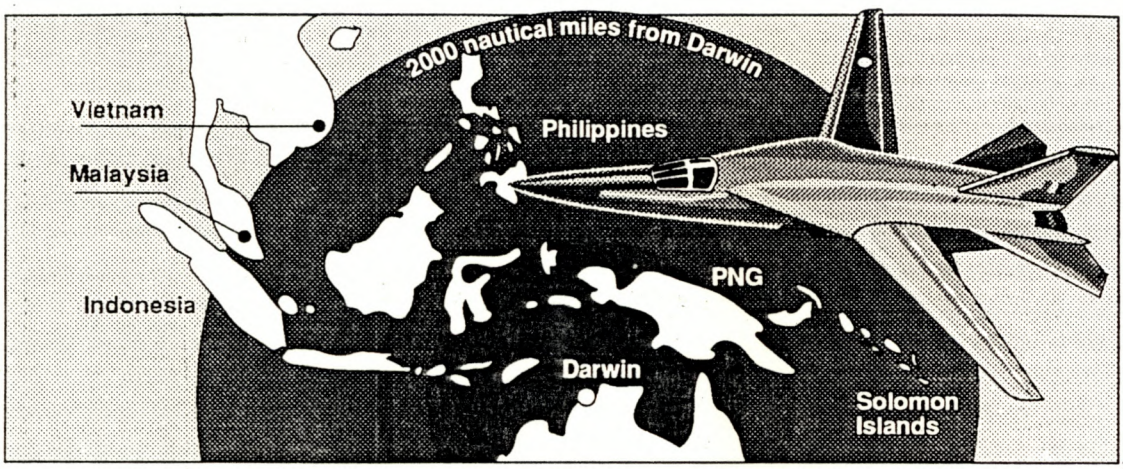


Australia to get F-111s out of mothballs in US

By MARK METHERELL, defence reporter, Canberra

The Federal Government disclosed yesterday that it is negotiating with the United States to buy up to 18 F-111 bombers, being mothballed by the US Air Force, at bargain prices.

The deal would nearly double Australia's fleet of the long-range strike aircraft, which are widely acknowledged as the most potent aircraft in Asia.

The Defence Minister, Senator Ray, said given that the planes would be for attrition (or replacement) purposes, he did not think neighboring countries such as Indonesia would see any problem with the purchase.

Senator Ray declined to reveal the likely purchase price of the aircraft. But he said: "They will be massively cheaper than any new bomber."

Senator Ray discussed the deal with US defence officials in Washington two weeks ago, and Australian defence officials are expected to visit the US as soon as possible to complete negotiations.

Unofficial estimates put the price tag at between $60 million and $80 million — a fraction of the plane's original price in today's dollars.

The purchased F-111s, the first of which are unlikely to arrive before 1994, will be placed in storage, possibly some remaining in the US, and used for replacement purposes and to extend the operating life of the existing 22-strong fleet by 10 years to the year 2020.

The Government is believed to be planning to make special finance allocations for the purchase to take pressure off the defence budget, projected to fall by $50 million a year from 1993-94. However, the replacements are expected to need expensive upgrades, costing $10 million to $15 million a plane.

Senator Ray said the extended operating life was particularly important given the likelihood that there would be no replacement for the F-111 by that time.

The purchase would ensure that Australia retained "superior strike and interdiction capability in our sea-air gap".

"Our strategy of defence in depth demands that we have sufficient capable assets for surveillance, strike, interdiction and air defence."

The Opposition's defence spokesman, Mr Downer, who is expected to announce the coalition's defence policy next week, said the the plan seemed superficially attractive but accused the Government of "ad hoc policy-making on the run".

Asked if the purchase was a bid to undercut the Opposition's defence policy, Senator Ray said he had been considering the deal for several months and "the Prime Minister has certainly been considering it for several weeks".

"Now is the opportunity to best maximise our position in regard to this. If the Opposition's policy on defence is collateral damage in this, so be it."

