

Submission to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

**Inquiry into Australian Defence Force
Regional Air Superiority
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The key to air superiority is estimating the shape and size of future threat, coupled with the development of an appropriate force structure to deal with it.

Executive Summary

The ability of the Australian Defence Force to maintain air superiority in our region to 2020 depends entirely on our assessment of threat. The Defence department's choice of the F35 describes a low-level threat environment. This means Australia is not prepared for the worst, but a very hopeful situation – a nice bright sunny day. The combination of an improved F111 and the F22, outshine the F35 (which doesn't exist operationally) and F18 mix significantly, both financially and in capability terms. Our failure to influence the region with long-range heavy hitters will impact both strategic and internal securities, adding a new dimension to the need for range, endurance, payload and speed. If states sponsoring terrorism on our soil are immune from retaliation, there may be consequences our population will have to suffer with on means of protection.

Defence acquisitions are long-term events. Yet predicting even the near future is almost impossible. But there are answers. The most obvious answer is the force structure we will require.

Introduction

The sweeping victory of Hamas in the Middle East is a lesson in how quickly the political and strategic landscape can change. It also suggests a trend in Islamic countries that have significant implications to Australia. This is a wind of change that has been blowing for some time. What do we do?

Alex Fishman, military commentator for the Yediot Ahronot daily stated "The best brains in the business tried to reasonably predict outcomes. Israel's military intelligence, which prepared forecasts, said a major Hamas win was an "extreme scenario" of low probability." He added, "None of the experts, of any colour or uniform, realised what was going to happen. It appears that the same agencies that did not predict the collapse of the Soviet Union, and failed to read events in Libya also failed this time."

Given that the best minds have been completely surprised over the last century and have failed to warn effectively of not just long term, but imminent threat—including Pearl Harbour (1941), Communist attacks on South Korea (1950), Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968), the Iran revolution (1979), and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (1990), asking anyone to look ahead twenty years is impossible. But there is an answer.

The Standing Committee is being asked to crystal ball fifteen years into the future, a tough job for anyone. This enquiry operates in a strategic environment of substantive uncertainty that surrounds potential threats, requiring judgments that are inherently vulnerable to error. A review of intelligence forecasts published after 1990 illustrate clearly how erroneous we can be (do a search on the internet, they are hilarious). This means that the threat scenarios

offered to you today could be invalid tomorrow, a single unexpected event like the Hamas win, changing the course of events and history.

The logical conclusion therefore, if you are planning for the future, is to assume the worst and prepare for that. Current defence thinking illustrates a belief in the possibility of a mild threat scenario. The early retirement of our heavy hitter (F111), the continuation of the F18 and the proposed acquisition of a low performance light bomber, clearly suggests we don't perceive too much trouble in our neighbourhood. (I think Neville Chamberlain had the same plan).

Probability of War

There have been wars among the major powers for sixty percent of the years since 1500. Nine of these wars were world wars involving nearly all the great powers. The twentieth century has seen over 250 wars, including two world wars and a cold war, with more dead than in all previous wars over the past two millennia. Over the next 25 years, the number of wars, small and not-so-small, that even reasonably sanguine analysts might justifiably expect to see, is large enough to make anyone worry.

Does Regional Air Superiority Secure Australia Internally?

Australia's future internal security might be strongly influenced by our ability to project power over long distances. Countries, or rogue states supporting terrorist elements in Australia, will think twice if they know we can pay them a quick visit and accurately deposit bombs anywhere we want to. Air Superiority is the only means we have to achieve this. This requires, capable and very fast long-range aircraft with the ability to deliver heavy loads that can be tailored to multiple mission requirements.

Possible Scenarios

Given the earlier discussion, a number of scenarios are worth noting, which even if improbable, the serious consequences make them worthy of consideration.

