

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
**THE GENERAL COURT**

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133 1053

March 10, 2015

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We, the Portuguese American Legislative Caucus of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, are writing to you with our concerns upon learning of the President of the Azores Government's statements at the 33rd meeting of the Standing Bilateral Commission on the plans to significantly scale back Lajes Air Force Base.

The president's remarks, made February 11, 2015 in Lisbon, concern us on a number of fronts. He foretells of the negative impacts the reduction will have on the island of Terceira, including financial problems for its people and for the Azores as a whole. He also warns of the impact the reduction could have on the historic relations shared between Portugal and the United States, which is home to a significant number of Portuguese immigrants and their descendants who live, work and vote in America.

If President Cordeiro is correct in saying the Department of Defense will phase out the base in three years, as compared to the five years typical of other jurisdictions, it seems as though Terceira will suffer more than any other jurisdiction in Europe, especially if unemployment increases to 55 percent, as the President projects. What's more, according to the Department of Defense, the move will cost the United States about \$1.5 billion to eliminate an environmental footprint a major reduction could leave behind. There must be a better way to deal with this issue.

The changes that have already taken place at Lajes are beginning to hurt the island's economy. For the Azorean people, geography is a unique hurdle to overcome when seeking alternative employment. Viable solutions should be implemented over time if the base is to be phased down.

In fact, given the Azores' geographic location, the United States ought to approach this issue in a much more strategic way. We should share a joint agenda and collaboration with the European Union and our NATO allies on an array of international security matters including cyber security, drug interception and climate change. The Azorean islands are located in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, putting them in an advantageous position to monitor what is happening with our oceans and climate change. What's more, given the state of maritime trade in the Atlantic Ocean, and the increased trade through the Panama Canal, the United States should capitalize on the opportunity to increase transatlantic trade through a maritime trading center in the Azores.

There are many possibilities to aid the Azores with this transition. As Americans, we believe in helping to restore nations, not destroy them. Specifically as Americans of Portuguese descent, we have a responsibility to do the right thing for a people and a government that has been our friend and ally for decades. Let us be extremely sensitive to the fact that the smallest amount of savings for the United States will occur at the extraordinary expense of the Azorean people.

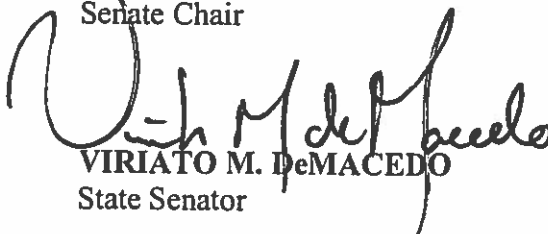
American media outlets and airwaves already reflect the frustration President Cordeiro has expressed in his remarks. We hear their sense of urgency loud and clear. If we do not achieve a better diplomatic position on this issue, we may jeopardize our longstanding relationship with Portugal, which will have consequences for our constituencies of Portuguese-Americans.

Our Portuguese American Legislative Caucus has been to Lajes and we know if the Azores islands were made more of a priority, a better outcome could be reached for the United States and the Azores could be made whole going forward. We must take action to help guide this process before it gets out of hand. We hope you will take seriously our plea for a better alternative to this plan and that you would work with your cabinet to reach an arrangement that will better assist Portugal with the transition if resources are scaled back at Lajes.

We respectfully request your support on this important matter. If you or your staff would like to discuss a plan of action with our caucus, please do not hesitate to contact Senate Chair Marc Pacheco at 617-722-1551 or House Chair Antonio Cabral at 617-722-2017.

Respectfully,


  
MARC R. PACHECO  
Senate Chair

  
VIRIATO M. DeMACEDO  
State Senator


  
ANTONIO F. D. CABRAL  
House Chair



**JOHN V. FERNANDES**  
State Representative



**ALAN SILVIA**  
State Representative



**DAVID T. VIEIRA**  
State Representative

cc: Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter  
Secretary of State John Kerry

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