

JOB DESCRIPTION - TRAINEE 'BUYER' (AS01)

Under close direction:

1. Liaise with HQLC specialist staff and outside organizations in respect of provisioning and procurement of equipment.
2. Call for quotes and prepare quotation schedules.
3. Raise basic purchase orders and overseas indents.
4. Monitor progression of orders to achieve spares on the shelf on time.
5. Action routine shipping documentation and clear outstanding consignments.
6. Input DEFMIS data.
7. Maintain finance registers and records.
8. Liaise as necessary with appropriate specialist staff to resolve queries.
9. Prepare basic, routine submissions and correspondence.

Department of Defence

DUTY STATEMENT

Date	Pos.No.
Classification: Administrative Service Officer (currently AS02)	
Local Designation:	
Creating Auth. No. Date Ref.	Current Auth. No. Date Ref.
Number of Subordinates:	

State: Victoria
Division: Headquarters Logistics Command
Branch: Logistics Operations
Directorates: Weapon Systems Logistics Groups

Imm.Sup. FLTLT/AS04 P.N.	Highest Sub.	P.N.
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Duty No.	BUYER
1.	<p>Under general direction perform the following procurement tasks:</p> <p>Maintain and manage an assigned inventory of aircraft spares.</p> <p>Scrutinise and investigate provisioning documentation and action as necessary.</p> <p>Raise and process procurement documentation as required.</p> <p>Project, monitor and review expenditure achievements and manage outstanding commitments for assigned spares inventory.</p> <p>Exercise financial authorizations within guidelines.</p> <p>Certify and process claims.</p> <p>Clear shipping consignments including custom requirements.</p> <p>Liaise with outside organizations and specialist staff on procurement matters.</p> <p>Access and update databases.</p> <p>Prepare submissions and correspondence as required.</p>
2.	Assist in the provision of training of AS01 staff.

Highest Function - No.	Most time-consuming duty:
Delegations:	
Conditions:	
Quals. & Exp. (other than prescribed)	

PROPOSED 'SPARES INVENTORY MANAGER'/'BUYER' JOB DESCRIPTION
HOLC LOGISTICS GROUPS

Manage an Assigned Inventory of Equipments (LOAS Tree Based)

1. Scrutinise all provisioning reviews for correctness of data, investigate anomalies and initiate buy proposals.
2. Investigate Inability Asset Reports and take necessary action to satisfy inability including special buys, redistribution or issue of alternatives.
3. Raise and process IPRs in response to requirements detailed.
4. Assess usage data and determine lead time parameters for items which do not require specialist input.
5. Investigate and action DI(AF) SUP 9-15 and 4-1 demands.
6. Clear orsus accounts (procurement dues in).
7. Action shipping documentation and clear outstanding consignments.

Purchasing Management

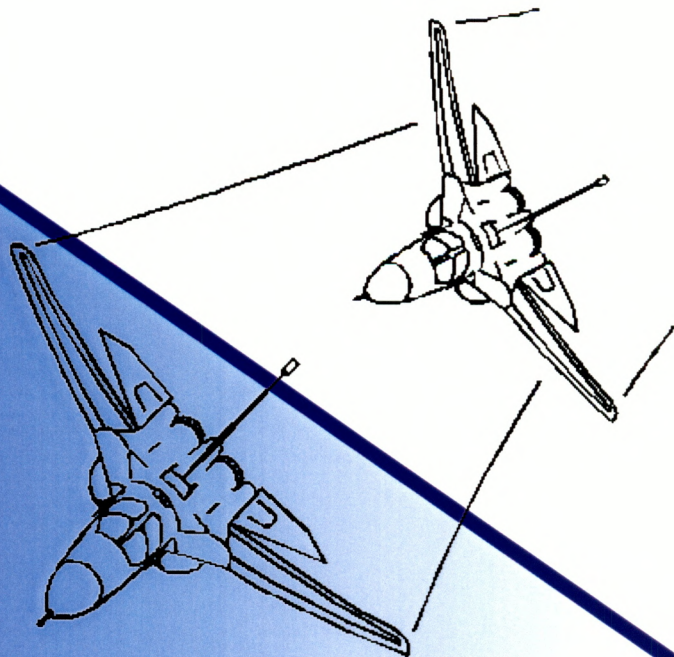
8. Liaison as directed with RAAF specialist staff and outside organizations in respect of procurement of the above equipment.
9. Raise amendments to procurement documents as required.
10. Determine source of supply.
11. Call for quotations and prepare quotation schedules in accordance with finance regulations.
12. Raise Purchase Orders, Procurement Demands and Overseas Indents for the supply of nominated commodity range.
13. Monitor progression of orders to achieve spares on the shelf, on time.
14. Assist in the resolution of high priority demands.

