



Submission No 31

Inquiry into Australian Defence Force Regional Air Superiority

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To:

The Australian Parliament
Federal Government Joint Standing Committee on Foreign
Affairs, Defense and Trade
Inquiry into Australian Defense Force Regional Air Superiority

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RE: Inquiry into Australian Defense Force Regional Air Superiority

Dear Secretary & Committee Members,

I wish to submit this letter for your consideration, having formed a number of my views in following the web-published debate thus far.

I am an Australian, and recipient of the Centenary medal for my contributions to Australian industry. My industry involves me in the Australasian/ SE Asian region and I have formed views about economic and associated political trends that point inevitably to a future where both the practical capability, as well as unambiguous perceived capability of air-superiority remains essential for Australia's security.

I have followed your committee's published debate with interest. As a citizen looking ahead at those inevitable political/economic fluxes within Australia's immediate geographic / economic region of interest, and having a keen interest in our future defense capabilities, I wish to share some views with you.

The currently plan to purchase F-35 JSFs to displace our FA-18s & F-111s would appear less than ideal, and far from optimum value-for-money or level of autonomy both militarily and industrially, and generally a backwards step from the assumed status quo.

Given that various SE Asian countries have purchased or will soon purchase more Russian Sukhoi fighters and the fact that the F-35 JSFs are out profoundly out-performed by these Sukhois, the Federal Government and the Department of Defense seem to be pursuing a direction which leaves a fundamental gap in our air force capability. The cost argument favoring JSF over F22 now seems to have been neutralized or overturned: at least that is the view expounded by some parties'

recently well-researched submissions.

The reliance by the RAAF on the as-yet unproven F-35 JSFs is analogous perhaps to the darkest days of WWII when our homegrown Boomerang fighters, however valiantly deployed, simply flew suicide missions against the 'air-superior' Japanese Zeros. That is to say, against an air-threat that had been dismissed preemptively by governments and defense leaders of the day.

The JSF F35 simply cannot protect Australia against today's more potent aircraft already deployed in our region nor can it wholly fulfill our traditional role in regional peace keeping.

The JSF looks as if it will take a substantial cut in planned manufactured aircraft - before a representative production airframe even flies. It is expected to take further cuts in the future and this implies much Australian tax-payer-funded cost blow-outs and delays for any aircraft that we may have committed to.

F-22 Raptor fighters are flying now, and have attributes that allow them to dominate Sukhoi fighters; preserving RAAF air superiority previously afforded by our F-111s and F/A-18. There appears to be a lot of rhetoric in the submissions to the committee from very credible sources that are contradicted in substance and fact by other sources. I am not qualified to say which details are most correct, but challenges have been published, and the credibility of this review surely hinges on opening up this debate further plus a greater degree of documented proof (accountability) required of the JSF proponents rather than just dogmatic assertion.

I have read that our F-111s have at up to 40 more years of service life and are the only aircraft available in the world today that can economically and effectively perform the role that they do for Australia's unique needs over our immediate geographic region of economic interest (approximately one fifth of the Earth's surface). I also understand that Raptor engines are a relatively easy retrofit option into our F-111s, and if such commonality were exploited by pairing F22's with life-extended F111's, this upgrade would allow our F-111s to cruise at supersonic speeds without after-burning (high fuel consumption & infrared signature) as well as parts-share with Raptor.

Survivability of any bomber, including the F-111, depends on the threat environment. If the bomber carries long-range standoff weapons like the cruise missiles originally planned for the F-111, then it can shoot them from significant distance and remain out of reach of virtually all defenses. If the bomber is carrying shorter ranging weapons, then US Air Force planning sees the use of F-22s to knock out opposing fighters, and Surface to Air Missile batteries, opening a corridor for the bomber to attack directly. The USA intends to use F-22s to escort and protect all bomber types including the stealthy B-2A. The JSF is simply not able to operate as effectively under the most extreme hostile environments, and has a role planned within the USAF more akin to battlefield interdiction with some self defense fighter capabilities.

If Australia acquires the F-22 then there are no issues with F-111 survivability since there will be no fighters or SAMs intact to threaten them within corridors dominated by the F22s.

The high speed of the F-111 makes it extremely difficult to catch by fighter intercept. The F-111 is more survivable than the B-52, B-1B and also the F/A-18A and F-16 in the bomber role, since it is faster and can fly lower. This is however a wholly academic point since the F-22 and carriage of long-range stand-off missiles resolve any survivability issues.

The F111 carries approximately 50% of the payload of a B-52, and more internal fuel stores than any contemporary strike aircraft. No replacement aircraft with the F111s capabilities as suited to the RAAF's wide ranging needs and role for that aircraft presently exists.

The USAF has also embraced a culture of extending the life of a similar vintage aircraft as the F111, because, like the F111 in the case of Australia' air defense, some older designs presently have no contemporary aircraft capable of replacing them. In the case of the F111 and its role, as the saying goes: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". The F22 plus F111 scenario gives uus two compatible aircraft-roles. The JSF will deliver half a role with equal effectiveness. That is a ratio of 2:0.5. This debate surely has a long way to go.

I trust that these views will be considered by you and your colleagues in formulating strategies that will ultimately be reflected upon by future Australians, should our RAAF face threats in our regional defense.

Yours sincerely
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