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

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**

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.