Financial Management

15. Project, monitor and review expenditure achievements.
16. Certify claims.
17. Arrange payment of claims.
18. Input DEFMIS data.
19. Maintain finance registers and records.
20. Provide input for financial commitment programme.
21. Manage outstanding commitment.

General

22. Exercise appropriate financial authorizations.
23. Liaise as necessary with appropriate specialist staff to resolve queries.
24. Prepare submissions and correspondence.



1992

NEWS PAPER CUTTINGS AND
ARTICLES OF INTEREST for
the year 1992

AN SRLMSQN PERSPECTIVE



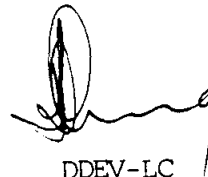
RAAF LOGISTICS COMMAND

WSLM NEWSLETTER

NO 4

24 FEBRUARY 1992

The fourth in a series of Newsletters to inform personnel of the formation on 501WG and relevant squadrons, future WSLM development, Industrial Relations and Engineering involvement to WSLMs.



DDEV-LC

2 MAR 1992

501WG FORMATION

The first Logistics Unit that will incorporate the WSLM concept was formed at Amberley on 1 Dec 91 under the command of GPCAPT Chris Tyler. No 501 Wing will have a HQ, including Administrative and Education services, and three squadrons:

- * AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE SQUADRON (501AMSQN),

- * AVIONICS MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT SQUADRON (501AVMMSQN), and

- * STRIKE RECONNAISSANCE LOGISTICS MANAGEMENT SQUADRON (501SRLMSQN),

The HQ, 501AMSQN and 501AVMMSQN were formed by bringing together the deeper maintenance activities of 482SQN and 3AD. 501 SRLMSQN which will consist of the SRWSLM (presently in HQLC) and some personnel from UNDA and MSI sections in SSSAMB will join the 501WG in April 92. An interim establishment of 83, uniformed and civilian, has been agreed for 501SRWSLMSQN.

MANNING

DGM-AF has already addressed posting activity for RAAF personnel. Not all personnel in SRWSLM who had expressed a wish to deploy to Amberley received guernsies due to DGM requirement to satisfy other suitably qualified personnel who had prior claims to Amberley posting in the normal posting cycle. However, positions deemed critical were filled by personnel with suitable qualifications and a smooth transition to 501WG is anticipated. Confirmation of the 501SRWSLMSQN civilian establishment is expected by 21 Feb 92 which will allow appropriate recruitment/position filling activity.

Leadership of SRWSLM is transitioning from LTCOL Mark Stevens to WGCdr Max Dederer who will lead the relocation to Amberley. LTCOL Stevens will apply his WSLM development experience in leadership of other WSLMs, particularly in his appointment as SG2.

INFORMATION SYSTEM

The proliferation of disparate HQLC information systems brought together during development of SRWSLM cried out for an integrated electronic logistics management system to prevent Monty Pythonish visions of a WSLMite sitting at a desk totally enclosed by all-round computer terminals. SQNLDR Sharon Flynn was appointed by DLIS-LC to meet the challenge and has with her team, developed a proposal for a local LAN system which will encompass the current systems. After verification the LAN system will be considered for introduction in other HQLC areas.

AMBERLEY FACILITIES

On relocation to Amberley 501 SRWSLM will be housed in Area E of the 501WG Hangar. The area has been extensively refurbished, air conditioned and furnished with modular ergonomic furniture. SFACO BSAMB, SQNLDR Les Johnson and his team have pulled out all stops to have the accommodation ready on time and have produced a most pleasant and efficient working area with panoramic views of the airfield.

