

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Procurement of the Lockheed Martin F-35A Lightning II (Joint Strike Fighter)

As a newly appointed member of the ADF, I would request that my submission be accepted withholding my identity because, while I am not yet privy to any sensitive information within Defence, I feel that it is better to remain anonymous just in case. My name is not important here anyway; all you need to know about me is that as a new member of my country's armed forces, I have reasonable and justified concerns about the ability of the government to provide us with the right tools for the job – in this particular case, the right aircraft to meet Australia's air power needs including defending our country should the need ever arise.

As an Aviation student I have followed the F-35 program with great interest, especially since the decision was made some time ago that this would be the future combat aircraft of the RAAF. I should point out here that I make absolutely no claims of being an expert in aeronautical engineering, avionics, testing procedures for aircraft development or even the business side of things. After reading through the other submissions made to this inquiry, you already have a wealth of information from people with far more experience and knowledge than I might ever have, so instead I am simply aiming to provide another perspective on the issue and back-up what has already been put forward so far.

The very simple angle I would like to provide is this:

- Our nearest rivals in the region are acquiring, or in the process of acquiring, aircraft and weapons systems that would likely give them a combat advantage over our own forces should Australia continue with the F-35 acquisition. As both a citizen and now a member of the ADF, this is somewhat alarming, and I would urge those in the positions able to influence the project most to cancel the F-35 program by any means.
- Remove the rose-tinted glasses and realistically investigate, in a more urgent fashion, the other capabilities that are presently on offer to the RAAF as a true air power platform. After reading the other submissions and doing some research of my own, I would argue that the JAS-39E Gripen manufactured by SAAB in Sweden provides not only incredible capabilities as a multirole fighter, but even when considering its

through-life support and maintenance, becomes obvious as a far more cost-effective solution which would provide the RAAF with the means to maintain air superiority as well as supporting other ADF combat elements during armed conflict both in our region and abroad in support of our global interests or as part of a coalition force.

- While it may not have the stealth capabilities of 5th generation aircraft such as the F-35, the Gripen has many other attributes such as higher speed (up to Mach 2 I understand, as opposed to 1.6 for the F-35A), better manoeuvrability due to its canard-delta wing configuration, the ability to carry a greater weapons payload for sustained fighting, and perhaps most importantly, a better range and combat radius, able to be extended even further through aerial refuelling with our fleet of KC-30A MRTT aircraft. As a complete package, it out-performs the F-35A in almost every arena, and would give our forces one of the best platforms with which to fight and win against the newest generations of Sukhoi, Mikoyan and various Chinese-built fighters which have been talked about already.
- Get a procurement plan in place and get some pilots training on the alternative type straight away. I don't know the ins-and-outs of facilities construction, simulator support and other infrastructure required to operate a fleet of fighter aircraft at this point in time, but from what I have read about SAAB's designs and the Gripen as a platform, the costs and supporting infrastructure would be far simpler and cheaper to establish, operate and maintain than anything Lockheed Martin sells.

In summary, I think the F-35 is the wrong tool for Australia given the unique and varied requirements of aircraft performance and combat operations in our immediate region, and the SAAB Gripen E provides a far more capable alternative at a fraction of the cost – whether that means acquiring more than 100 total airframes or simply spending money elsewhere, such as a strategic bomber aircraft to in lieu of a real successor to the F-111 fleet...

Give our armed forces the best chance of winning a war – air power is something we cannot afford to get wrong here.