operations as F-15s reach the end of their expected viable service lives in 2025. If the Air Force does not adequately plan for this transition, most of these units could have to suspend ASA operations at the same time during this time frame. This situation could be similar and possibly worse than late 2007 to early 2008, when 5 ASA units had to suspend ASA operations when the Air Force grounded the entire F-15 fleet for 3 months. Air Force,

NORAD, and NGB/ANG officials told us that this situation created a significant burden on ASA operations, including the need to have Canadian fighter aircraft sit alert at a U.S. ASA site.

Conclusion

Conducting routine risk assessments to determine ASA operational requirements could help NORAD better determine the level and type of capabilities and resources needed to support ASA operations. Also, if the Air Force continues to treat ASA operations as a temporary mission and if ASA mission, roles, and responsibilities are not clearly defined in the Air Force's homeland defense policy, doctrine, and guidance, ASA units may continue to experience difficulties in conducting the ASA mission. Further, if the Air Force, or other service if assigned, does not formally assign the ASA mission to units performing ASA operations and ensure that the readiness of units performing ASA operations is fully assessed—to include training, personnel, equipment, and the ability to respond to an alert—opportunities may be lost to identify and resolve readiness issues. Unless the Air Force addresses the two challenges we identified, the long-term sustainability of ASA operations is questionable. For example, without plans to address the issue of aging aircraft, by 2020, 11 of the 18 ASA units may not have viable aircraft to perform ASA operations. Also, a method that provides personnel to replace deploying personnel and to support units receiving replacement aircraft—while allowing unit commanders the flexibility to independently find such replacements—could provide ASA units with a better tool to address this challenge.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of the U.S. command element of NORAD to routinely conduct risk assessments to determine ASA requirements, including the appropriate numbers of ASA sites, personnel, and aircraft to support ASA operations.

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the military services with units that consistently conduct ASA operations to formally assign ASA duties to these units and then ensure that the readiness of these units is fully assessed, to include personnel, training, equipment, and ability to respond to an alert.

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to take the following five actions:

- Establish a timetable to implement ASA as a steady-state mission.

- Implement ASA as a steady-state mission according to NORAD, DOD, and Air Force guidance by
  - updating and implementing the ASA program action directive;
  - updating the Air Force homeland defense policy, homeland operations doctrine, and concept of operations to incorporate and define the roles and responsibilities for ASA operations; and
  - incorporating the ASA mission within the Air Force submissions for the 6-year Future Years Defense Program.
- Develop and implement a plan to address any projected capability gaps in ASA units due to the expected end of the useful service lives of their F-15s and F-16s.
- Develop and implement a formal method to replace deploying units that still provides unit commanders flexibility to coordinate replacements.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

DOD provided written comments on a draft of this report and these comments are reprinted in appendix II. DOD concurred with some of our recommendations and partially concurred with others.

DOD stated that it partially concurred with our draft report recommendation to employ a risk-based management approach. However, DOD also stated that it believes that sufficient guidance and a long-standing risk-based process currently guide its decisions on ASA operations and, therefore, it does not plan on taking any additional actions until additional requirements are identified through its current process. The process described in DOD's response does not include a critical component of a risk-based management approach—the use of routine risk assessments that incorporate threat, vulnerability, and consequence, and is used to develop scenarios and help inform actions that are best suited to prevent an attack or mitigate vulnerabilities to a terrorist attack. As such, we adjusted our recommendation to clarify the need to routinely conduct a risk assessment specific to ASA operations. Specifically, we have revised the recommendation to suggest that DOD routinely conduct risk assessments to determine ASA requirements, including the appropriate numbers of ASA sites, personnel, and aircraft to support ASA operations. We believe that this clarification would be consistent with NORAD and Air Force officials responsible for ASA operations, who told us that a routine risk assessment that considers threats, vulnerabilities, and criticality would be beneficial to enhance their ability to determine the appropriate level and types of resources—including units, personnel, and aircraft—for ASA operations. We also continue to believe our work shows that such assessments would benefit DOD, Congress, and the National Guard

Bureau by clearly demonstrating the basis for future investments in ASA operations.