FUTURE WSLM DEVELOPMENTS

To accord with RAAF 2000 requirements a further three FEG focused WSLMs will be developed by Feb 93, 503ALLMSQN at Richmond, 504MPLMSQN at Edinburgh and 502TFLMSQN at Williamstown. Definition of 503ALLMSQN is under way at Richmond and initial definition of 504MPLMSQN and 502TFLMSQN will commence in Mar 92. Discussions with Army office on the possible application of WSLM concepts in support of aviation will be held in Mar 92. RAAF 2000 proposals for LUs at Pearce and East Sale have been deferred. There have been

discussions with AOC-TC and options are available to reduce the overhead of logistics support for air operations at TRGCOM bases. Application of the WSLM concept to other logistics support activities presently in HQLC continues to be developed.

THE FUTURE HQLC

The impact on HQLC by the planned dispersal of WSLM activities from Melbourne to the four logistics units is being considered initially by AOC-LC and senior executives this week.

THE INDUSTRIAL RELATION FRONT

The OSI Report for SGs and the proposed civilian establishment for SRWSLM produced by the joint DDEV/PSU Working Party were endorsed by the Victorian Regional Consultative Committee on 31 Jan 92. Establishment activity is being pursued by SEOHR. Development of appropriate establishments for the remaining SGs on transfer to WSLM in mid 1992 will be achieved on a case by case basis though consultative group facilitated by DDEV-LC staff. Consultation on the

WSLM reorganisation have occurred at state and national branch levels with the PSU and MEWU. Both management and unions have agreed to conduct further regular consultative meeting as reorganisation proposals are developed. DDEV-LC, Mr I King has been authorised by Air Force Office to conduct consultations on behalf of RAAF on industrial matters involving Lu and WSLM developments.

DELEGATION OF ENGINEERING AUTHORITY TO WSLMS

The concept. DGELS-LC developed a concept in which the maximum appropriate delegation of engineering authority and management takes place in a WSLM. The concept defines the roles of systems engineers, in the WSLMs licenced by DGELS-LC to

execute and manage the execution of the engineering content of ILS management of a weapon system in accordance with the delegated authority of DGELS-LC. With the future location of system engineers in WSLMs:

* engineering staff in HQLC will approve weapons systems airworthiness requirements; and

* monitor and audit the performance of the system engineers and their managers in the WSLMs to ensure that they are complying with those airworthiness requirements.

The HQLC engineering staff will also provide services including:

- a. monitoring, and
- b. maintenance engineering analysis.

POLICY BASIS OF THE CONCEPT

The concept is based on existing approved DIs including, and most importantly, the airworthiness management philosophy defined in AAP 7001.025-1. The concept ensures that DGELS-LC is responsible to AOC-LC for in-service airworthiness management of weapons systems, while being responsive only to other authorities with a legitimate interest in airworthiness.

PRINCIPLES FOR GRANTING AIRWORTHINESS SYSTEM ENGINEER LICENCES

* DGELS-LC will delegate engineering authority to WSLMS by issue of a licence. There will be three categories of licence, Gold, Silver and Bronze.

* Variations to authorised configuration by a Gold licensee, within a WSLM, may only be effected after an application for the change has been approved by DGELS-LC in writing

* Licensee decisions to vary configuration must be formally documented within existing procedures and the record signed and stamped with the licence number.

* All licence decisions will be the subject of periodic audit by DGELS-LC staff similar to DGDQA audits of Contractor QCLs.

* Decisions to vary the configuration of weapon systems may only be made by a licensee.

AUTHORITIES CONFERRED BY THE GRANTING OF AIR WORTHINESS SYSTEM ENGINEER LICENCES

BRONZE - Can vary configuration provided he:

- a. gains independent peer group endorsement, and
- b. gains OEM DA or DAC endorsement.

SILVER - Can vary configuration provided he gains EOM DA or DCA endorsement.

GOLD - Can vary configuration, acting as RAAF DA.