1. China vs US over Taiwan
2. China vs Japan over resources/commerce
3. China trading weapons and aid for basing access in SEA
4. Terrorism in Australia supported by a foreign power
5. China playing a coercive Soviet like policy across the region
6. Balkanisation of Indonesia and factions seeking Chinese aid/intervention
7. Balkanisation of Indonesia and formation of Islamist state
8. Coalition attack on Iran over nukes
9. Coalition attack on Nth Korea over nukes
10. Coalition campaign in central Asia over oil/gas
11. Major war in Middle East resulting in coalition campaign.
12. Oil embargo

China

Political correctness and our economic partnership with China might be blindsiding Australian leadership to a rapidly developing threat. China, with the world's fastest growing economy, is focusing its strategic development to secure access to energy resources. Unburdened with democratic processes, it often supports dodgy regimes, such as Iran or Dafur in order to acquire oil. China goes further by providing military technology. The most recent example of this is Iran's 3000km ballistic missile. In a few years they will exceed this, bringing us well under the Islamic Nuclear strike capability.

The Islamic Nations

Within less than a decade we may have to face up to an enemy that is rich, well armed and hostile to our way of life. Moreover, this enemy may well have the ability to crumble our economies by controlling energy resources, specifically oil. The coalescing of many Islamic states and subsequent evolution of these countries into Islamic theocracies is a probability. Ironically, new democracies could be fomenting this process. It is worthwhile noting that Nazism and Communism both took advantage of democratic processes only to eliminate them when they got the chance; there is no reason to think Islamic fundamentalists will not do the same. Abdul Majeed Thunaibat, head of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood, the country's largest party, said the Palestinian elections proved that given a free choice Arabs would pick Islamists, not nationalist and leftist parties blamed for Arab defeats. We're seeing that, for now, the only alternative to secular regimes in the Middle East are the Islamists.

In a Gallup poll of the Islamic world, only 27% of Indonesians held a favourable view of the United States. Eighty-nine percent opposed the U.S.-led war on terrorism, more than any other Muslim nation surveyed, including Iran and Saudi Arabia. A large percentage of Indonesia has already adopted strict Islamic law with plans to do the same in nearly all other states. Within these states other religions are actively persecuted. Within just a few years, the entire nation of Indonesia, over 200 million Muslims, will live under *syariah* law, strictly interpreted from the Quran. A nation capable in this late age of killing over 180,000 East Timorese (Non Muslim), governed by religious dictates and militarily still led by many people complicit in the genocide. This is a country to worry about. What are we doing? Considering the acquisition of go-carts in a Formula One racing event?

- The Islamic community in Indonesia is the largest in the world
- There exists a strong feeling of solidarity among Muslims in Indonesia
- The birth of Islamic warrior troops is a reality
- There is strong opposition towards secularism and the Jews

The demand for the implementation of Islamic sharia law for Muslim adherents has become not only a project but a reality that is a constitutional demand in most Islamic nations. A significant part of Indonesia is Shia. It would be reasonable to believe they will be good friends with Iran. The thought of a nuclear equipped Iran, supporting Indonesia and its ambitions is one we should be prepared for.

In a bad case scenario, but looking more probable by the day, a nuclear deterrent provided by Iran (Long shot inclusion of Pakistan if coerced) to allied Islamic nations, could choke our energy supplies, destroy our economies and through terrorists groups, attack our peoples without fear of retribution. With a nuclear umbrella and economies supported by the sale of energy resources to China, they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. This is where our air capability will determine how much we suffer from internal attacks on our society.

Our ability to strike at our enemy, over very long distances, at great speed, carrying heavy loads is a critical deterrent. Potential enemies need to be aware that we can reach them, even if they fight by proxy. The French, who normally procrastinate over the use of force, partly due to developing relationships with China and Russia, are ironically the first to threaten substantial retaliation to any nation sponsoring terrorism on their own soil. This threat is

taken seriously because the French military retain a long-range and accurate strike capability, able to reach almost anywhere on the globe.

On the same note, if Australia loses its ability to reach out and touch our potential enemies, we will have given them a free hand, should they be inclined, to violently interfere internally through sponsored terrorism and to directly threaten our EEZ and other financial interests without fear of retaliation.

As recent as last month, it has been identified that Chinese Army firms have been selling advanced ballistic and cruise missile guidance systems to Iran. Three of the sanctioned Chinese firms are well known to many defence analysts as the same companies that participated in the Clinton-era China-Gate scandal. The list includes China Aero-Technology Import Export Corporation (CATIC), China North Industries (NORINCO) and China Great Wall Industry.