DOD concurred with our recommendation to implement ASA as a steady-state mission, but its comments did not state whether the Air Force will implement the ASA program action directive, nor did it address specific actions to implement ASA as a steady-state mission—an important step in helping to resolve ongoing difficulties that we identified in our report. Rather, DOD's response indicated that the Air Force would review and update the ASA program action directive and other key policy documents by the end of fiscal year 2009. DOD also commented that it plans to identify, in the Future Years Defense Program, the impact of any changes to future plans and resources. DOD also commented that it would include a detailed budget display for the ASA mission to comply with §354 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009.[35] However, since DOD did not include in its comments a time frame for implementing ASA as a steady-state mission, including implementing the ASA program action directive, we modified the recommendation to suggest that the Secretary of Defense direct that the Secretary of the Air Force establish a timetable for this purpose. DOD also commented that it plans to review and update, as required, policy, operations, doctrine, steady-state alert requirements, and concept of operations for the ASA mission, pending a review of the Operation NOBLE EAGLE Execution Order (EXORD). We acknowledge that the EXORD would impact ASA operations. However, since (1) DOD did not provide a timeframe for these different reviews and ASA units are currently experiencing difficulties conducting ASA operations as discussed in this report and (2) the Air Force could implement ASA operations as a steady-state mission without changing the EXORD, we continue to believe the Air Force needs to implement ASA as a steady-state mission.

DOD stated that it partially concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to formally assign ASA duties to units that consistently conduct ASA operations and ensure their readiness is fully assessed. DOD commented that the Secretary of Defense is furnishing clear direction through the EXORD, which it says formally assigns supported and supporting roles to multiple

[35] Congress directed the Secretary of Defense to submit a consolidated budget justification covering all programs and activities of the ASA mission for the Air Force, beginning with the fiscal year 2010 budget submission. Pub. L. No. 110-417, § 354 (2008).

agencies. Further, DOD commented that the exclusive assignment of any specific Air Force units and sites would appear to be inconsistent with the flexibility and capabilities under the EXORD. Our original recommendation did not suggest that DOD modify the EXORD to assign the ASA mission exclusively to the Air Force; the EXORD does not replace the mission document statements issued by services to their operational units. Moreover, without a mission document statement and formal assignment of the mission to units, ASA readiness will not be assessed. DOD also commented that it wants to retain the flexibility to use military services other than the Air Force to conduct ASA operations. We had initially focused this recommendation on the Secretary of the Air Force because, at the time of our review, the units conducting ASA operations had historically been Air Force units. The intent of this recommendation is to ensure that such missions are clearly assigned to performing units and that readiness for these operations be fully assessed, regardless of which service performs them. Therefore, we have modified our recommendation to make it clearer that the Secretary of Defense should direct any of the military services that have units consistently conducting ASA operations to formally assign ASA duties to these units and ensure their readiness to conduct ASA operations is fully assessed.

DOD partially concurred with our recommendation that the Air Force develop and implement a plan to address fighter capability gaps in ASA operational units that we identified based on our analysis of Air Force data and plans. In its comments, DOD discussed the capabilities needed for the broader, multiservice air defense mission, but did not clearly agree to ensure the fighter gaps we identified would be addressed in Air Force plans. Our recommendation is directed specifically at the issue of future fighter aircraft capabilities for ASA operations, which are currently conducted by the Air Force and the ANG. We continue to believe that our evidence supports the need to address these capability gaps in Air Force planning.

DOD concurred with our recommendation to develop a formal method to include ASA unit commanders' flexibility to replace deploying units. If the ASA mission is formally assigned to the performing units, DOD's plan should be responsive to our recommendation.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Defense and other interested parties. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on GAO's Web site at http://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-5431 or dagostinod@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.

Davi M. D'Agostino
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

To determine the extent to which North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) has adopted a risk-based management approach to determine air sovereignty alert (ASA) operational requirements, we reviewed prior GAO reports that recommended organizations use risk assessments to manage risk and determine operational requirements.[1] We then interviewed officials and reviewed documents from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force, and NORAD to determine the extent to which NORAD was required to routinely conduct such an assessment to determine ASA operational requirements. During our discussions, we asked these officials if they routinely used risk assessments to determine ASA requirements and how ASA requirements were assessed. We obtained and reviewed their ASA assessments and compared them to the elements used to conduct risk assessments.

