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Issues concerning the Proposed Sale of E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) to Iran. September 19, 1977. 7 pp.

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; by Richard W. Gutmann, Director, Procurement and Systems Acquisition Div.

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The United States may sell seven Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft and ground-based radars to Iran. The adequacy of assurances offered by President Carter in response to concerns over Iranian security and personnel capabilities depend on the ability of Congress to obtain factual data from the executive branch and to monitor events in Iran at the appropriate times. A Department of Defense study of possible alternative air defense systems for Iran was not conclusive as to which of the alternatives is operationally and militarily preferable. The cost comparisons of the study were not completely valid because they were based on alternatives of differing capabilities. The airborne systems provide part time coverage of limited areas; the ground-based system provides full border and interior coverage 24 hours a day. The detection range specified in the study for AWACS was 220 nautical miles and for the E-2C 180 miles. The most recent Navy tests have shown that the E-2C capability may be in excess of 200 miles. The assumption was made that AWACS aircraft could operate 11 hours a day for a 21-day wartime period as opposed to 6 hours a day for the E-2C. The AWACS rate was based on as yet unproved objectives set out in the AWACS production contracts. An all ground-based system would require more personnel than the other alternatives.
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STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
UNITED STATES SENATE

ON

ISSUES CONCERNING THE PROPOSED SALE OF E-3
AIRBORNE WARNING AND CONTROL SYSTEM (AWACS)
TO IRAN

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, we are pleased to be here today to respond to your request for our comments on certain aspects of the proposed sale of seven Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft to the Government of Iran. Specifically you asked that we discuss (1) the assurances offered by President Carter in response to concerns over Iranian security and personnel capabilities, and (2) the study of possible alternative air defense systems for Iran that was recently completed by the Department of Defense.

With respect to the so-called assurance items, there is little that we can specifically comment on. In essence, the assurances are largely promises of actions to be taken in the future. The extent of those assurances will depend to

a great extent on circumstances occurring after delivery of the aircraft to Iran. These assurances are general in nature at this time and many of the specific arrangements are yet to be worked out. Therefore, to a considerable extent, the adequacy of these assurances will depend on the ability of the Congress to obtain factual data from the Executive Branch and to monitor the events in Iran at the appropriate times.

We have written to you separately on these assurances and with your permission I will provide a copy of our letter for the record.

With respect to the Department of Defense study of alternatives--we are of the opinion that it is not conclusive and will not be of great assistance in helping you to reach a decision on the merits of the alternatives to the proposed sale. The study is not an examination of the costs and effectiveness of alternatives as requested by a number of committee chairmen and members of the Congress because it begins with the assumption that seven AWACS and a number of ground-based radars are adequate for the Iranian air defense mission. It then proceeds to compare some of the advantages and disadvantages of alternative systems with the AWACS/radar option. Because of the short time available to it, the study group could not adequately assess the cost and effectiveness of alternative solutions for a specifically stated Iranian air defense requirement.

While the study can be useful in pointing out differing capabilities and some indications of costs, it does not, in our opinion, make a persuasive case either for the selected alternative, AWACS, or against the other alternatives. This being the case, we believe that your decision must necessarily turn on foreign and military policy considerations and the technological security risks involved.

We think it is important to understand that there is little or no question about the relative capabilities of the three systems examined. Each presents certain advantages and certain disadvantages. For example, the AWACS is most effective from the standpoint of range, command and control capabilities, and overall flexibility. The Navy E-2C aircraft is not as capable as AWACS, but it costs significantly less. An all ground-based system, while not providing the flexibility of coverage available with an airborne system, has the distinct advantages of performance reliability and round-the-clock airspace surveillance of all of Iran's borders.

In the context of our overall conclusions, I would like to make some specific comments on the recently completed Department of Defense study so that you will be better able to assess its conclusions. The study, as you know, considered three alternative systems to provide an air defense capability for Iran. These were:

--a combination of seven AWACS plus a small number of ground-based radars,

--a combination of E-2C (Navy airborne radar aircraft) and ground-based radars, and

--ground-based radars only.

The study concludes that the first option--AWACS in combination with some ground-based radars, is the appropriate course of action. As in all studies of this type, however, the results are very sensitive to assumptions made by the study group and to the accuracy of the data used. I would, therefore, like to point out some of the key issues revealed by our review of the DOD study report and our subsequent discussions with Department of Defense officials.

Costs

The cost comparisons are not completely valid because they are based on alternatives of differing capabilities. The airborne systems provide part-time coverage of limited areas. The ground-based system (the highest cost option) provides full border and interior coverage 24 hours a day.

Detection Capability

The study calculates the number of aircraft required to maintain a certain level of coverage based on a combination of available flying hours, range, aircraft speed and detection capabilities of the airborne radar equipment. The detection range specified in the study for AWACS was 220 nautical miles

and for the E-2C 180 miles. However, the most recent Navy tests have shown that the E-2C capability may be in excess of 200 miles.

Flying Hours

The AWACS is given a substantial advantage (with respect to the number of aircraft required), by assuming that each aircraft could operate 11 hours a day for a 21-day wartime period as opposed to 6 hours a day for the E-2C. The E-2C rate is supported by available Navy operational data. The AWACS rate is based on as yet unproved objectives set out in the AWACS production contracts.

Personnel Requirements

One of the principal objections to an all ground-based system, according to the DOD study, is the large personnel requirement in comparison to the numbers required for the other alternatives. The study uses an Iranian estimate that 770 people are required to man each of 41 ground radar stations. On the other hand, the Air Force estimates that only about 150 people are required for each station.

This overstatement of personnel requirements tends to make the other alternatives appear to be much more attractive because of the cost and training implications. While it appears that Iranian manning requirements for the other alternatives may also be overstated, the most severe adverse impact from a

comparative standpoint is on the ground-based system because of the number of bases and the relatively large numbers of personnel involved.

Mr. Chairman, in summary I would like to state that we certainly do not consider this current study completely invalid. We think it is valuable for an examination of some of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the three alternatives. I would like to reiterate, however, that we do not believe it provides basis for concluding which of the alternatives is operationally and militarily preferable.

I would also like to briefly comment on a related matter. In our letter of August 26, we advised this Committee that our preliminary discussions with Department of State and Department of Defense officials indicated that the contemplated study of alternatives would not be responsive to the needs of the Congress. We also pointed out that, as of that date, we had been furnished no specifics on how the assurance items would be implemented.

In a letter to the Comptroller General dated September 1, the State Department took exception to our letter because they were of the opinion that it inferred a lack of cooperation on the part of those involved in preparing the Administration's position on this proposed sale. :

We would like to say that we did not intend to infer a lack of cooperation. Our staff has had a number of meetings with State and Defense officials and has obtained reasonably good cooperation from all.

Our letter was intended solely as a progress report to the Committee and was in response to your written request that we monitor the developments in this case. As a courtesy, we advised State Department officials in advance that we intended to send the letter in question--and they requested that we not do so--a request we felt was inappropriate in view of the Committee's great interest in this subject.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions at this time.