All three PLA owned firms were linked to illegal exports of U.S. technology during the Clinton administration. All three firms have also participated in a wide variety of arms smuggling, ballistic missile sales and sales of WMD technology to Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Syria. This is the tip of the iceberg in the proliferation of advanced military technologies. Current and future capabilities being acquired by our neighbours require us to step up to bat, instead of playing catch and hoping we have not caught a bomb.

Are We Preparing For These Potential Threats?

Are We Preparing For These Potential Threats? Clearly not, as previously mentioned, our force structure is designed to combat a very near shore mild opposition. As a result of the failure to take the fight to the enemy, Considerable damage and untold civilian casualties will result from unfettered terrorist aggression. With obvious warning signs posted for all of us to see, we would be entirely negligent if we did not prepare.

Our choice now is to either expose our nation to future internal and external aggression, or ensure we have an adequate force structure to protect our vital interests through our ability to carry the fight to the enemy's doorstep.

You don't turn up at a gunfight with a knife. Likewise, we do not want to be facing the threat described, with an aircraft that is slow, can't carry much or go very far, whose only saving grace is stealth. Of course I am talking about the JSF. Yes, it is a little harder to see electronically, but due to its poor range, the enemy won't see it either, because it won't get there. With a miserable performance, especially compared to probable adversaries (Latest Sukhoi family for a start), we will be out gunned and hiding in our fox holes.

Anyone that rests our security on the fact that our next aerial warfare engagement will be over the horizon should think again. Speed is critical and super cruise the ultimate force multiplier as well as being a powerful means of threat avoidance in hostile air space. It should be remembered that an aircraft has to get to the target, and back. Once the JSF has expended its offensive and defensive munitions on a mission, it is back to basics. Due to its limited range outbound/inbound routes would be predictable and easily monitored by enemy Su33's, 35's and other variants in the operational theatre. Faster than the JSF, with substantially greater endurance, these long-range enemy aircraft will place the F35 on the defensive, a place where it does not shine. The F35 will be forced into fights with a superior combat aircraft, probably in greater numbers that can follow it halfway across Australia.

It seems then, the argument to acquire F35's is financial. However the acquisition and lifetime costs of the F35 look increasingly dodgy. While we have a force option that is proven today, we seem to be talking ourselves politically into purchasing an inadequate platform, unproven, that looks more like a gogo mobile than something that can really deliver force we need.

Today we have the possibility of an improved F111 fleet, a fleet we are skilled at maintaining and flying, a fleet capable of placing our hands around the throat of those that threaten us, even over great distances. An F111S fleet with super cruise capability, that boasts extreme range and is able to out run virtually any threat, is the type of punch we need. Accompanied by the F22, the two super cruise aircraft will be able to kick the doors down and deliver a lethal shock virtually anywhere we want to. Compared to driving around the EEZ with F35 minivans, I fail to see the argument that would support an F35 purchase.

My Questions to Defence and the Committee Are:

- What do you believe the threat environment will be in twenty years?
- Why should I be consenting to a F-111 retirement when over a billion was invested in upgrades, and the decision to retire was driven by internal budgetary politics, not technical reasons?
- Why should I be consenting to a JSF buy when it is as plain as day that it is a low end light bomber built for export to all and sundry globally and not what we need?
- Why are Defence buying JSF when the much better F-22 is almost the same price, and at least twice as good?
- Why are we buying a small number of expensive new aerial tankers when there is a glut of used airliners in the market, which perform as well, or better at less cost?
- What Defence have said about JSF, F-111, F-22 clashes with common public knowledge that a teenager can access on the Internet in addition to public reports from the US. Who are they kidding?

Conclusion.

We have two choices; assume a mild threat and prepare for sunny days, or define the meaning of the defence of our nation. This can be achieved by creating a force structure of F111 and F22 that for the same price as the F35 will do the job of protecting us both at home as well as strategically. To me it looks pretty simple. I'm willing to bet hindsight will see it that way as well, it has a habit of proving the obvious.