

**UNCLASSIFIED**

**STATEMENT BY**

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

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS**

**FIRST SESSION, 111<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

**ON**

**AIR SOVEREIGNTY ALERT MISSION  
FOR THE AIR NATIONAL GUARD**

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THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

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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.