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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

#59

October 2, 1983

Field Marshal Mohamed Abdel Halim Abu Ghazala
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense
and Military Production
Arab Republic of Egypt
Cairo, Egypt

Dear Colleague:

(U) I appreciated the recent opportunity to discuss important issues of concern to both of our countries, including nuclear powered warship transit of the Suez Canal. Thank you again for your candid comments on this subject. As you know, a delegation from your country led by Major General Esmat Ezz visited the United States as our guests during the period 19-25 July to obtain information on the safety of our nuclear powered warships. We were especially pleased to see the delegation headed by a member of the Ministry of Defense since this is a strategically important issue having significant implications for our mutual defense interests.

(U) The purpose of the trip was to receive briefings, tour Panama Canal facilities, ride the nuclear powered cruiser USS ARKANSAS (CGN-41) through the Canal, and tour our naval base facilities in Norfolk, Virginia with the expectation that we could demonstrate to the delegation first hand the safety of these ships. We were most gratified to hear at the end of the visit that the delegation considered our nuclear powered warships to be safe.

(U) At the last meeting during the visit, Major General Ezz requested that we provide design criteria that could be used to judge objectively the safety of a country's nuclear powered warships and to which governments would be asked to certify compliance prior to being allowed to transit the canal.

(U) As I mentioned to you during our luncheon, my Navy experts are forwarding a detailed response to this request. Our response outlines an approach which we believe would serve your needs. It provides for flexibility in judging the safety of nuclear powered ships, takes an impartial and evenhanded approach to all nations consistent with your obligations under the Treaty of Constantinople, and forms a basis which would not, in our view, invite an attempt by the Soviet Union to seek passage. The approach builds on the extensive discussions we have held with your government representatives and is consistent with the policy we follow for world-wide port visits by our nuclear powered warships. Our approach is also consistent with procedures for approving nuclear powered warship transits of the Panama Canal.

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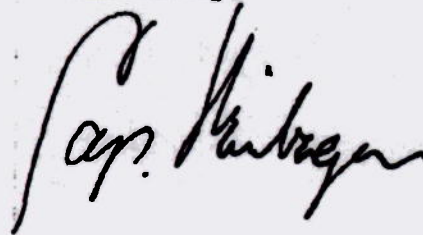
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(U) Since the first visit of a U.S. nuclear powered warship to Egypt by the USS CALIFORNIA in October 1976, we have conducted many discussions and provided extensive documentation on the safety of our nuclear warships. I believe the issues have been fairly and fully explored. We have put forth our best efforts in responding to Egyptian concerns within our own security and policy limitations. I would hope that the approach outlined in the letter to General Ezz could be adopted.

(U) I want to close with an affirmation that this issue remains of vital importance to my government. The need to rapidly move forces between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean has never been more vividly demonstrated than during the recent events in Chad and Lebanon. I request your assistance in resolving this issue to reach a satisfactory arrangement permitting our nuclear powered warships to transit the Suez Canal.

Sincerely,



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MFR: Original hand delivered
by SecDef at meeting in Cairo
on 2 Oct 1983. KH

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