

"We should have become mistress of the skies... what a fearful opportunity this country has lost, all because a politician wouldn't believe a technician". – Dr Barnes Wallis

By Dr Carlo Kopp

The 1957 UK Defence White paper produced under the leadership of Duncan Sandys was disastrous. Sandys and his followers decided that manned aircraft were irrelevant and the future lay in guided missiles.

The subsequent collapse of the UK aircraft industry and loss of technological momentum in the RAF was a negative turning point. The RAF never recovered. Recent events in this country show every sign of being a repetition of this grandiose historical blunder.

The DoD drive to kill off the F-111, the preoccupation with networks over platforms and the JSF panacea solution bear an uncanny resemblance to the thinking of the Macmillan ministry of 1957.

The descent began with the near-religious belief that devalued the capabilities of manned aircraft for the new guided-missile technology which showed promise, but which was then and still is only an enhancement to air power, rather than a replacement.

Ignore history – repeat mistakes

Adopting this doctrine, despite repeated objections by the expert community who knew better, the UK apparatus of state withdrew funding from a wide range of projects ultimately seeing the UK industrial base lose its capacity to function independently and the RAF become a second tier air force with limited independent capabilities.

Almost 50 years later we see a similar pattern in this country. The panacea future technology is not guided missiles, but Network Enabled Operations /Network Centric Warfare – seen as more important than the platforms it is used to connect.

The strategic capability is the capacity of the RAAF to operate independently in a regional environment nearest in relative capability terms to the rapidly modernising Warsaw Pact of the late 1950s.

The industrial base issue is the future of Australia's capability to develop independently and modify combat aircraft in country, now concentrated in the F-111 support base.

Just like 1957, the techno-stra-

tegic and industry intelligentsia is objecting, and being resolutely ignored by a group-think, bureaucratic machine.

The specific technologies and strategic framework are inevitably different but the underlying issues and behaviour are not.

The ascendancy of bureaucratic power over technocratic power and influence in the late 1950s UK MoD parallels the post 2000 White Paper decline of technocratic power and influence inside Australia's Defence bureaucracy.

The loss of highly talented RAAF generals during this period has no recent precedents.

Australia is now sitting at a critical historical junction point for its future. It could go down the same kind of techno-strategic-military black hole the UK dived into in 1957 – or it could change direction and embrace the technologically oriented, evolution-driven transformation philosophy now practised by the US.

Australia's political leadership has a unique opportunity at this time to effect a change in direction for the better, one which is demonstrably beyond the intellectual grasp of the Defence bureaucracy.

Lakeside meet for Hill in NZ

CANBERRA – NZ Defence Minister Mark Burton and Australia's Robert Hill met in Taupo for the third between the two Ministers.

Along with discussions on regional and global security issues of mutual interest, the ministers discussed practical bilateral activities that support the close Australia-New Zealand defence relationship.

The Ministers agreed that the first phase of the police-led Re-

gional Assistance Mission in Solomon Islands (RAMSI) had been a success.

Both ministers flew to Honiara from Taupo immediately following their meeting, to take part in ceremonies marking the Mission's first anniversary.



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