The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) is a bi-national 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. The May 2006 NORAD Agreement renewal added a maritime warning mission, which entails a shared awareness and understanding of the activities conducted in U.S. and Canadian maritime approaches, maritime areas, and inland waterways.

To accomplish these critically important missions, NORAD continually adjusts its structure to meet the demands of a changing world. The commander is appointed by, and is responsible to, both the U.S. president and the Canadian prime minister. The commander maintains his headquarters at Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado. The NORAD and U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) Command Center serves as a central collection and coordination facility for a worldwide system of sensors designed to provide the commander and the leadership of Canada and the U.S. with an accurate picture of any aerospace threat. Three subordinate regional headquarters, located at Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska, Canadian Forces Base, Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida, receive direction from the commander and control air operations within their respective areas of responsibility.

To accomplish the aerospace warning mission, the commander of NORAD provides an integrated tactical warning and attack assessment to the governments of Canada and the United States. To accomplish the aerospace control mission, NORAD uses a network of satellites, ground-based radar, airborne radar and fighters to detect, intercept and, if necessary, engage any air-breathing threat to North America. As a part of its aerospace control mission, NORAD assists in the detection and monitoring of aircraft suspected of illegal drug trafficking. This information is passed to civilian law enforcement agencies to help combat the flow of illegal drugs into North America. The command is currently developing a concept for implementing the new maritime warning mission.

Through outstanding bi-national cooperation, NORAD has proven itself effective in its roles of watching, warning, and responding. NORAD continues to play an important role in the defense of Canada and the U.S. by evolving to meet the changing threat. The events of September 11, 2001 demonstrated NORAD’s continued relevance to North American security. Today, NORAD provides civil authorities with a potent military response capability to counter domestic airspace threats.

While the national leadership of Canada and the U.S. continue to refine our response to the terrorist threat, NORAD’s proven abilities and unique capabilities will remain a vital part of homeland defense.