SYSTEM ENGINEER LICENCE QUALIFICATIONS

BASIC QUALIFICATION GRADE	BRONZE	SILVER	GOLD
TRAINING	TERTIARY QUALIFICATION IN PARTICULAR <----- DISCIPLINE (e.g. AVIONICS, STRUCTURES,-----> PROPULSION)		
BACKGROUND EXPERIENCE	3 years DLM/ILM + 1 year LSU/HQLC or 2 years Depot + 1 year LSU	BRONZE in more than one weapon system to a total of six years	SILVER Experience either 1. At least one year in an aircraft or weapon system drawing office or 2. Two years experience of design review in project management
WEAPON SYSTEM EXPERIENCE	1 year in either OLM/ILM/DLM (can be con- current with background experience) (includes normal tech or FTF training courses)	BRONZE in at least one other weapon system	SILVER
RANK	at least FLGOFF	at least FLTLT	at least WGCDR
RECOMMENDATION	recommended by a SILVER Licence	recommended by a GOLD Licence	CO or Director application to DGELS



ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE
AIRCRAFT RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT UNIT

RAAFQ-TQM Certificate of Achievement

This certifies that WGCDR N.G. SCHMIDT O47260 successfully completed
the RAAFQ Team Leader Course
in March 1992

N.J. FORD
Group Captain
Officer Commanding

Australia's intention to double its airborne strike capability with the purchase of an extra 18 F-111s is

F-111s

THE DEAL AND THE CONSEQUENCES

By foreign affairs writer CAMERON STEWART

IN February last year, the Minister for Defence, Senator Ray, launched an attack on the Coalition at the National Press Club in Canberra. The same man who this week announced Australia would seek effectively to double its airborne strategic strike capability by buying up to 18 F-111 fighters from the United States.

He had told the press club: "Should the Coalition return to a favourite theme of theirs — increasing significantly the Australian Defence Force's power projection capabilities — they will provide at best a marginal increase in Australia's defence capability whilst risking serious disruption to our regional relations."

"In a 1986 paper titled *The Coalition, Defence and the Dobb Review*, the then spokesman for defence, Mr Sinclair, called for the military ability to project power far beyond our area of direct military interest to influence developments in our favour."

"This type of 19th-century gunboat diplomacy would do immediate and lasting damage to our international relations and national security if ever adopted."

Twenty months later, Senator Ray's words have come back to haunt him. Not only has he announced plans to increase dramatically Australia's power projection capabilities but, as he foreshadowed last year, his actions appear to have raised concern among regional neighbours.

The Indonesian ambassador to Australia, Mr Sabam Siagian, said on Thursday that the decision to buy the additional F-111s — Australia's most lethal long-range weapon — could raise doubts in Asia about Australia's stated commitment to fostering closer defence links with the region. If this is the case,

and it appears likely that it is, then it represents a major setback to Australia's attempts in recent years to foster these closer defence links.

Prime Minister Paul Keating moved to forge closer defence links with Indonesia during his visit there earlier this year and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Evans, has worked hard in recent years to promote greater discussions on regional security among the relevant countries.

It has been largely because of Evans's efforts that regional security was recognised for the first time in 25 years as an official agenda item at this year's

'Many senior officials were stunned that the Government made no attempt to explain the decision to Indonesia'

meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Nations in Manila.

Given that this move towards greater integration with Asia has been the foreign policy hallmark of the Keating Government, it's not surprising that many high-level officials with the Department of Foreign Affairs and within the defence establishment were stunned by this week's announcement of the Government's planned purchase of the additional F-111s.

In particular, some have expressed surprise that the Government made no attempt to explain the rationale for the decision to the Indonesian Government or other regional neighbours within the F-

111 attack range before announcing it — particularly given the highly sensitive nature of the purchase.

To many Australians, it may be difficult to understand the sensitivity in Asia towards the purchase, given that our defence relationship with most countries in the region has been generally harmonious of late.

However, the F-111 has a particularly sensitive history in Asia. It was initially ordered in 1963 by then prime minister Robert Menzies, at a time when public concern about the military threat from Indonesia was at its highest because of "Konfrontasi". When the initial 24 F-111 aircraft were finally delivered in 1973, Indochina had taken the place of Indonesia as the main potential threat to Australia.

The delivery of the first F-111s launched Australia into the modern era of air warfare, giving it a long-range airborne offensive strike capability which no other countries in the region had or have since developed.

This strike capacity has been criticised in Asia as not sitting easily with the defensive strategic posture outlined in the government's 1987 White Paper on defence — a policy which rejects the notion of forward defence which led Menzies to order the F-111s in the first place. The purchase of a further 18 F-111s on top of the 22 already in service represents a massive increase in Australia's already strong offensive strike capability relative to any country in the region.