In determining whether the Air Force had established ASA as a steady-state mission according to the Department of Defense (DOD), NORAD, and Air Force guidance, we reviewed documents and interviewed officials from a range of DOD organizations involved in conducting, managing, or overseeing ASA activities and funding. (See tables 2 and 3 for a list of organizations and units that we interviewed during this review.) Specifically, we reviewed NORAD, DOD, and Air Force policy documents and statements, and interviewed officials to determine guidance and directives related to ASA operations, and whether the guidance and directives had been fulfilled; reviewed documents and interviewed officials to determine the steps taken to fulfill guidance and directives and the causes for not fulfilling any specific actions listed in DOD guidance or directives; conducted site visits to designated ASA sites; and interviewed officials from every unit conducting ASA operations to determine what impacts, if any, may have resulted from efforts to fulfill DOD guidance and directives related to ASA operations.

[1] See GAO, *Homeland Security: Key Elements of a Risk Management Approach*, GAO-02-150T (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2001); *Homeland Security: Further Actions Needed to Coordinate Federal Agencies' Facility Protection Efforts and Promote Key Practices*, GAO-05-49 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 30, 2004); *High-Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-05-207 (Washington, D.C.: January 2005); *21st Century Challenges: Reexamining the Base of the Federal Government*, GAO-05-325 (Washington, D.C.: February 2005); *Defense Management: Additional Actions Needed to Enhance DOD's Risk-Based Approach for Making Resource Decisions*, GAO-06-13 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 15, 2005); and *Risk Management: Further Refinements Needed to Assess Risks and Prioritize Protective Measures at Ports and Other Critical Infrastructure*, GAO-06-91 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 15, 2005).

To determine the extent to which the Air Force assesses the readiness of units performing ASA operations, we analyzed Air Combat Command's Operational Readiness Inspections, the Continental NORAD Region Command Alert Force Operational Assessments, Pacific Air Force's Alert Force Operational Assessments, and NORAD's Fighter Alert Force Evaluations and compared them to readiness requirements in DOD guidance. From this comparison we determined the extent to which each report reflected the units' readiness to conduct ASA operations. We formed conclusions as to the completeness of the readiness assessments based on this comparison, and visited four ASA sites, interviewed 20 ASA units, and met with the relevant Air National Guard (ANG) officials. We also interviewed commanders from two sites that were scheduled to conduct ASA operations after fiscal year 2008 due to DOD's 2005 Base Closure and Realignment process; however, since the two units were not conducting ASA operations at the time of our discussion we did not include their responses with those from the 20 units that were conducting ASA operations at the time of our discussion. In general, we compared the readiness requirements contained in DOD's guidance with current readiness assessments—graded and ungraded—used to evaluate the units conducting ASA operations, and the overall effect, if any, these assessments have had on the units' ability to meet ASA operations readiness requirements. We analyzed DOD guidance, interviews, and readiness reports to determine if ASA operations readiness requirements were being fully captured in one or more currently used readiness assessments.

In identifying the challenges to the long-term sustainability of the Air Force's ASA operations and the extent to which the service had plans to address these challenges, we reviewed documents and interviewed officials from a range of DOD organizations involved in conducting, managing, or overseeing ASA activities and funding. (See tables 2 and 3 for a list of organizations and units that we interviewed during this review.) Specifically, officials with whom we met and conducted structured interviews identified a number of challenges that they believed could affect the long-term sustainability of ASA operations. Based on these discussions, we were able to identify those issues that were frequently identified. We then reviewed NORAD, DOD, and Air Force documents pertaining to these challenges. For example, in addition to discussions we had with officials knowledgeable about the lifespan of the F-15s and F-16s, we reviewed and analyzed documents that reflected the expected lifespan of these aircraft. We assumed that units will cease to be viable in terms of conducting the ASA mission half-way through the 3-year drawdown period, at which time the ASA units will not have enough aircraft to fulfill

both their ASA and expeditionary missions. We then reviewed and analyzed the Air Force's F-22 and F-35 fielding schedules to determine whether those aircraft would be available before the F-15s and F-16s exceed their expected lifespan. The F-35 fielding schedule did not identify the specific ANG bases that are expected to receive the F-35s, so for the purposes of our analysis we assumed that the Air Force would provide the F-35s to those sites conducting ASA operations before equipping ANG units not conducting ASA operations. Air Force officials told us that a fielding schedule reflects the projected fielding of equipment and that the fielding dates could be postponed if the equipment is not developed according to schedule. We also reviewed NORAD, DOD, and Air Force documents and statements to determine which organizations or offices were responsible for addressing these challenges and subsequently asked each of these organizations or offices to provide us with plans that they had developed to address these or any other challenges that could affect the long-term sustainability of ASA operations.