The F-111s have been criticised in the past as being too offensive in capability for Australia's defensive posture.

Senator Ray told 'The Age' last night that the Defence Force was configured largely along defensive lines. "But you must have some strike capacity. We have a limited one in Australia — limited to the submarines and F-111s."

A leading defence analyst, Professor Des Ball of ANU's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, said it was essential that Australia had a strike capability. If the F-111 was available at bargain prices, Australia should get them.

PAGE 4: Mark Metherell's comment.

MELBOURNE AGE
FRIDAY 16OCT92

STRIKE - WED 21 OCT 1992

F111s to fly past 2010

PURCHASE of an additional 18 F111 aircraft announced last week by the Minister for Defence, Senator Robert Ray, commits the F111 to operational service beyond the year 2010.

The United States Air Force is withdrawing about 250 F111s from service. Following discussions between Senator Ray and senior US Defence officials a team will be sent to the US to negotiate the purchase of up to 18 aircraft.

"Not only will this ensure that the integrity of the F111 fleet is maintained throughout its life of type, it will also provide for F111 aircraft to be deployed beyond the current target of the year 2010", Senator Ray said.

No likely replacement for the F111 is currently on the drawing boards -- not even an initial design concept -- and the cost of replacing the F111 with an aircraft such as the B-1 Bomber would be prohibitive.

In a television interview on SBS's Dateline Senator Ray said that the F111 was the only viable fighter bomber in the world for Australia. Asked why 75 F/A-18 Hornets were not deterrent enough, Senator Ray said that while the Hornets were a deterrent in a defensive role they did not have the range and weapons payload capability of the F111.

"The F111 is one of the most versatile aircraft ever put in the sky -- as its various upgrades over the years have shown."

Senator Ray said the additional aircraft will ensure that Australia retains superior strike and interdiction capability in its sea-air gap. "The acquisition of these aircraft represents a unique force in regional terms", he said.

The F111s will be stored until attrition of the current fleet of 22 aircraft requires their introduction into service. The 18 aircraft will be upgraded over several years -- estimated to cost about $200 million -- but no further updates of the fleet are planned.

"Given our current and foreseeable strategic circumstances, the Government sees no requirement for any further upgrade of F111 strike capability beyond the current programme", Senator Ray said.

Senator Ray said that an expected $3 billion saving in Defence expenditure from now until the year 2000 -- as a result of the Force Structure Review -- would fund projects such as these.

On the question of Australia's regional neighbours' regard for the purchase, Senator Ray said that no one in the region wants Australia to reduce its military capability. "Most people in our region, if not all, see us as protecting their southern base. They see us as a stabilising influence... as a colleague in the region, one that will have a deterrent effect on anyone else inserting themselves in the region", Senator Ray said.

❑ ***John Armstrong***

In the heat and oppressive humidity of a Florida summer, a small RAAF team quietly works at acquiring automatic test equipment for our 'new' F-111 fleet.

The job is not high profile however what the team develops is vital to ensuring faults in an aircraft's new avionics are quickly and efficiently identified.

The team, headed by SQNLDR Len Neist, has its Automatic Test Equipment Replacement (ATE-R) offices at Harris Government Support Systems Division in Orlando. The objective is to replace test stations built in the 1950s and purchased in the 1970s, with a $40m state of the art system.

A test station is a computer controlled, automatic system which confirms an avionic component has failed, and then determines why.

"It is not a routine maintenance," SQNLDR Neist said. "It is as things fail so it is on an arising basis."

In practice, test stations are in use daily.

"A unique thing is that the (new) system will be operated and maintained by the contractor (at 501WG, RAAF Amberley)."

When our F-111 fleet was delivered in the early 1970s, the RAAF purchased two sets of test stations (CENPAC) from the USAF.

However, by the late 1970s, the RAAF was experiencing problems due to low reliability and spares unavailability.