Senator Ray has attempted to downplay the diplomatic pitfalls of the purchase by arguing that the extra F-111s are needed primarily to extend the life of the fleet beyond the present target of 2010. This means the new aircraft will be stored and upgraded rather than used to create an extra squadron on top of the two already in service at Amberley airbase in south-east Queensland. But they would of course be available in a crisis.

However, Australia bought four F-111s in the early 1980s as attrition aircraft and, as one defence official said yesterday, if only four aircraft were needed for this purpose then, why are 18 F-111s — two squadrons' worth — needed now?

There's no doubt there will be a need for the refurbishment of the F-111 fleet if the life of that fleet is to be extended beyond 2010, and Ray says the planes — surplus stock from US military cutbacks — are cheap and available and should therefore be purchased.

But it is the size of the planned F-111 purchase, at a time when Australia is seeking to foster closer links with the region, which may herald the Prime Minister's first foreign policy setback in Asia.

INVESTMENT

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Taking out insurance for changing region

By foreign editor GREG SHERIDAN

THE purchase of 18 F-111 strike aircraft is a response by the Australian defence forces to the huge increase in armaments in our area of strategic concern. During the past decade, East Asia and South Asia's expenditure on military equipment has risen dramatically, in absolute terms and as a proportion of global expenditure on military equipment.

The Federal Government, deeply conscious of regional sensitivities, does not like to describe this process as an arms race. It will even pretend that the purchase of the F-111s is not a response to this process. But any defence planner who tells you that Australia's force structure is not heavily influenced by the force capabilities of the region must have his fingers very firmly crossed.

The conjunction of several historical trends is producing a huge increase in the amount of high-technology, highly destructive weaponry possessed by the countries in the region.

Partly the cause is economic, partly it is a response to perceived American retrenchment from the region, partly it is, paradoxically, a result of the end of the Cold War.

Throughout the Cold War the countries of South-East Asia in particular faced numerous domestic insurgency problems. They structured their forces accordingly, with an emphasis on large numbers of fairly low-technology, counter-insurgent ground forces.

Whatever high-tech strategic guarantees they felt they needed were provided for by the huge United States military presence in the region.

Now that environment has changed totally. The US is withdrawing, the Cold War is over and the insurgency threats largely gone, and the economies of South-East Asia are far richer and far more modern. And so the defence forces are far richer and more modern as well.

This is a process which will transform Australia's strategic environment during the next decade.

Until a couple of years ago, our economy was as big as the economies of all the six member nations of the Association of South-East Asian Nations put together. That is no longer the case. And the ASEAN economies are almost all growing much faster than we are. Thus the old relationship, in which they had lots of troops but we had a massive advantage in technology and force projection capabilities, is changing rapidly.

A not wholly dissimilar process is happening in some of the countries of North-East Asia. The most worrying case is China.

It has more or less abandoned its "people's war" doctrine, which was basi-

cally a response to the Soviet threat, a threat which no longer exists. Instead the People's Liberation Army has developed the concept of "local war", which is another way of describing force projection capabilities. In 1990 and 1991, China increased its defence spending by 13.7 per cent and 12 per cent respectively. It has bought Su-27 fighter-bombers from Russia and is interested in purchasing an aircraft carrier from Ukraine.

Its aggressive stance over the disputed Spratly Islands has convinced a number of serious thinkers in Australian intelligence that a shooting conflict is more likely than not to break out there.

Meanwhile, Taiwan, replicating the basic South-East Asian pattern of economic power leading to increased military power, and acutely aware of everything that China is doing, has approval from Washington to buy 150 American F-16 fighters.

Even Japan is moving decisively beyond the limits of its pacifist post-World War II Constitution. This is a process Australia has assisted in many ways, large and small. Not least has been General John Sanderson, the Australian commander of the United Nations forces in Cambodia, assigning the Japanese peacekeeping troops to the least dangerous sectors of the country to try to ease their transition into international peacekeeping.

AND then there is India, which has made abundantly clear its desire to exercise regional military leadership in the partial vacuum created by the end of the Cold War. Then, if you really want to frighten the children, there is nuclear proliferation on the Indian sub-continent and the Korean peninsula.

None of this is to suggest that Australia faces any immediate threats. But our strategic environment is rapidly transforming itself and the quantity and quality of massively destructive weapons, and the ability to use them over long distances, is increasing.

The economic success of Asia is overwhelmingly to Australia's benefit. But rich, powerful countries tend to have rich, powerful military forces.

