

The Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
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PLANNED ACQUISITION OF THE F-35 FIGHTER AIRCRAFT

Attached is my submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee on the above referred matter.

Yours faithfully

John Donahoo FIE(Aust)

19 February 2016

Attachment: Submission by John Donahoo

SUBMISSION BY JOHN DONAHOO

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Introduction

Arguments submitted by Chris Mills, Air Power Australia, et al, clearly demonstrate serious concerns about the wisdom of Australia acquiring the F-35A aircraft. A separate confidential submission provides comment on the possible acquisition of some F-35B aircraft by Australia.

F-22 Option

General Michael Hostage, the former Commander of the USAF Air Combat Command stated in an interview on aerospace.com on 11 June 2014 that two F-22s are equal in effectiveness to eight F-35As. He stated: *“Because it can’t turn and run away, it’s got to have support from other F-35s. So I’m going to need eight F-35s to go after a target that I might only need two Raptors to go after”*. In the same article General Hostage was quoted as saying that: *“If I do not keep that F-22 fleet viable, the F-35 fleet frankly will be irrelevant [as] the F-35 is not built as an air superiority platform. It needs the F-22.”* The article continues: “Hostage was defending the F-35, but saying it could not function without F-22s flying top cover was widely seen as a rare admission of the F-35’s shortcomings by a senior military figure. Hostage made his comments in a [Feb 2 interview](#) with Air Force Times”.

Much adverse comment has been written in the literature of the poor agility and low airspeed of the F-35s compared to the F-22 and potential adversarial aircraft, as this affects its ability to avoid incoming missiles. Few could argue that acquisition of the F-22 with the F-35 ‘smarts’ would be an ideal solution for Australia and other allied nations. However, that option is not currently available for anyone. How then can Australia achieve that outcome?

Australian Influence

In World War II, the United States (US) treated Australians with some disdain and some Americans described us as being a bunch of ‘colonial hicks’. Our population ratio was about 20:1 but today it is 13:1. Australian victories were described as allied victories. Decades later, Malcolm Fraser publicly stated that during the Viet-Nam war, the US were only concerned with their interests and not ours. Today, with declining US global power, the US is more respectful of trusted and reliable allies such as Australia, and it is more amenable to accepting their advice.

Aircraft Noise

Within the US, the US Marine Corps clearly has had a disproportionate influence on US air power development, as the F-35 development was predicated on having one engine and other constraints needed for a STOVL aircraft. This action in turn compromised the effectiveness of the A and C variants from the start and also ensured that an extremely noisy aircraft would be inflicted upon the populace of many nations including our own. As aircraft noise is related to engine thrust levels, the single engine F-35A will be noisier than the Hornet by about 4 - 5 dBA outside houses adjacent to RAAF Bases Williamtown, Townsville and Darwin, and Salt Ash Air Weapons Range. Moreover, its higher low frequency noise component allows greater noise penetration through standard building materials by another 4-5 dBA, thereby increasing the overall noise level inside these houses by about 8-10 dBA. The human ear perceives a 10 dBA noise increase as a doubling

of the noise level. The foregoing noise data was obtained from a Defence document included at Annex A.

Proposed Action

Malcolm Turnbull has criticised his recent Labor predecessors as being ‘doe-eyed’ in the presence of the US President, thereby implying that he would not be so over-awed, and therefore be more forthright in advancing Australia’s interests. Now Canada has recently cancelled their order of F-35A aircraft and there is some doubt whether, inter alia, the US and Italy will acquire the aircraft numbers currently planned. Australia must now take a bold stand and cancel our F-35A order and then commence an Air Combat Aircraft replacement process. More Super Hornets may then be needed to replace the aging legacy Hornets to fill the gap. This approach needs to be complemented by our government conducting a diplomatic offensive with the US and other nations who plan to acquire the F-35A. The Australian influence may be enough to tip the balance in the US to convince them that they should take a financial hit and develop a new F-22 that includes the ‘smarts’ of the F-35, as in that country there are many influential people who have grave concerns about the direction of US air power development. Continuation of the F-35B program would most likely still proceed as the UK and the US Marine Corps are committed to that variant, and Australia and other nations may be interested in acquiring the F-35B if it ever works as planned.

The task of convincing the US to change course will be difficult as their Congress operates on pork barrelling and their President lacks power over Congress. Furthermore, components for the F-35 are being manufactured in 46 of the 50 States and this provides Lockheed Martin with huge influence over Congress.

Recommendations

Australia should cancel their F-35A order and Malcolm Turnbull should lobby the US President, Congress and other affected nations to embark on a different course in air power development.

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Annex:

A. F-35A Noise Data