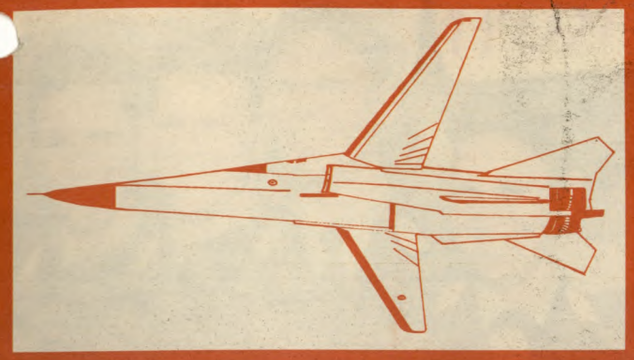
Initially it was planned to refurbish this equipment but in 1989, the F-111 Project Office was formed to place the Avionics Update Program, Automatic Test Equipment Replacement (ATE-R) and Simulator Replacement projects all under one program office. The ATE-R no longer uniquely involved replacement of an existing capability, but was responsible for providing test support for the new avionics.

As part of the Australian Offsets Program, Harris has (or will have) subcontracts with Harris Australia Pty Ltd, Philips Defence Systems and Rockwell Ship Systems Australia.

The ATE-R development and production phases stretch through to December, 1995. Four RAAF members also are stationed at Harris' Melbourne Centralised Australian Test and Integration facility.

The RAAF team in Orlando, Florida, is (l to r) standing: WOFF Jim Cooper, CPL Kari Partanen, SGT Mark Smith, FLTLT Bill King and FSGT Steve Dickeson. Seated with SQNLDR Len Neist is secretary, Georgetta Schommer.

OUR PIGS IMPROVING THE BEST



Imagine you are a RAAF F-111 crew member sitting at a mission planning computer terminal and can prepare for flight in a fraction of the time the job takes manually.

You move to the aircraft with a Data Transfer Module (DTM) cassette to program the on-board computers with the mission details.

Airborne. The aircraft's new Global Positioning System (GPS) antenna locks onto three of 28 US military satellites to 'triangulate' your aircraft's position to within ten metres. In the blink of an eyelid, the numbers are crunched to enable your weapons strike at the required split second.

It is precision only available through the latest high tech wizardry and not what the builders of our F-111s imagined possible when the aircraft was developed in the 1960s. However, the current Avionics Update Program (AUP) will give our 'pigs' this state of the art capability.(The aircraft was nicknamed due to its long 'snout' and close to the ground flight capability.)

The project is aimed at ensuring the RAAF F-111s remain a formidable strike weapon well into the next century. The revolutionary bomber is destined to remain in service for an unmatched 40 years, and claim a unique place in military aviation.

###

The AUP is an Australian defence big ticket item costing around the $500m mark. Given that the price for an equivalent new aircraft, the necessary infrastructure and training needed to fly, maintain and service the fleet is around the $4b mark, it is easy to see why the military aviation industry is rapidly moving toward upgrade programs.

The F-111 project has three components - a new avionics suite for all our bombers, new automatic test equipment (see story left) and a mission simulator.

RAAF News Editor, Warwick Shields, takes a close look at how our F-111s shape up through the current 'half-life' avionics upgrade.

"The RAAF is incorporating in one program what the USAF has or will be doing in four," WGCDR Downing said.

"The principal areas we are modifying are the aircraft avionics - displays, computers, communication systems, terrain following and attack radars and the digital flight control system. And we are upgrading the aircraft stores management; that part of the avionics that controls the weapons and plays a part in the release of weapons.

"Also to be delivered under the program is a Weapons System Support Facility (WSSF) which essentially is a set of hardware and software development tools. That will allow us to support five Operational Flight Programs (OFP) which is the computer software that drives the plane."

Central to the WSSF is a Lab Integration Mockup (LIM) featuring an F-111 crew station and aircraft forward equipment bay. Project engineer, FLTLT Dave Vrancic said the basic aim was to ensure everything fits into place and works as it should before moving onto the prototype.