Australia's strategic, and therefore political and ultimately psychological, relationship with its region is changing. The effective doubling of our F-111 force, to strengthen further our already lethal, and generally superior, airborne strike capacity, is a form of insurance policy against all these developments.

But the long-term trends are unmistakable. We will be relatively less powerful in a much more heavily armed region.

ANYONE who has visited a recession-bound car dealer recently will have seen some pretty good bargains. So it is with military equipment as the NATO and former Warsaw Pact countries cut defence spending to earn their peace dividend.

So extensive is the market that China is buying former Soviet Su-27 fighter bombers, Malaysia is negotiating a barter deal for the Russian MiG-29 and a low-mileage, if elderly, MiG-21 can be bought for as little as \$90,000.

The United States has announced an 25 per cent cut in defence capability to take full effect by 1995-96. Reductions in the US air force mean that more than 1000 aircraft, many of them modern types, are surplus to requirements.

Moreover, the American defence cuts have led to the cancellation of new aircraft projects such as the A-12 strike aircraft, which was seen as a potential successor to the F-111. Australia has been offered 18 of America's surplus aircraft, all modernised F-111s, at a bargain-basement price said to be around \$150 million for the package.

An offer too good to refuse. The Government moved with almost indecent haste to accept and trumpet to the nation and the region that Australia had enhanced its strategic strike capability.

The reality is somewhat different. Despite Democrat Senator Sid Spindler's extravagant claims, the F-111 can fly to Jakarta and back or carry a large weapons load but it cannot do both. The Australian F-111 force has always been the subject of absurd claims that frequently embarrass its crews. These claims reached a new intensity after the Gulf War, in which 104 (out of 1190 US aircraft) F-111 variants took part.

In that conflict, the elderly

Bargain buy or blunder?

By MICHAEL O'CONNOR

F-111s were a valuable element of the Allied strike force. Updated with modern electronics and armed with precision-guided weapons, they were among those aircraft that produced the extraordinary footage of bombs flying through doors in the target buildings.

On the other hand, the F-111s required extensive tanker support, airborne early warning and electronic counter-measure aircraft even for sorties of about 600km. Australia has no such support available for its F-111 force and must depend on either Allied assistance or a fairly unsophisticated enemy.

The Government has said that the new aircraft will be used primarily as attrition spares. To that extent, it is trying to give substance to the 1991 Force Structure Review's claim to keep the F-111s flying until 2010 or beyond.

That was always a doubtful proposition. While the existing aircraft are being modernised, there are limits and by 2010, the original F-111s will have been in squadron service for 37 years. Keeping them operational for that long implies that flying hours will be substantially limited, with consequent limits on crew training.

The F-111 force is already short of crews, with perhaps one-third the number of the trained personnel required to keep two squadrons operational in a high-intensity combat environment such as the Gulf War.

The force lacks the in-flight refuelling capability available

to the F/A-18 fighter force. The tankers the RAAF has acquired cannot support the F-111s, which use a different refuelling system. In the Gulf War, 312 of the 2600 Allied aircraft were tankers.

With a credible weapons load, Australia's F-111s operating from Darwin or Derby would be unable to attack high-value targets in any neighbouring country. Moreover, they would lack the electronic counter-measure support that is essential in modern strategic air warfare.

In effect, the Australian F-111 force is restricted by technology and geography to tactical operations in support of surface forces on land or at sea.

In that role, it is a valuable, even vital, component of the defence force and the purchase of the new aircraft makes a lot of sense.

What is surprising is that in a climate of defence budget cuts, the Government has "found" a spare \$150 million to spend on these aircraft yet is seemingly unable to raise cash for a number of much more urgent projects listed in the force structure review.

THESE projects include airborne early-warning aircraft and a helicopter carrier, but perhaps the Government is hoping for some cut-price offers from the US.

Given the admittedly minor contradictions in the F-111 decision, the concerns expressed by the Indonesian ambassador to Australia, Sabam Siagian, warrant

closer analysis. The ambassador is clearly annoyed that his Government was not told of the purchase before it was announced publicly by Senator Robert Ray.

Fervent Australian nationalists would protest that Australia is entitled to provide for its defence regardless of what its neighbours think. Others, such as Senator Spindler, are worried about stimulating an arms race in the region.