Table 2: DOD Commands and Organizations That We Visited During This Review

Office of the Secretary of Defense	• Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense
Headquarters Air Force	• Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Financial Management • Office of the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Air and Space Operations • Office of the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics Installations and Mission Support • Office of the Air Force Deputy Chief Of Staff for Plans and Requirements • Office of the Air Force Deputy Chief Of Staff for Strategic Plans and Programs • Homeland Defense Office
NORAD/ U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM)	• Office of the Chief of Staff • Directorate of Personnel • Directorate of Intelligence • Directorate of Operations • Directorate of Logistics • Plans • Programming/ Financial Management • Analysis • NORAD/NORTHCOM Command and Control Center
National Guard Bureau/ANG	• Director, ANG • Directorate of Personnel • Directorate of Operations • Directorate of Programming

Air Combat Command	• Office of the Chief of Staff • Directorate of Personnel • Directorate of Intelligence • Directorate of Operations • Directorate of Logistics • Plans • Programming • Financial Management
First Air Force/Air Forces Northern Command/NORAD Continental Region Command	• Office of the Chief of Staff • Directorate of Personnel • Directorate of Intelligence • Directorate of Operations • Directorate of Logistics • Plans • Infrastructure and Contracting • Financial Management • 601st Air Operations Center
ASA sites	• Andrews Air Force Base (AFB), Maryland • Buckley AFB, Colorado • Duluth International Airport, Minnesota • Langley AFB, Virginia

Source: GAO.

Table 3: ASA Units That We Contacted During Our Structured Interviews

	ASA site	Air Force unit	Active duty/ANG unit
Sites conducting ASA operations at the time of our structured interviews	Andrews AFB, Maryland	113WG 121FS	District of Columbia ANG
	Atlantic City International Airport, New Jersey	177FW/119FS	New Jersey ANG
	Buckley AFB, Colorado	140WG /120FS	Colorado ANG
	Burlington International Airport, Vermont (Site will deactivate in fiscal year 2010 when Barnes Air National Guard Station (ANGS), Massachusetts, becomes an active ASA site.)	158FW /134FS	Vermont ANG
	Duluth International Airport, Minnesota	148 FW/179FS	Minnesota ANG
	Ellington Field, Texas	138FW/125FS	Oklahoma ANG detachment

	ASA site	Air Force unit	Active duty/ANG unit
	Elmendorf AFB, Alaska	3WG/19FS	Active duty unit
		3WG/90FS	Active duty unit
	Fresno Yosemite International Airport, California	144FW/194FS	California ANG
	Hickam AFB, Hawaii	154WG/199FS	Hawaii ANG
	Homestead Air Reserve Base (ARB), Florida	125FW/159FS	Florida ANG detachment
	Langley AFB, Virginia	158FW/134FS	Vermont ANG detachment
		114FW/175FS	South Dakota ANG detachment
	(Madison) Dane County Regional Airport, Wisconsin	115FW /176FS	Wisconsin ANG
	March ARB, California	144FW/194FS	California ANG detachment
	New Orleans, Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base, Louisiana	159FW/122FS	Louisiana ANG
	Portland International Airport, Oregon	142FW/123FS	Oregon ANG
	Selfridge Air National Guard Base (ANGB), Michigan (ASA mission transferred to Toledo, Ohio in October 2008.)	127WG/107FS	Michigan ANG
	Shaw AFB, South Carolina	20FW	Active duty unit
	(Tucson) Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona	162FW/152FS/148FS/195FS	Arizona ANG
Sites that received the ASA mission as a result of the 2005 DOD Base Closure and Realignment process.	Toledo Express Airport, Ohio (Site became active in October 2008.)	180FW/112FS	Ohio ANG
	Barnes ANGS, Massachusetts (Site is scheduled to become an active ASA site in fiscal year 2010.)	104FW/131FS	Massachusetts ANG

Source: GAO.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense

Note: GAO comments supplementing those in the report text appear at the end of this appendix.

HOMELAND DEFENSE & AMERICAS' SECURITY AFFAIRS

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2600 DEFENSE PENTAGON
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DEC 18 2008

Ms. Davi M. D'Agostino
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. D'Agostino:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, "Homeland Defense: Actions Needed to Improve Management of Air Sovereignty Alert Operations to Protect U.S. Airspace," (GAO Code 351186/GAO-09-184). DoD concurs with two recommendations and partially concurs with three recommendations. Our response to your recommendations is enclosed (Enclosure 1) as is our technical response (Enclosure 2).

