President Jimmy Carter to Senator James O. Eastland, 12 May 1978

Jimmy Carter (1924- )

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To Senator James Eastland

The motion in the Senate next Monday to block all of the proposed aircraft sales to Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia presents a vital test of our national purpose. In the hours before the Senate votes, it is my duty as President to draw attention to the powerful reasons supporting each of the sales and the dire consequences of rejecting them.

Our basic goal is to secure peace, stability, and harmonious relations among the nations of the Middle East. Since becoming President, I and my chief foreign policy advisers have spent more of our time and effort on this subject than any other foreign policy issue.

The number of aircraft proposed for each of the countries has been carefully considered to insure a regional balance, but the decision before the Senate transcends the particular transactions.

The choice is stark and fundamental. Shall we support and give confidence to those in the Middle East who work for moderation and peace? Or shall we turn them aside, shattering their confidence in us and serving the cause of radicalism?

It is my considered judgment that the aircraft sales to Egypt are essential to enable President Sadat to continue his efforts for peace. At great personal and political risk, President Sadat has taken an initiative which has created the best prospects for peace in the Middle East in three decades. With similar risks, he has turned away from a relationship with the Soviet Union and placed his trust in the United States.

To reject the proposed aircraft sale to Egypt would be a breach of that trust. Such a rejection would be a devastating blow to President Sadat, to the military forces of Egypt, to the people of Egypt, and to the forces of moderation in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia has become a firm friend of the United States. As its influence dramatically expands in the world, Saudi Arabia has been not only a firm supporter of the peace process but a moderating and conciliatory force on a wide range of global issues.
It is beyond challenge that the Saudi air defense system must be modernized and augmented. The United States has an opportunity through these proposed sales to enhance its relationship with the Saudis as they take these vital steps to defend themselves against their radical neighbors armed by the Soviet Union. But I must tell you with great gravity that it is an opportunity that we will quickly lose if we do not grasp it immediately.

If the Saudis are forced to turn elsewhere to meet their defense needs, it will unquestionably impair the peace process. Moreover, the erosion of confidence will inevitably have a far broader -- and adverse -- impact on the wide range of issues on which we have been working in close harmony.

The aircraft sales to Israel are a reflection of our strong and unshakeable commitment to the security of Israel. The American people fully understand that our commitment to Israel's survival and security is total, unequivocal, and firmly fixed in our national policy.

The long-term interests of Israel are served by the proposed sales to Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It is in Israel's interest to encourage the forces of moderation in the Middle East, and to promote their close relationship with the United States. It would not serve Israel's interest if we were to fail to keep bi-partisan commitments, made by the prior Administration as well as by mine, to provide aircraft for the defense of Saudi Arabia. It would be against Israel's interest if moderate nations are brushed aside by the United States, opening vast possibilities for the intrusion of hostile influences.

In the end, the national interest of the United States is the issue. On the basis of the most careful and serious analysis of all factors, I am convinced that the proposed sales will enhance U.S. national objectives, contribute to our national security, and promote peace in the Middle East.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

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