

By Dr Carlo Kopp

In regional contingencies the ADF could face over the next decade, the F-111 would provide the fire support for diggers on the ground. The argument that the F-111 is of no value in the Army support role is bunk.

The most likely regional contingencies the ADF could face are like Timor-like – under-developed enclaves exploding in ethnic or more religious conflicts. An Islamo-fascist militia, armed with RPGs, shoulder-launched SAMs and small arms could cause genuine mayhem with the intensity of Afghanistan and Iraq.

In such a contingency, our soldiers need precision heavy fire-power support.

Historically naval guns provided fire support. The Army now sees this as a role for its coming armed reconnaissance helicopters.

Naval gun fire is indirect artillery fire – an Anzac or FFG would lay down shells on an enemy position. If an enemy sites its strong-point amidst civilian housing the collateral damage would have dead civilians over TV world wide within minutes. Even with guided naval artillery rounds, precise selection of aimpoints will remain a

genuine problem – and target gets deeper in land would be out of reach.

Armed helicopters fare slightly better. But face the lethal threat of small arms, RPGs and SAMs. While the new helos will be more survivable than Vietnam-era Hueys, the terrain provides tremendous opportunities for ambushes.

Civilian collateral damage or the loss of helicopters would both produce a political backlash for an Australian government.

In such an environment RAAF F-111s armed with low-cost GBU-12 500lb laser-guided bombs offer an alternative – a GBU-12 with a 20-millisecond fuse delay can take out a position with little collateral damage.

The principal challenge in providing such support will be range and persistence over the target. At 450 nautical miles the F-111 can orbit for nearly three hours in a kill box awaiting a command to strike, without aerial refueling support, out of reach of MANPADS, RPGs and small arms. With aerial refueling support, crew endurance and bomb load exhaustion are the limiting factors.

Why Army needs ‘Pig’ support

The F/A-18A is problematic – with minutes of endurance over a target at 400+ nautical miles, it is dependent on tanker support. While a few runways can support fighters, fewer are capable of supporting a 707-sized tanker.

Therefore tankers have to travel further and this drives up the cost. Moreover, to provide for safe diversion, a Hornet would have to carry external fuel tanks at the expense of bombs – an issue in air campaigns over Afghanistan and Iraq.

The range/endurance, payload and precision of the F-111 would also be invaluable in preparing for the insertion of a main force. Supported by special forces on the ground providing targeting and bomb damage assessment, the F-111s could destroy key positions before the Army arrives in strength.

There are no issues in implementing this tactic – the RAAF already trains for precision air support and US Afghanistan experience provides a proven planning template.

Arguments that seek to diminish the value of the F-111 in regional contingencies are unadulterated non sense.

Sukhois: Indos want more

JAKARTA – Indonesia’s armed forces want a squadron, or at least 12 more Russian Sukhoi Su-030s, despite a controversy over a purchase

of four of the jets earlier this year.

Indonesia bought the first batch of two Su-27 jets and two similar Su-30s, along with two Mi-35 helicopters, in counter-trade deal with Russia in April.

Two of the four planes have been delivered.

“We want more (Sukhois) because four are not enough (for operations). I will talk with officials about more for next year,” armed forces chief General Endriatono Sutarto said.

“We want at least one full squadron with between 12 and 16 planes.”



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