



Submission No 10

Inquiry into Australian Defence Force Regional Air Superiority

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Name: Brigadier Brian H Cooper (Retired)

Submission

to

The Joint Standing Committee

on

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

on

An Inquiry into Australian Defence Force Regional Air Superiority

By

Brigadier Brian H. Cooper [Retired]

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Ladies and Gentlemen my submission will be brief.

A number of nations in Asia are upgrading their defence forces with the acquisition of fighter/strike aircraft which have the capability to defeat Australia's current and obsolescent aircraft. Australia's security depends in part on her maintaining a condition of regional air superiority and the Government has said that the ADF will receive new aircraft in order to achieve this commencing sometime after 2012.

This submission does not attempt to say what that aircraft should be other than to suggest that it must be an aircraft that is stealthy, can supercruise, and can carry all the appropriate weapons to perform the tasks of air defence, strike and Army and Fleet support.

This submission does not address how many of these aircraft are required but for the purpose of the discussion I have selected the figure of eighty [five squadrons each of 16 aircraft]

But the number of aircraft you own is not the critical problem that this submission addresses, it is the number of aircraft that you can commit. In this regard your ability to maintain your aircraft and to repair battle damage is extremely important, and makes the aircraft available for tasking, but it is air to air refuelling that allows you to commit them.

US Air Force operational planning practices are that you will need one 50 tonne tanker for every four fighter aircraft you wish to commit to air defence and you will need two for every four aircraft you commit to strategic strike or close air support to the land force. Therefore to commit 40 of our fleet we would need either ten or twenty 50 tonne tankers depending on the task. If you use 100 tonne tankers you halve the number of tankers required. Australia is obtaining five A330 MRTT 50 tonne tankers so we obviously need more if we are to achieve the required air superiority.

But the answer is not more 50 tonne tankers but 100 tonne tankers such as the KC-33A [Boeing 747-400]. With five KC-33A tanker/transport, together with the five A330 MRTT we could commit twenty fighters to air defence and, at the same time, commit a further twenty to strategic strike or close air support to the land force.

And there is a bonus here. When not being used for tanking five KC-33A tanker/transport could deliver up to 550 tonne of stores and equipment including APC, light vehicles and artillery, or 1,800 troops to a range of 4,550 nautical miles.