

Executive Correspondence
DCN 7369



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Message:

EDWARD M. KENNEDY
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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2101

August 12, 2005

Admiral Timothy Keating
Commander, NORAD and USNORTHCOM
50 Vandenberg Street, Suite B016
Peterson AFB, CO 80914-3801

Dear Admiral Keating:

I was dismayed by your testimony yesterday before the BRAC Commission. Chairman Principi asked you if you were comfortable with the level of protection for New England under the BRAC recommendation to close Otis Air National Guard Base, move its 15 fighter planes out of the region, and leave only two fighter planes based at Bradley International Airport in Hartford, Connecticut, on alert in the entire New England region. You testified that you were "comfortable" with the recommendations, and they "would not pose unacceptable risk."

Otis has a strong role in the Northern Command's current tiered defense plans. Since 9/11, fighter planes from Otis have flown over 1500 sorties and logged almost 5000 hours in their homeland defense responsibility. In the days after 9/11, with the nation at a heightened state of alert, Otis F-15s were overhead continuously. To do so required far more than two planes on alert in the region. As Chairman Principi mentioned, previous BRAC rounds have already drastically reduced the number of aircraft available to respond in New England, yet the current recommendation would dramatically reduce that level.

It defies common sense that you will be able to meet all your needs under the tiered defense plans without Otis and its full complement of F-15s. Moving a small number of fighter planes to Bradley Field would be a major further reduction in fighter capability, since it would increase response times to intercept commercial flights entering US airspace, and endanger the ability of the Coast Guard to patrol our waters. Shifting the planes would also significantly reduce the surge capability for the region, since Bradley would be unable to accommodate additional armed fighter planes.

I was also concerned by your response to Admiral Gehman, who asked whether you had taken into account the need to find airfields that allow fighters to sit on alert with loaded weapons. The recommendations for New England would leave only two fighters on alert at Bradley Field, a commercial airport that does not currently allow the loading or stationing of armed fighters. In fact, the A-10s stationed at Bradley must store and load their weapons at other sites. If the two fighter planes on alert are required to do the same, the need to arm them in the crisis would greatly delay their response. This suggests that the two fighters on alert to protect the entire northeast would be unarmed, and to arm them would greatly increase their response time. The F-15s now on alert at Otis sit with

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live weapons, they have unmatched response times to any point within New England, and the base has rapid surge capability to meet increased threat levels.

You repeatedly stated that the BRAC recommendation does not pose unacceptable risk. But why should the BRAC proposal present any increased risk to our homeland defense compared to our current capability? The BRAC Commission and the American people deserve a candid answer to that question, because the facts clearly demonstrate that closing Otis would pose a large risk to our homeland defense in the entire Northeast, and I urge you to give the highest consideration to correcting the Administration's flawed recommendation.

With respect and appreciation,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ed Kennedy", written in a cursive style.

Edward M. Kennedy

cc: Anthony J. Principi, Chairman, Base Realignment and Closure Commission