Our point of contact is Mr. Gary Betourne, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and America's Security Affairs, (703)693-1248, or gary.betourne@osd.mil.

Sincerely,

Peter F. Verga
Principal Deputy

Enclosures:
As stated

GAO DRAFT REPORT – DATED NOVEMBER 26, 2008
GAO CODE 351186/GAO-09-184

"HOMELAND DEFENSE: Actions Needed to Improve Management of Air Sovereignty Alert Operations to Protect U.S. Airspace"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of the U.S. command element of the North America Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) to adopt and implement a risk-based management approach to determine air sovereignty alert (ASA) operational requirements, in order to better inform decisions on the provision and placement of capabilities and resources – including the levels and types of ASA sites, personnel, and aircraft – to support these operations.

DoD RESPONSE: Partially concur. The Department has a long-established process to ensure US forces and capabilities are identified, resourced, and maintained consistent with national security priorities and the risks posed by threats to the homeland. The air sovereignty mission is no exception.

The process begins with the *Unified Command Plan* (UCP). The current UCP, signed in 2006, provides direction for combatant commanders (COCOMs), to execute their respective missions, including the defense of the United States. In April 2008, the President approved and the Secretary issued (May 2008) the *Guidance for Employment of the Force* (GEF), a document that consolidates guidance for contingency planning, global defense posture, and global force management. "Defend the homeland in depth" is identified as one of the priorities in the GEF.

Strategic priorities are also identified in the *Guidance for Development of the Force* (GDF), also issued by the Secretary. The GDF covers the period 2010-2015 and identifies defending the homeland as one of the priority focus areas. In turn, the Military Services, guided by the COCOMs, participate in the Joint Capabilities Integration Development System (JCIDS) process to identify requirements based on mission assignments and responsibilities. Gaps in mission capabilities are identified, including air sovereignty—a broad mission area where each Service has a responsibility to train and equip, and multiple COCOMs (i.e., US Northern Command, US Pacific Command, US Southern Command, US Transportation Command, and US Joint Forces Command) are charged with execution should the need arise. This process utilizes intelligence assessments that characterize the threat for the air sovereignty mission. Within this mission area, the Air Force and Army are the principal contributors.

Once gaps in mission capabilities are identified and requirements are proposed to fill those gaps, risk is applied in the budget process and programs are resourced according to the priorities established by the Secretary during the Program Objective Memorandum (POM) process. Available funding is then applied to counter risk in the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP). The FYDP facilitates a crosswalk between DoD's requirements and the President's Budget, ultimately resulting in appropriations from Congress.

We believe that sufficient guidance and a long-standing risk-based process guide our decisions on air sovereignty alert operations.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to implement air sovereignty alert (ASA) as a steady-state mission according to the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), DoD, and Air Force guidance, including:

- implementing the ASA program action directive;
- updating the Air Force homeland defense policy, homeland operations doctrine, and concept of operations to incorporate and define the roles and responsibilities for ASA operations; and,
- incorporating the ASA mission within the Air Force submissions for the 6-year Future Years Defense Program.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur. The *USAF Program Action Directive (PAD) 2003-01-XOH*, 28 February 2003, outlines the way ahead for homeland air defense for steady-state alert posture. Because the ASA PAD was created in 2003, the Air Force will review it for appropriate content and accuracy in concert with other key policy documents, including AFPD 10-8 (*Homeland Defense and Civil Support*) and homeland operations doctrine. We expect this review to be complete by the end of FY09. Additionally, we will determine if other Military Services should initiate a similar effort.

See comment 1.

The air sovereignty alert mission consists of more than just the alert operation and far more than just fighter aircraft. Today, the alert operation is principally supported by the Air Force and the Army. The US Navy/US Marine Corps can participate in alert operations when circumstances warrant. A Marine unit entered into mission qualification training during the brief period when the F-15 force was grounded. Should there be a need to provide for the air defense of Guam, the Marines Corps would likely support that air defense operation.

The Department plans to review and update, as required, policy, operations, doctrine, steady-state alert requirements, and concept of operations for the air sovereignty mission pending a review of the Operation Noble Eagle Execution Order. If an update is required, it will address force requirements for: fighters, missile defense systems, air

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refueling tankers, airborne warning and control aircraft, and other support elements for each air sovereignty alert level, as well as identifying the supporting Military Services and COCOMS. Such an update would also reflect the impact of the most current threat assessment. In turn, the Military Services and COCOMs will identify the impact of any changes to future plans and resources in the FYDP.