"We have simulator computers which exercise a lot of the equipment in there so that you can actually sit in the crew module and have it working," Dave said.

"There is no motion in the module itself but you can simulate the avionics and software."

The LIM eventually will be shipped back to Australia to assist with maintenance and future modifications.

###

Meantime, when all our F-111s are converted, you will have to look hard to notice the small, flat antennas to be positioned in front of the crew modules. These will be the only units, will be accurate to within 10 metres.

"Another system that we are updating is stores management. It mainly is a reliability improvement and we are using hardware common to the F/A-18 for logistics commonality, but different software."

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Also at Anaheim, the project team is working to dramatically reduce the time needed by crews for mission planning. The key here is mission data preparation equipment which will be handled by crews in the operations area.

"A module (computer cartridge) with information that relates to the mission will be pre-programmed by the crew....and taken to the aircraft to operate it with essential information," said independent validation and verification team leader, SQNLDR Chris Deeble.

Continued page 16

Not a common sight - a RAAF F-111 in the snow. Rockwell's Palmdale facility is just under two hours drive east of Los Angeles. The F-111 arrived last northern winter. The aircraft in the background is a USAF B1 bomber.

Upon the arrival of our F-111 prototype in the US, program director, GPCAPT Mike Lorimer (left), project office leader, WGCDR Bob Downing (right) and flight test director, SQNLDR Mal Hurman (centre) were joined by Rockwell senior executives , Mr Les Hill (2nd from left) and Mr Jim Monroe.

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The major avionics contract was won by Rockwell Electronics Australasia (REA), an Australian subsidiary of Rockwell International. The program development phase is being conducted at Rockwell's Anaheim (Los Angeles) facility. Production will be managed in Australia by REA with Hawker de Havilland (Victoria) as the major sub-contractor.

In Anaheim, WGCDR Bob Downing heads a staff of 34. Overall, the project is driven by GPCAPT Mike Lorimer in Canberra.

A RAAF F-111 prototype currently is being stripped down on Rockwell's site at the Palmdale facility just outside Los Angeles, and not far from Edwards Air Force Base. This massive complex (it takes 20 minutes by car to move from one side to the other) is the development site for many top secret US military aircraft, and is where the space shuttle was built.

###

However, Anaheim presently is the project hot spot with the development and testing of the latest computerised systems to replace the old analogue avionics. Out will go switches and dials; in will come the advanced systems for flight control, navigation, weapons delivery and stores management.

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Meantime, when all our F-111s are converted, you will have to look hard to notice the small, flat antennas to be positioned in front of the crew modules. These will be the only outward signs of the satellite-linked Global Positioning System. Outside the USAF's 'Pacer Strike' F-111 upgrade, the RAAF fleet is the first to acquire this capability.

Rockwell test and integration group member, Seven Clark said the space shuttle had positioned 18 of a total 28 military GPS satellites for the USAF.

"They beam down a particular frequency. You will have three brought to the aircraft so you can triangulate from their exact known positions, to figure out your position," Seven said. "It is very precise. It is the best positioning system we have."

The system has particular applications to the delivery of bombs and missiles. "....I know an exact latitude and longitude of a target, my specific air speed and altitude, and I know how a bomb goes through the air (its drag). I have to release it at a precise point. But to get to that point, I have to know my precise position, otherwise I can miss the target. You have to know where you're at to know where you're going."

The F-111's existing inertial navigation system has a drift rate of eight nautical ilometres per hour. The S, co-ordinating with two ring laser gyro inertial navigation units, will be accurate to within 10 metres.

