



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

5/22/2018

The Honorable Deb Fischer  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

DEAR SENATOR FISCHER,

Thank you for your May 8, 2018 letter requesting my views on issues related to the Open Skies Treaty, as it is an important mechanism for engaging with our allies and partners. Despite Russia's violations of its obligations under the Treaty, it is my view that it is in our Nation's best interest to remain a party to the Open Skies Treaty.

The Open Skies Treaty is a military-to-military engagement tool that provides signatories with the ability to gather information through aerial imaging on military forces and activities of concern to them. This contributes to greater transparency and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region, which benefits both the United States and our allies and partners. The Treaty also produces imagery that is verifiable and unclassified, which allows for its use in international or bilateral fora. For example, in 2014, Treaty imagery was a key visual aid during U.S. engagement with allies and Russia regarding the military crisis in Ukraine.

In order to maximize U.S. benefits from the Treaty, the United States needs to recapitalize and modernize its sensors and aircraft. The 1960s-era U.S. Open Skies aircraft are ill-suited to extreme operating environments in Russia and experience regular, unplanned maintenance issues, often resulting in mission delays or cancellations. In 2017, the United States completed only 64 percent of its scheduled Open Skies missions over Russia. Other Treaty states parties, including Russia, typically complete 100 percent of their scheduled missions. In order to ensure that the United States can exercise its full Treaty rights, I directed the Air Force to begin an effort to recapitalize the U.S. Open Skies aircraft.

I greatly appreciate your support for the Open Skies aircraft recapitalization efforts, as these efforts will address existing performance gaps and will maximize the benefits of U.S. participation in the Open Skies Treaty.

Sincerely,

Jim Mattis