For the FY10 budget submission, the Department plans to include a detailed budget display for the air sovereignty alert mission in compliance with §354 of the FY09 National Defense Authorization Act.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to formally assign the air sovereignty alert (ASA) mission to units performing ASA operations at steady-state sites, and then ensure that the readiness of units performing ASA operations is fully assessed to include training, personnel, equipment, and the ability to respond to an alert.

See comment 1.

DoD RESPONSE: Partially concur. The Secretary of Defense is furnishing clear direction through the Operation Noble Eagle Execution Order (EXORD). The EXORD formally assigns supported and supporting roles to multiple agencies (i.e., the Military Services, US European Command, US Northern Command, US Pacific Command, US Southern Command, US Transportation Command, and US Joint Forces Command). The exclusive assignment of only specific Air Force units and sites would appear to be inconsistent with the flexibility and capabilities under this EXORD. The Department will review the EXORD in the near future to determine if any changes are necessary.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to develop and implement a plan to address any projected capability gaps in air sovereignty alert (ASA) units due to the expected end of useful service lives of the F-15s and F-16s.

DoD RESPONSE: Partially concur. This recommendation underscores the complexity associated with maintaining critical defense assets for future operations as well as the air sovereignty and alert operation missions. The report recognizes the challenges the Department has in reaching an acceptable balance between capabilities and risks. We will ensure that the air sovereignty force—which consists of air refueling tankers, airborne command and control aircraft, ground command and control systems, and space assets—remains mission ready. The Army and the National Guard also contribute significantly to this mission.

In 2008, the Secretary of Defense issued guidance and established priorities in the *Guidance for Employment of the Force* in conjunction with the *Guidance for Development of the Force*. In response, the Air Force, a principal provider and the focus of the aircraft-related portion of this report, has placed a high priority on recapitalizing its

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aging fleet of fighter aircraft. Part of this recapitalization effort will involve modernizing the aircraft that support the air sovereignty mission and its day-to-day alert component, as well as the other missions assigned to fighter aircraft. This work is underway and it will address the service life issue of the F-15 and F-16 aircraft. Fiscal constraints and environmental impacts will affect the final plan for replacement aircraft or the modernization of existing aircraft.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to develop and implement a formal method to replace deploying units that still provides unit commanders flexibility to coordinate their own replacements.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur. The Secretary of Defense has already established a formal process represented by the Global Force Management Implementation Guidance and operated under the Joint Staff Force Sourcing Business Rules and the Secretary of Defense Operations Book (SDOB). The US Joint Forces Command will examine the existence of informal elements of this process, highlight the existence of the formal process, and issue any validated changes, or emphasis as required, in the next edition of the SDOB.

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GAO's Comment

1. The Department of Defense's response further demonstrates the lack of consistency and clarity of concepts, definitions, and terms surrounding air sovereignty alert (ASA) we identified in our review and highlights the need for a commonly understood definition of ASA. As we discussed in our report and illustrated in Figure 4, and as defined by the North American Aerospace Defense Command and First Air Force, ASA operations are part of the broader air defense mission; that is, they are the ground operations that take place prior to a fighter aircraft lifting off in response to an alert, at which point the operation becomes a homeland air defense mission. However, the scope of our study was ASA operations, and we did not address the broader air defense mission.

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgements

GAO Contact

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Acknowledgements

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Related GAO Products

Homeland Defense

Homeland Defense: U.S. Northern Command Has Made Progress but Needs to Address Force Allocation, Readiness Tracking Gaps, and Other Issues. GAO-08-251. Washington, D.C.: April 16, 2008.

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Risk Management

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Homeland Security: Applying Risk Management Principles to Guide Federal Investments. GAO-07-386T. Washington, D.C.: February 7, 2007.

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WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING THE HEARING

APRIL 22, 2009

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. TAYLOR

General WYATT. Federal entitlements for Air National Guard members who die on Active Duty (Title 10) or Active Duty for training (Title 32) are equal. In addition, many States offer additional death benefits for their guard members who die in the performance of their duty. These benefits vary greatly from State to State.

	Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI)	Death Gratuity	Dependency & Indemnity Compensation	Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP)	Unpaid Pay Allowances	Veterans Education Assistance Program (VEAP) or Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB)	Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH)	Air Force Aid Society
Title 10 Benefits	Yes - If member is paying for SGLI and amount they have elected	$100 K	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes - if the member qualifies	Yes	Yes
Title 32 Benefits	Yes - If member is paying for SGLI and amount they have elected	$100 K	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes - if the member qualifies	Yes	Yes

Every Air National Guard base has a Casualty Assistance Representative assigned. This individual works with the Air Force Casualty or the Air Reserve Personnel Center Casualty office (depending on the status of the member at the time of death) and provides benefit counseling to survivors.

Thank you for your inquiry regarding Title 10 vs. Title 32 death benefits for members of the Air National Guard. We appreciate that the Congress continues to recognize the sacrifice of our members and that regardless of status, when a service member gives their life, we as a country, take care of the survivors of that Airman, Soldier, Sailor, Coast Guardsman, or Marine. [See page 24.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

April 22, 2009

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. GIFFORDS

Ms. GIFFORDS. The GAO report states that "the Air Force faces two challenges to sustaining its ASA capabilities over the long-term—(1) replacing or extending the service life of aging fighter aircraft and (2) replacing ASA units with equipment and training personnel when they deploy."

In your review, how would you say the Air Force has performed and is performing on those two key challenges?

Ms. D'AGOSTINO. We found that the Air Force did not have plans to manage or deal with either of these challenges even though they could adversely affect the long-term sustainability of ASA operations.

Ms. GIFFORDS. At this rate, what impacts will affect the Air Guard and the ASA mission?

Ms. D'AGOSTINO. Until the Air Force develops plans to address the availability of fighter aircraft to conduct ASA operations, our analysis of Air Force and Air National Guard data (as of April 2009) reflects that there will be a number of ASA sites, including those supported by Air National Guard units, that will not have enough viable aircraft to train and conduct both ASA operations and expeditionary missions (e.g. military operations in Iraq).[1] Additionally, unless the Air Force develops a process to replace ASA units with equipment and trained personnel when they deploy and as they transition to different aircraft, the voluntary process that ASA commanders currently use to find replacements may continue to be inefficient and burdensome.

Ms. GIFFORDS. Do the current projections for Air National Guard capabilities meet our nation's ASA mission requirements?

General WYATT. The current projections for the Air National Guard capabilities meet the nation's near-term ASA requirements. The Air National Guard and the Air Force are working together to ensure there is no gap in mid-term capability and solutions are in place for the long-term capability. The solution to ensure the availability of aircraft for the United States' requirements in the long term will require a combination of effective legacy fleet management, force shaping, and recapitalization with a Total Force approach. We are working with the Air Force to produce this solution and ensure the strategic requirements of the United States are met.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. FRANKS

Mr. FRANKS. General Darnell, in reading the GAO report and testimony one would think ASA operations and locations are not routinely assessed to include personnel capability to perform the mission, training, equipment, and mission responsiveness. I was under the impression these units do receive regular oversight in the form of readiness inspections. Can you please discuss briefly what these readiness inspections include, how they assess the unit's mission and your level of confidence in their results as they pertain to unit's ability to conduct the ASA mission?

General DARNELL. The Inspector General (IG) for the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) performs inspections and evaluations that provide a comprehensive assessment of the units' readiness to perform the Operation NOBLE EAGLE (ONE) mission. Specifically for ONE, the NORAD IG is the only entity that evaluates unit readiness. However, all Air Force Major Command (MAJCOM) gained units which participate in ONE (Air Combat Command, Air Mobility Command, and Pacific Air Forces) have their primary missions evaluated by their respective MAJCOM IGs during Phase I and Phase II Operational Readiness Inspections (ORIs).

Mr. FRANKS. General Darnell, the GAO report talks at length about the service life of our existing F-16 and F-15 aircraft and the impact that will have on the ASA

[1] The number of ASA sites that could be without viable aircraft varies depending on the assumptions that are made. Our January 2009 report entitled, Homeland Defense: Management Actions Needed to Improve Management of Air Sovereignty Alert Operations to Protect U.S. Airspace (GAO-09-184), identifies the assumptions we made while analyzing the Air Force and Air National Guard data.

mission and homeland defense. General Renuart mentioned in his testimony to the SASC last month the Air Force was working on a plan to bridge capacities of our existing F-15 and F-16 fleet as the F-22 and F-35 become operational. Can you please discuss for a moment some of the options that are on the table? What concerns do you currently have with the transition or any potential gaps that may exist over the next 5, 10, 15 years? In addition, can you please discuss the role of tanker (air-refueling) aircraft in the ASA mission? Considering fighter operations are pretty dependent on tanker aircraft availability, do we currently have, or do you foresee, a problem with tanker aircraft support over the next 5-10 years?