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Continued page 16

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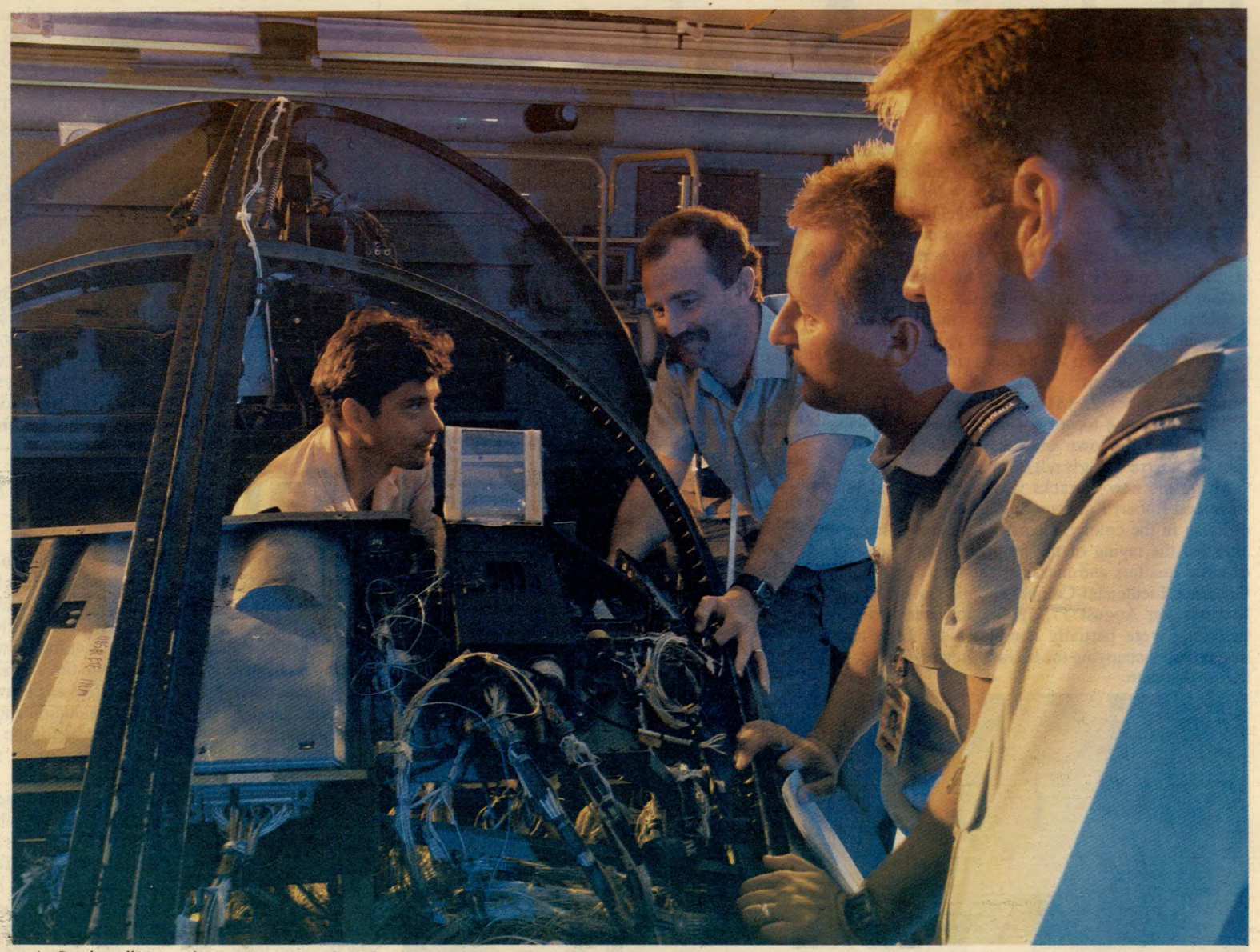


At Rockwell's Anaheim (Los Angeles) facility the project's Laboratory Integration Mockup currently is allowing team members to ensure that, basically, the new avionics system will fit in the aircraft and operate effectively. Involved with this work are officers (l to r) SQNLDR Chris Deeble, FLTLT Dave Vrancic and FLGOFF Chris Gray. The Hawker de Havilland engineer in the unit is Joe Kielniacz.

