

## Dr Carlo Kopp

MELBOURNE – The Defence Capability Plan's force structure model ignores the developing regional environment. The changes are the most profound since the early 1940s. India and China are gathering enormous momentum as they spend their wealth on modern weapons.

The mutually competitive Chinese and Indian buys are symptomatic of these nascent regional superpowers jockeying for position. India recently closed deals for the former Soviet carrier *Gorshkov*, an air wing of navalised MiG-29Ks, and a batch of Beriev A-50I with Israeli Elta phased array radars.

It also took delivery of its first batch of the Su-30MKI with phased-array radar – planning sees 180 operational by 2015, as well as its first batch of Il-78MKI tankers, and Israeli Green Pine ballistic missile defence radars.

The potent Russian Kh-61 Yakhont supersonic cruise missile has been licensed for production as the Brahmos. Discussions continue on the lease of Russian Tu-22M-3 Backfire bombers – a 2,500 nautical mile radius strategic bomber. The Tu-142M Bear aviatics and missile upgrade remain in the pipeline.

China, following its Su-30MKK

buy, has now ordered the Su-30MK2 for its naval air arm, to supplement the indigenous FH-7 Flying Leopard, analogous to the EU Tornado. With Shenyang now assembling the first of 200 licence-built Su-27SKs, and several squadrons of Su-27SK/UBK and Su-30MKK now in service, Russian sources see the possibility of sales of up to 500 Su-27/30 to China – noting that the US Air Force flies a total of around 600 F-15C/D/E at this time.

Russian supersonic Kh-31 stand-off missiles are to be licence built and the AGM-142-like Kh-59MK supplied directly.

China's indigenous J-10 fighter, an agile Lavi-like, delta-canard is expected to enter full rate production next year, in parallel with other indigenous designs like the J-8B and the J-7E/G – the ultimate evolution of the MiG-21. The Russian Beriev A-50E AWACS is on the shopping list, while speculation continues about an order for the Il-78MK tanker.

H-6 Badgers are now being converted into tankers. While a Badger is only equivalent to a Victor K.2 tanker in offload performance, China has a Badger fleet of more

than 120, the oldest of which were built in the 1970s. The upper limit in this game could be equivalent to 60 or more KC-135s.

Both China and India will develop the capability to project significant air and missile power into South-East Asia over the next decade.

We have already observed the flow-on effect as Malaysia orders Su-30MKMs, Indonesia Su-27SK/30KI and now Vietnam the Su-30MKV.

Over the next decade the nearer and wider region will be literally awash in high-technology Russian and indigenous weapons – the mere presence of which destabilises a delicately balanced region.

Russell Offices have displayed almost stoic indifference. We are expected to believe that the Joint Strike Fighter, a close air support / battlefield strike optimised aircraft will in concert with five tankers and four Wedgetails secure the skies.

We are also expected to believe that Australia no longer requires the F-111. The Navy is to invest billions in Air Warfare Destroyers with anti-ballistic missile capabilities, rather than an optimised ability to defeat cruise missiles.

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