General DARNELL. Homeland defense is DoD's first priority and the Air Force is committed to the ASA mission now through the long term. As you know, long term recapitalization of the fighter and tanker fleet requires many years. Within the funding available, the Air Force must maximize the life of the existing aircraft until they can be replaced. All of the options to ensure the ASA mission remains viable are dependent on the life expectancy of these airframes.

The Air Force, in conjuction with DoD, is currently developing plans to ensure we can meet the combatant commander's requirements for the defense of the Nation—whether it is with Air National Guard aircraft or in combination with active duty assigned aircraft. There are many moving pieces as we look at all the different Air National Guard units around the country to determine the best alignment of our limited resources. We anticipate an update from the Quadrennial Defense Review regarding national requirement, and subsequently, the Air Force's requirement for this critical mission.

Tanker aircraft are a critical force multiplier for the Air Sovereignty Alert mission through ground alerts, scheduled air refueling, and airborne orbits. Assuming that the number of tankers required by Combatant Commanders does not increase and unforeseen reliability or availability problems do not arise, the Air Force does not foresee any shortfalls in tanker support for the ASA mission today or in the next 5-10 years. However in larger context of meeting National Military Strategy, Mobility Capability Study 05 identified a required tanker force of between 520-640 tanker aircraft. Currently, there are 474 legacy tankers (415 KC-135RT, 59 KC-10A) in the Air Force fleet. The Air Force is taking action to minimize risk by modernization of the current tanker fleet and recapitalization through the KC-X program to fill tanker fleet requirements.

Mr. FRANKS. General Wyatt, there has been a great deal of discussion on aircraft availability and long term sustainment of the ASA mission, however GAO sited "Personnel Issues" and "Funding" as the two highest factors identified by ASA Commanders as "Moderately or Greatly Impacting Units' Ability to Conduct ASA Operations." Can you please discuss for a moment some of the Personnel Issues that are driving these Commanders to list this as one of the highest factors of concern?

General WYATT. The "Funding" and "Personnel Issues" identified in the GAO report highlight the historical need to utilize various funding sources for the part time guard members that were put on full time status to perform the ASA mission for the United States. The full time manpower used to execute the ASA mission at ANG units is now funded every two years in the POM cycle. Previously, the Air Force corporate structure did not fund the requirement at 100%, which meant that various other sources of funding were required to cover the difference in execution year funding. This funding often occurred last minute and would occasionally require members to change types of orders, sometimes even in mid-fiscal year. This instability in funding causes members to experience interruptions in medical benefits, monthly pay, leave tracking, and concern about their future employment. The current ASA requirement for the full time manpower is funded at 100% in the FY10 PB.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. BRIGHT

Mr. BRIGHT. According to the National Guard posture statement, 80% of Air National Guard F-16s will begin to reach the end of their service life in 8 years. Unfortunately, the F16s we fly at Dannelly Field are part of that situation with service lives ending generally between 2017 and 2020. It is my understanding that new F22s and F35s will be provided to the Air Guard at some point later than that so it appears that there will be a "fighter gap." If Air Guard fighter units have no planes to fly, I can't imagine the units will survive. This is of deep concern to me because we fly F16s in the Air Guard in my state. Does the Air Force have a plan to address this "fighter gap" in Air National Guard F16 units like mine in Alabama?

General WYATT. The Air Force is concerned about F-16s nearing the end of their service life. The AF will sustain the F-16 Block 30 aircraft to ensure they meet the

programmed 8,000 hour service life. The AF also has plans to transition some ANG units currently flying F-16s to other fighters such as the newer block F-16s, A-10s and F-15s. These transitions will enable us to bridge the gap between the F-16 and its fifth generation fighter replacement.

With the current fiscal constraints on our fifth generation fighter procurement schedule, some units currently flying fighter aircraft will transition to other relevant AF missions. Several ANG units have already transitioned to emerging mission sets that are vital to our national defense such as the unmanned aerospace system, and direct command and control support for our combatant commanders. These missions are critical to today's war efforts, homeland defense, and wartime readiness. These new mission sets have kept these units relevant to today's mission requirements and the future needs of our nation's defense.

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