From page 11

Upgrading our F-111s

"The system we have incorporated is very different from the one utilised by the USAF. What we have is F/RF-111 mission data preparation equipment made by Horizon Technologies. The hardware in this system is similar to that utilised by the F/A-18 back in Australia. The software application, although utilising certain elements of the F/A-18 system, is really F-111 specific."

Basically, the system allows crews to, on a computer screen, plan a mission to the finest detail. The computer quickly calculates aspects such as the effect of diminishing fuel loads, the varying weights of weapons loads and the distances to be flown.

"All the things a crew used to do as a manual process is now automated and can be done on a leg by leg basis. If you are looking at planning missions back home you can go in and do a fairly complex mission....in about 90 minutes, whereas potentially you were looking at a day."

The system also can calculate the effect of radar shadows during a mission. It's the only one currently able to do a radar prediction and then enhance it.

"It would take one man probably a day and a half to do a radar prediction. I can do a prediction now, if I have the digital plane elevation data, in probably 15 minutes."

The project's third element, the mission simulator, is a surplus USAF F-111F unit procured from the US Government. The simulator was recently upgraded with 80 percent new hardware and a contract for the reconfiguration and further upgrade will be let early next year.

###

So, why go to all this trouble and expense? The official line is to improve the reliability, maintainability and supportability of the F-111 fleet.

The Director-General Materiel - Air Force, AIRCDRE Ian Whisker described the project as a partial half-life refit. "If we were not to undertake this avionics update we would have been faced with problems in keeping the avionics of the F-111s going," he said. "This is in view of the fact the USAF is closing down some of the 111s which have similar systems to ours. The only ones they will keep operating will have gone through an avionics update, although slightly different (to ours)."

###

In the mid-1980s the Federal Government insisted defence improve self reliance. We now are upgrading our 25-year-old aircraft to contain the ever-growing cost of keeping such weapons and the manpower bill which wraps around new systems. Australian industry also is a major beneficiary with the AUP's production phase to be carried out at RAAF Amberley.

At present there are up to 14 Australian civilian engineers working alongside RAAF members in the US. By the time the project is completed, a large number of Australian companies and engineers will have been involved in a way that will allow them to compete for the program follow-on support.

AUSTRALIAN WED 17 JUN 92

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

Air Force Commercial Support Program

INDUSTRY CONSULTATION

Wednesday 24 June 1992
(Commencing 9am)

No 501 Wing Headquarters, Amberley, Queensland

An invitation is extended to companies that have a genuine interest, capability and capacity to provide support for major maintenance of the F-111C aircraft and associated systems to attend an industry consultation under the Air Force Commercial Support Program.

The scope of activities being considered include: maintenance of TF30 engines, airframe accessories, fuel tanks, ground support equipment, electrical equipment, general instruments and motor transport; general engineering services such as surface finishing, electroplating, metal machining, carpentry, fitting and welding, and non-destructive testing; and administrative support services such as personnel administration, education services, building services, supply support and management information services.

The intention is to address aspects such as: work packaging; risks; Industry expectations, capabilities and capacity; logistics support considerations and interfaces with other support activities.

For further details and attendance registration, please contact:

SQNLDR Ron Derlagen
CP3 – 2 – 08
Campbell Park Offices
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Ph: (06) 266 2132
Fax: (06) 266 2099

AB1-8025410RS

AUSTRALIA

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE
Commercial Support Program
Royal Australian Air Force

REGISTRATION OF INTEREST

FOR MAINTENANCE OF ENGINES AND COMPONENTS AND PROVISION OF SUPPORT FUNCTIONS FOR THE F111 AIRCRAFT

The RAAF is seeking registrations of interest from industry for the provision of a commercial option for the Maintenance of Engines and Components and Provision of Maintenance Support Services for the F111 Aircraft at RAAF Base Amberley, Qld. including the following services:

a. Gas Turbine Engine Maintenance
b. Maintenance of Airframe Accessories
c. Maintenance of Aircraft Electrical Equipment
d. Maintenance of Instrumentation Equipment
e. Provision of Electroplating Services
f. Provision of Metal Machining Services
g. Provision of Carpentry and Wood Machining Services
h. Provision of Motor Transport Maintenance*
I. Provision of Ground Support Equipment Maintenance*.

