

WHO'S KIDDING? How F-111 cuts will cripple Aust power

By Dr Carlo Kopp

MELBOURNE – The Defence Capability Review briefing claimed there would be no “strike capability gap” resulting from the early retirement of the RAAF’s 30+ strong F-111 fleet. This was a brave statement given the pivotal role of the F-111 in the RAAF’s force structure.

Air Marshal Angus Houston outlined the intention to retire the F-111s once a “suitable capability” is available. This was said to be the addition of a “follow-on standoff weapon” on the F/A-18A and AP-3C – presumably the AGM-158 JASSM series, the addition of the GBU-31/38 JDAM on the F/A-18As and the introduction of the four to five new medium tankers.

The idea of hanging four JASSMs on an AP-3C and declaring it to be a strike asset presupposes that it will only be flown in airspace devoid of Sukhoi Su-30s. The Sukhoi can detect it using its radar from 200 nautical miles away. Using AP-3Cs as standoff missile platform in this region post-2005 is suicidal.

The Sukhoi was originally designed to hunt down B-52Hs firing 600-mile range AGM-86 cruise

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RAAF image

Down among the greeds! A RAAF F-111 celebrated the Indy races on the Gold Coast with a low-level run, dump and burn below the high-rise apartments at Surfers. This picture was taken from a helicopter over the beach.

Cracks nobble Army choppers

CANBERRA – Rumours of cracks in the Australian Army’s Black Hawk helicopters have been confirmed by a report in *The Australian* quoting engineering documents. The fault has restricted the fleet to less than 80 per cent of its target capacity during the past two years.

The problem has affected 12 of the army’s fleet of 36 Black Hawks, which the Army says is caused by “dynamics and stresses experienced by helicopters”.

The cracking – in the middle of the helicopter frame beneath the rotor blades – is linked to the external stores support system, a pylon holding extra fuel tanks and weapons mountings fittings

on the Australian fleet which put extra strain on the Black Hawks in operations.

Sikorsky’s General Manager of Operations in Australia, Graeme Breen, said: “In terms of the availability of the aircraft... when it was asked to, it flew well over its targets. I don’t think (the cracking has) ever limited the defence forces in meeting its operational requirement.” Breen said other defence forces around the world had experienced the cracking in Black Hawks.

“It’s certainly the sort of issue that is well-known to the US Army as a matter of course. These things come up, and they are dealt with.”

Cripple, from PI

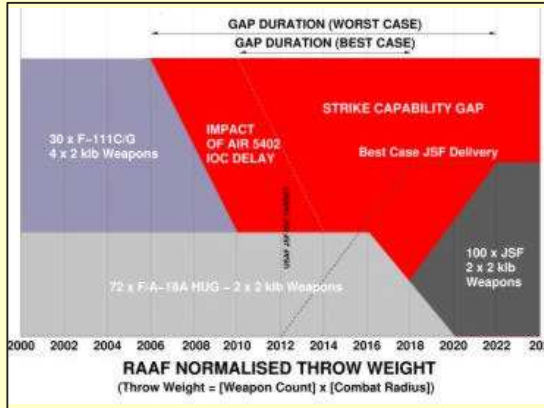
– putting a 200+ mile range JASSM on an AP-3C is not believable.

More importantly, putting a stand off missile such as the JASSM and the JDAM on the F/A-18A does not alter the basic force structure equations in relation to combat power. That is dictated by numbers of aircraft, how many weapons they lift, and how far they carry them.

To understand what is proposed for the RAAF we must explore quantitative measures of combat strength. Perhaps the best of these is “Throw Weight”, used for decades in nuclear and conventional arms control negotiations as a measure of striking capability. Throw weight is the product of the striking range of the weapon system, and its firepower – in warheads of normalised size. For our purposes a generic 2,000lb weapon is considered – GBU-10, GBU-24, GBU-31, AGM-158 or equivalent payload in smaller weapons.

The removal of the F-111s from the RAAF inventory amounts to a 62.5 percent reduction in RAAF throw weight! Even considering a simpler measure like relative firepower in total numbers of 2,000lb weapons lifted still yields a 45 percent reduction in strike capability when the F-111 is removed.

Either measure indicates that the early retirement of the F-111 effectively



chops the RAAF down to half its combat strength. Arguments about using newer weapons like JDAM or the Small Diameter Bomb are irrelevant as these can all be put on the Block C-4 F-111 system. Tonnage at range is what matters.

We are of course expected to believe that this will change when the JSF arrives. The throw weight of 100 JSFs armed with GBU-31s comes in at about the same number as the 30 F-111s now flown – assuming no JSFs are needed for escort.

In a region full of Sukhois, escorting tankers and Wedgetails is a must. Therefore the “all JSF RAAF” model provides much less than 62.5 percent or two-thirds of today’s RAAF orbit.

We are also expected to believe that the five, twin-engine medium tankers will make up the difference. Tanker offload charts or rule-of-thumb sizing techniques

show the throw weight of 72 F/A-18As supported by five such tankers is only 48 percent of the current strength.

How many tankers would be needed to make up for the loss of the F-111? Assuming that 60 F/A-18As or

JSFs can be committed without any fighter escorts to protect tankers and Wedgetails, then no less than 14 to 16 additional tankers would be required. This is many times the number budgeted for in the DCP.

We have been told there will be no strike capability gap, yet hard quantitative measures such as throw weight show that a strike capability gap of 52 percent will exist pre-JSF, and 36 percent post JSF, assuming 100 JSFs, once the F-111 goes.

In the two years since the White Paper we have seen the most fundamental – and unstated – change in Australia’s strategic doctrine since the 1940s: the abandoning of air power as the cornerstone of Australia’s defence.

One wonders whether Federal Cabinet have the slightest inkling of what they have been sold over the last 18 months.

WICHITA – The recession that grips Wichita tightens every week as the aviation centre waits for new contracts such as the conversion of Boeing KC767-200ER tankers for the US Air Force and for a revival in general aviation.

Each week 30 to 40 Kansas families lie, unable to make their mortgage payments, lose their homes to sheriff’s auctions.

Unemployment benefits and family savings have run out for thousands of laid-off aircraft workers in Wichita’s four aircraft manufacturing plants.

Why Wichita needs 767 tanker jobs

Wichita is home to plants for The Boeing Co., Cessna Aircraft, Bombardier Aerospace and Raytheon Aircraft. The companies have cut more than 14,000 jobs since aircraft sales went soft in 2001.

In Kansas, 1.15 percent of mortgage loans were in foreclosure proceedings as of June 30, according to figures compiled by the Mortgage Bankers Association of America in Washington. In addition, more than 4 percent of mortgage

loans in Kansas were delinquent.

In 2000, Sedgwick County recorded 620 foreclosures. By 2001, that figure rose to 901, and in 2002, it climbed to 1,049. By September of this year, the number of foreclosures already had reached 1,231.

USAF now has approval for the first 100 tanker ers, which will be built in Seattle and flown to Wichita for conversion.

The first has already left Seattle. The other shoe – the GA revival – is not nearly as certain.