

Why RAAF must have the F-111s

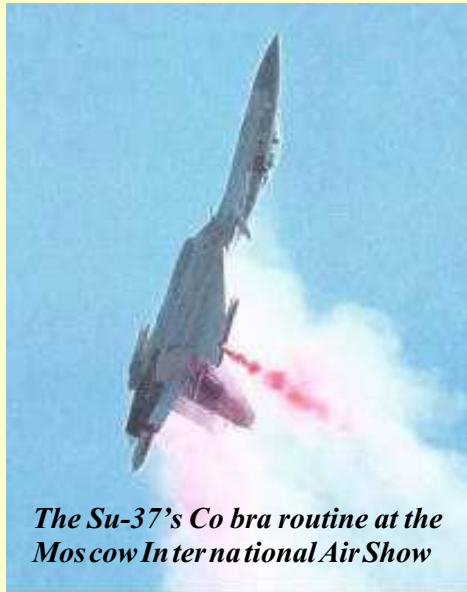
By Dr Carlo Kopp
MELBOURNE – The move to get rid of the F-111s echoes the mantra that “no threat will exist to Australia for the next 10-15 years”. In effect, this argument bets the farm on the near region remaining stable, cohesive and aligned with Australia – a remarkable conclusion given what we observe on television daily.

Australia will run a serious risk if it retires the F-111 without a credible replacement capability.

The central issue, aside from the militant, Islamic terrorism movement, is the proliferation of advanced Russian missile and fighter technology.

These are considerations distinct from the “bread and butter” issue of providing diggers on the ground with sustainable precision heavy fire support in any Timor-like regional contingency or any larger operation to root out terrorists in the region – a theme repeatedly raised by Cabinet last year.

Storm clouds over the force horizon



The Su-37's Cobra routine at the Moscow International Air Show

Spearheading the threat to Australia's regional position are the superb, 750-nautical mile radius Sukhoi Su-30 Flanker fighters, Russia's equivalent to the Boeing F-15E/K models. With buddy refu-

elling, it is capable of crossing the sea-air gap.

The Su-30s now being sold in Asia are like the advanced Su-35+ and Su-37 fighters, most using 2D thrust vectoring, canards, phased array radars and Western avionics.

Equipped with second generation variants of the Vympel R-27/AA-10 Alamo, R-73/AA-11 Archer, R-77/AA-12 Adler/AMRAAM-ski air-air missiles Su-30s outperform the F/A-18 family fighters across the board. They are a genuine challenge for the both F-15 and the new JSF.

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Global Hawk OK for airspace

SAN DIEGO – As Northrop Grumman's Global Hawk UAV enters first phase commercial production, the FAA has granted a Certificate of Authorisation to USAF to fly the RQ-4 Global Hawk in national airspace. The certificate is the first US COA granted for an unmanned air system.

The high altitude, long endurance Global Hawk has been flying in restricted airspace during take-off and landing before quickly ascending

to altitudes high above commercial air traffic. The COA paves the way for it to support homeland defence missions in national airspace.

Virgin gets its very own 737

BRISBANE – Virgin Blue Airlines has taken delivery of its first owned aircraft, a US\$62 million Boeing 737-800 delivered from Seattle.

The aircraft arrived in Australia after a brief stop-over in New Zealand

where it received its winglets.

Virgin will buy another nine aircraft over the next 12 months.

Virgin Blue secured the financing through the Royal Bank of Scotland, with support from the US Import/Export Bank.

Chief Executive Brett Godfrey said the financed purchase “balances our fleet of leased and owned aircraft”.

Virgin Blue's existing fleet is leased through various lessors, including Boullion, CIT, GECAS, ILFC and Tombo. The arrival of the first owned aircraft takes the fleet to 32.



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The Sukhois can be used as bombers, armed with stand off weapons equivalent to the AGM-142 – such as the Raduga Kh-59M, TV guided bombs like the GNPP KAB-500/1500Kr, Harpoon clone anti-ship missiles like the Zvezda Kh-35U, and the unique Zvezda Kh-31 Krypton long-range, ramjet anti-radiation missiles. It can also carry the massive, supersonic, sea-skimming Raduga Kh-41 Moskit/Sunburn and MBRPA Kh-61 Yakhont anti-shiping missiles.

Thus Su-30s can provide robust precision strike, defence suppression and sea control.

China is building up a force of

350 – possibly up to 500 Sukhois – rivaling the USAF F-15 fleet. India has ordered almost 200.

Closer to home, Malaysia has ordered 18 Su-30MKMs and Indonesia four Su-30KIs, a lead-in batch for a planned TNI-AU fighter fleet of about 50 Sukhois.

Russian sources claim Jakarta also is shopping for the S-300PMU/SA-10E/SA-20 Grumble surface-to-air missile system – an issue in its own right.

The acquisition of advanced weapons by marginally stable nations like Indonesia should be of genuine concern; even more so, the staggering numbers being purchased by China.

Threat requires both capability and intent. Historically Australia

has had the technical edge and capability has been lacking. This is all changing now.

Given that the F-111 is the only ADF asset capable of outranging the Sukhoi fighter and has the terrain-following radar to evade advanced SAMs, prudent strategic planning requires keeping the F-111s in service for as long as possible as insurance against political instability in a neighbourhood arming with top-tier weapons.

To base long term force structuring decisions on the premise that the instability in the near region will soon subside is simply not rational. The argument that broader PacRim strategic circumstances do not justify retaining the F-111 is also not rational.

Taipei makes sub payment

TAIPEI – Taiwan has kickstarted its plan to acquire eight conventional submarines from the United States with US\$3 million and will make another \$7.5 payment shortly. The US originally wanted Taiwan to make a \$333 million advance.

The hefty down-payment demanded complaints from Taipei, prompting reports that the plan could be killed or Taiwan could opt for second-hand submarines from the international market.

In October Washington will brief Taipei on the available submarines.

The US Navy has briefed four US companies that have the capability to bid as prime contractors, although only Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics are expected to bid.

But the United States has not built conventional submarines for more than 40 years and designing an entirely new one would be prohibitively expensive without foreign participation.

Taiwan navy's submarine fleet consists of two 50-year-old Guppy-class diesel-electric boats, which are both in very poor condition, and two Dutch Hai-Lung-class boats commissioned in 1987/88.

Fiji rebel a wanted man

SUVA – Fijian Lieutenant Colonel Filipo Tarakinikini is facing the prospect of extradition from New York to face desertion charges. A Court of Appeal overturned a High Court ruling that Tarakinikini had

resigned his post.

During George Speight's 2000 coup that brought down Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, Tarakinikini was martial law spokesman.

He lost his post later in 2000 amidst vague allegations that he was involved in the coup and a military mutiny in November 2000.

He took up a post with the United Nations Peacekeeping Office in New York but last year military commander Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama ordered him home to face further investigation.

Tarakinikini instead resigned and refused to come home and last year won court action saying his resignation was legal.

The military appealed and in a ruling the Court of Appeal quashed the lower court ruling and effectively declared Tarakinikini absent without leave.



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