



## **Submission No 37**

### **Inquiry into Australian Defence Force Regional Air Superiority**

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6<sup>th</sup> November 2006

Mr Bruce Scott, MP,  
Chair Defence Sub Committee  
JSCFADT

Dear Mr Scott,

Please understand I am using email instead of more properly communicating with you because I understand that the submissions deadline on matters before your committee has passed. I hope you will receive this.

As a basis for my input , I am a graduate of the RAAF College , the RAF College of Air Warfare , the RAAF Staff College, and a retired RAAF fighter pilot and fighter squadron commander . I was an airborne Forward Air Controller in Vietnam( I have the award of Distinguished Service Order from that period), and retired early from the RAAF in 1974 after 6 years in the rank of wing commander. My son was also an RAAF fighter pilot and Fighter Combat Instructor on Mirages and F/A-18s for 10 years. I have always maintained contact with the Airforce and both mine and my son's contemporaries over the years. My association with these folk has always been something of an on going informal forum on defence developments , in particular to do with air power. From this basis I wonder if I can be of service by offering you what I hope are some balanced and experienced judgements.

The first point I have to make is that having a necessary capability is basic to achieving the airspace dominance required, but "the local world's" perception of that capability is the criterion upon which strength at the negotiating table depends.

The need for regional air superiority, local airspace dominance, call it what you will, from the moment air power became effective, has always been the vital ingredient for the successful application of military power. With modern air weapons technology available it's relative importance has increased exponentially. In Australia we (The RAAF) have always tried to work from this basis. In my time in the fighter force, and since with the F/A-18, to play our part in contributing to this "airspace dominance" we have worked very hard to achieve a reputation of being one of the airforces not to be messed with. There are many USAF reports in their journals over the years of how successful the RAAF fighter elements have been in joint training exercises. The nation should be happy with the thought that airforces of the region know that if they take on the RAAF they are probably going to be "shot down". This is no accident . With the Mirage but particularly with the F/A-18 and associated weaponry and support systems , we have had good tools to work with.

Planning to risk "coming off second best" in a contest for air space dominance is not something this country can contemplate. Losing in combat is not an option. Of course we all hope to never have to go to war. Thus a perceivable and demonstrated capability to be in front is what it is all about . I think you will agree we must try to build on the "top gun" status which our RAAF 's fighter force has worked towards. We must NOT select a replacement aircraft or incomplete supporting

or weapons systems which carry risk of denigrating our perceived capability. How can anyone argue that a cost in dollars is more important!

I have become extremely concerned that the proposed Joint Strike Fighter with as yet ill defined associated support systems and weaponry, to which we have committed funds, is never going to make it as the topline aircraft. Quite to the contrary, all my contacts are urgently pressing their considered opinion that the USAF F-22 Raptor "system" is by far the superior option, and possibly not all that much dearer at this point if various acquisition options were to be seriously examined while the USAF is also negotiating to buy more of them. The F-22 and systems apparently continue to impress these people, all of whom comprise a group (both local and international) which could broadly be described as, "those who have been there, have no axe to grind, and know what they are talking about". I am convinced that possession of the operational system associated with the F-22 will achieve the airspace dominance required, and hence enable the continued effective use of less sophisticated and cheaper air assets such as the F-111, the F/A-18, and even the Hawk and the Army's attack helicopters.

Those of my friends who are still in contact with the current uniformed decision makers in Canberra are crying with frustration because despite their efforts they have been unable to get either our Chief of the Defence Force or our Chief of the Air Force to shift their gaze for an instant from the JSF. Those who are not in such contact continuously urge me to lobby whoever I may know. So, my frustration level is also very high.

Deriving from this inexplicable lack of comparative interest in the F-22, Australia's air capability, our ability to achieve local air space dominance in the future is clearly at risk, but not only that, our negotiating strength as obtained from our perceived regional air capability also risks losing credibility. I fervently hope that your committee can bring better perspective to the replacement aircraft acquisition project. Australia's defence may depend upon it.

Yours Faithfully  
signed Peter Larard

Peter Larard

