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Opinion

The Qatari jet can't be Air Force One, and Boeing should say so

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This is the Boeing 747 from Qatar, shown at an airport in Florida, that President Donald Trump toured on Feb. 15. (Al Drago / The New York Times)

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The Department of Defense, on behalf of President Donald Trump, last month [accepted](#), and hopes to transform into Air Force One, a Boeing luxury 747-8 worth about \$400 million from Qatar. There are questions, but also very serious ethical concerns surrounding the gift. Its acceptance could potentially violate the Constitution's foreign emoluments clause and put an American president under the influence of leaders of the oil-rich nation.

However, there is another issue at play: The plane is incapable of being Air Force One in the first place.

Boeing, [whose previous contract](#) to deliver two Air Force Ones is about five years late and billions over budget, should take responsibility. Instead of allowing the U.S. government to spend a billion more of taxpayer dollars to essentially start over on another aircraft, the company should make it clear to the U.S. government that the Qatari jet was never meant to be an Air Force One, and cannot be made so in a timely manner. Making this clear would benefit Boeing and the nation.

First, as retired four-star Gen. Barry McCaffrey has explained, the Qataris would likely not hand over the jet unaltered.

“It will have hundreds of bugs in it; there’s no way to sort out the security of it,” McCaffrey [told KING 5 Seattle](#).

Even some Republicans [echoed](#) McCaffrey’s concerns. When asked how much it would cost to ensure the plane is safe for the president, Sen. Rick Scott of Florida questioned if that was even possible.

“I don’t know how you would be able to do that if you don’t build it from scratch,” Scott said.

Second, while Trump has presented the plane as the pinnacle of luxury, this is far from the truth. Qatar has reportedly been [trying to get rid of the jet](#) since 2020, and the fact leaders were willing to give it away when the Trump administration asked shows how little they valued it. Furthermore, the plane was actually [manufactured before](#) the two planes originally intended to be the new Air Force Ones, meaning it is far from the most modern.

Finally and most egregiously, as Boeing knows, most of the cost of a new Air Force One is not building the jet itself. Instead, the cost comes from outfitting the plane to be able to refuel midair, communicate securely with the military — even in a worst-case scenario — and protect the president from attack.

Therefore, outfitting this new plane [could cost the American taxpayers \\$1 billion](#). If the overrun costs on the earlier contract with Boeing are any indication, the final cost could be much higher. Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina [acknowledged this](#) when speaking to NBC News.

“Air Force One is not like every other Boeing, and it’s going to have to be put through a lot of paces and every square inch analyzed before the president should consider it his primary means of transportation,” Tillis said.

He further questioned whether outfitting the jet was even worth it.

“You have to work through the cost benefit of it; I mean we’re in a world of DOGE, so we’ve got to figure out whether it’s worth outfitting or selling it and writing a check to the Treasury and help us with our debt reduction,” Tillis said.

Most of the responsibility for the ethical and practical concerns surrounding the jet falls on the shoulders of the president, and his decision to accept it without Congress’ approval.

However, Boeing must accept responsibility for failing to deliver the original Air Force Ones on time and within budget. To prevent taxpayers from funding a billion-dollar fantasy that this secondhand, security-compromised Qatari jet could be fit to carry the president of the United States, Boeing should finally finish what it started back in [2016](#). For the sake of itself and the nation, it must complete work and meet the latest deadline on the two original Air Force Ones.

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