There is little doubt that Australia has the right and duty to provide for its defence. But the failure to inform its neighbours of the intention displays a lack of sensitivity on Canberra's part.

Since 1988 at least, Australia has pursued a very rational and quite sophisticated policy of regional security co-operation. In the process, it has won a number of influential friends in the governing circles of most ASEAN countries, including Indonesia.

Assauring Indonesian concerns would have been relatively easy if the Government had taken time to inform countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore of its decision before rushing to win kudos through the minister's statement.

Indeed, the Government could have pointed out to those neighbours that regional security would be enhanced by the purchase, especially if arrangements could be negotiated for the F-111s to operate from regional air bases.

The timing of the statement was probably driven by the parliamentary timetable and this week's air show and regional air power conference in Victoria. The impending release of the Opposition's revamped defence policy may also have been a factor, with the Government engaging in some pre-emptive damage control.

Michael O'Connor is Executive Director of the Australian Defence Association.

The F-111 buy: is it politics or defence?

The startling announcement of the proposed bargain buy of the F-111s may prompt some sceptics to question whether the acquisition is aimed at potential foreign threats or a domestic one.

Next week the Opposition is expected to launch a bulky and long-awaited defence policy that will strive to undermine the Government's defence performance and project a more assertive stance, particularly in relation to security links with the region.

The chance to buy such lethal aircraft at apparently fire-sale prices has enabled the Defence Minister, Senator Robert Ray, to launch a pre-emptive attack on the Opposition.

Senator Ray's move is being seen by the Opposition and some analysts as based more on political than defence strategic grounds, particularly given that the F-111's long-range strike capacity is seen by some to fit uncomfortably with the Government's defensively oriented policy.

It is believed that the idea has not gone through normal Defence Department assessment procedures nor been discussed at a full Cabinet meeting.

The rush, however, may have more

COMMENT

MARK METHERELL

to do with political realities in the United States than in Australia.

Sources suggest that the Government might get a better deal out of the Bush administration (while it lasts) by playing on any misgivings the current administration may have about the impact of its trade policy on relations with Australia.

Australia's existing fleet of F-111s is regarded as the most potent air strike force between here and the Russian Far East.

Even Japan and China do not have anything to match the bombers' capability to deliver formidable firepower at long range.

The range of the aircraft fully laden with its laser-guided bombs and Harpoon anti-ship missiles is classified but is estimated at about 2000 nautical miles — enabling it to fly from Darwin to the South China Sea and back without refuelling, analysts say.

On approach to target, the F-111

can fly in faster than the speed of sound and below radar level, loosing off laser-guided bombs with devastating effect and precision while remaining immune from the sort of surveillance operating in Asian countries.

It was the Government of Robert Menzies that ordered the aircraft in what was seen then as a ploy to turn public paranoia about Indonesia's "Konfrontasi" against the ALP in the run-up to the 1963 federal election.

After a decade of crashes and controversy involving prototypes of the then revolutionary swing-wing aircraft, the RAAF took delivery of the first F-111s.

They have subsequently proved to be a durable, if expensive, first-order strike weapon in Australia's armory, also giving the RAAF valuable reconnaissance and interdiction capability.

The F-111s fitted the Menzies principle of forward defence — by which Australia would avoid direct attack by joining combats far away, alongside the US.

However, in his seminal 1986 review, which led to the 1987 defence white paper, Dr Paul Dibb had this to say about the F-111s:

"The decision to acquire the F-111

aircraft was made in the 1960s when Australia had rather different strategic priorities and aspirations.

"If the aircraft were not in our inventory, this review considers that in current circumstances we would decide that a specialised strike aircraft of the F-111 type was not justified by the extra capability margin it provides..."

Dr Dibb said then that the F-111s represented a unique capability in regional terms. "They have an unsurpassed capacity for long-range strike at land targets with substantial immunity."

The Government's defence policy, which was largely based on Dr Dibb's review, acknowledged that "political constraints" could limit the use of such a strike capability in lower levels of conflict which Australia could conceivably face.

But it also said that the F-111 "represents a useful option that a government would wish to have available".

Senator Ray said last night that Dr Dibb's comments about the F-111's non-suitability were made in the Cold War era when the bombers would have been much more expensive.

"There were very few spare ones for sale," he said.

MELBOURNE AGE FRIDAY 16 OCT 92