

## No. 830

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*Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Near South Asian, and African Affairs (Byroade) to the Secretary*

SECRET

[WASHINGTON.] JUNE

Subject: Israel request to purchase American jet aircraft.

Some time ago the Israelis approached me with a request we allow them to make a commercial purchase of 24 F-86 jet fighters. The only act required by the United States Government would be to grant export licenses.

The Israelis explained their desire to purchase these aircraft as part of a modernization of equipment scheme for their air force. They propose to dispose of 80 obsolete aircraft presently maintained. In view of budget restrictions they envisaged actually receiving the 24 new aircraft over an extended period of time.

In response to my query they stated the transaction would be of a secret military character and they could guarantee that no initial publicity would result.

My first reaction to this proposition was that we should give approval. I have been in fact searching for some way to help the Israelis and was therefore tempted to go ahead. I have, however, recently come to the conclusion that I cannot conscientiously recommend such a course to you, as I believe it clearly against United States over-all interests in the Middle East. This I believe to be true for the following reasons:

(a) Grant of permission to Israel to purchase American jets at this time might seriously compromise the possibilities of ultimately achieving the political objectives of our Iraq program, i.e. Iraqi participation in Middle East defense and the break up of the negativism of the Arab League.

(b) I do not trust the Israelis as regards publicity and it would appear to the area that Israel by different methods was going to receive more potent weapons than we planned to give Iraq under our new agreement.

(c) The United States contemplates no jet aircraft in its military assistance to the Middle East. If we should change our mind in this regard the Israel request should, of course, be reconsidered.

(d) Even with the disposal of obsolete aircraft in greater numbers, 24 F-86's would materially increase Israel's potential. Israel's present airforce capability probably exceeds the capabilities of all the Arab states put together.

(e) At the recent conference of Ambassadors at Istanbul, our feeling was confirmed that the real danger today lies in some foolish move on the part of Israel. The Ambassadors saw no evidence whatsoever that an Arab move was in the cards.