

Statement by
Robert G. Salesses
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
for Homeland Defense Integration and Defense Support of Civil Authorities

Before the 114th Congress
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives

April 29, 2015

Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, distinguished members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to address you today on the Department of Defense's (DoD's) role in securing the airspace of Washington, DC. I would like to acknowledge that aspects of this issue are very sensitive to the Department of Defense from a national security standpoint, and I look forward to continuing this discussion in a classified setting.

As stated in the National Security Strategy, "The United States government has no greater responsibility than protecting the American people." As reflected in DoD's Strategy for Homeland Defense and Defense Support of Civil Authorities, defending U.S. territory and the people of the United States is DoD's highest priority.

Defending the homeland neither begins nor ends at U.S. borders, and departmental planning is guided by the concept of an active, layered defense – a global defense that seeks to deter and defeat aggression abroad and simultaneously protect the homeland. It is a defense-in-depth that relies on collection, analysis, and sharing of information and intelligence; strategic and regional deterrence; military presence in forward regions; and the ability to generate and project warfighting capabilities rapidly to defend the United States, its Allies, and its interests.

Within the homeland, DoD's responsibility to defend the air sovereignty of the United States is assigned to the bi-national U.S.-Canada North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). NORAD provides aerospace warning, aerospace control (including air sovereignty) and maritime warning for all of North America. The Secretary of Defense assigns forces to the U.S. 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. The United States still has to contend with the potential security challenges posed by the military forces of other countries – from those actively hostile to those at strategic crossroads. DoD understands that it must be able to

dissuade, deter, and, if necessary, respond to challenges across the spectrum – including those from the military forces of other nations. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 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. Today, terrorists remain the preeminent air threat to the United States. NORAD’s vigilance against potential air attacks from within and from outside the United States is a critical distinction between the U.S. air defense posture before and after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

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 DoD, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) surveillance radars, airborne early warning aircraft, and tanker aircraft.

Collectively, DoD and its interagency partners provide multiple 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.

In addition, in defense of the National Capital Region (NCR), NORAD maintains a dedicated 24-hours-a-day/7-days-a-week (24/7) 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. To facilitate interagency cooperation, DoD maintains liaison officers in the Transportation Security Administration (TSA)-hosted NCR Coordination Center (NCRCC) on a full-time basis. In close cooperation with the FAA, DoD began using a Visual Warning System in the

NCR to supplement traditional radio communications to warn wayward pilots who have entered the NCR restricted airspace errantly, directing them to contact FAA air traffic controllers immediately. As part of DoD's collaboration with the FAA, DoD, along with approximately 140 participants from various governmental department and agencies, including intelligence and law enforcement agencies, monitors and participates in the FAA-sponsored 24/7 conference call network known as the "Domestic Event Network" (or "DEN"). The DEN is intended to provide timely notification to departments and agencies in the case of an emerging air-related threat or incident. DoD also provides to key interagency operations centers and the NCRCC access to DoD's "Operation NOBLE EAGLE Event Conference" (or "ONEC"), which is a classified conferencing capability used for DoD coordination and decision making during the response to domestic air threats.

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 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review, "[m]aintaining the capability to deter and defeat attacks on the United States is the Department's first priority."

DoD works closely with its Federal partners such as the FAA and DHS to pursue improvements to protect the National Airspace System (NAS). DoD works with these and other Federal partners such as the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the U.S. Capitol Police to maintain and enhance the protection of the NCR airspace.

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