NOTE: The requirements at h. and i. (annotated*) are subject to further review of Uniform Manpower Requirements and may not be included in the RFQ.

The aim of this Invitation to Register Interest (ITR) is to identify suitable companies with the capability to provide the required services, and to facilitate consultation with industry.

This ITR is the first phase in a two-phase process and offers will only be sought from a short list of suppliers selected from organisations responding to the ITR.

It is intended that any resultant contract will be in force for a period of 5 years commencing on 1 January 1994 with 4x1 year option extensions to be exercised at the Commonwealth's discretion.

A Familiarisation day will be held at RAAF Base, Amberley, Qld on 15 September 1992. Details of arrangements required for attendance are in the ITR document.

A formal ITR document including detailed statements of Requirements may be obtained from: Mr Glenn Pounder, Contracting Services, HQLC – RAAF, 10th Floor, Jensen House, 339 Swanston Street, Melbourne Vic. 3000. Telephone (03) 282 7350, Fax (03) 282 7364.

Registrations must be lodged in accordance with the requirements of the ITR document no later than C.O.B. Wednesday 30 September 1992.

AB90/022

THE AUSTRALIAN Oct 16 1992

Indonesia queries F-111 deal

By foreign affairs writer CAMERON STEWART

INDONESIA warned last night that the decision to double Australia's airborne strike capability might raise doubts in Asia about the Government's stated commitment to closer defence links with the region.

The Minister for Defence, Senator Ray, announced last night the decision to purchase 18 F-111 strike aircraft — Australia's most lethal long-range attack weapon — from the United States. The estimated cost is $150 million.

The Indonesian ambassador to Australia, Mr Sabam Siagian, said Indonesia was not alarmed by yesterday's decision but he questioned whether it was necessary in the present strategic climate.

"If the Australian Government deems it necessary to acquire more military aircraft, it surely must fit somewhere with the current strategic doctrine," Mr Siagian said.

"(But) is it necessary given the (strategic) shift in the Asia-Pacific region and the emerging network of regional security co-operation?"

The planned acquisition could "raise possible scepticism (in Asia) of Australia's seriousness in security co-operation", he said.

In a move to minimise any diplomatic fallout from the decision, officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs were last night consulting Indonesian officials to expain the purchase of the aircraft. Indonesia was not given prior warning of the announcement.

Australia's other neighbours are also expected to be briefed on the purchase, which Senator Ray said yesterday would ensure Australia retained "superior strike and interdiction capability in our air-sea gap".

"Our strategy of defence in depth demands that we have sufficient capable assets for surveillance, strike, interdiction and air defence," he said.

Senator Ray said the purchase of 18 F-111s, to add to the 22 already in service, was important because it would extend the life of the F-111 fleet beyond its target year of 2010 at a time when there was no likely replacement on the drawing board.

The possible purchase of the aircraft was discussed with senior US officials while Senator Ray was in Washington late last month and was decided following "further discussions" within the Government on his return.

But government sources said last night the decision had not gone to Cabinet and had been made in a three-way discussion between Senator Ray, the Prime Minister, Mr Keating; and the Minister for Finance, Mr Willis.

A spokesman for Senator Ray said the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Evans, who has played a leading role in encouraging closer links with Asia on regional security issues, was briefed on the decision, but the spokesman would not comment when asked whether Senator Evans favoured the decision.

Senator Evans left Australia yesterday on a working visit to Europe and was unavailable for comment on the diplomatic implications of the decision.

Defence sources estimate the F-111s could cost $150 million. The Government has not released any cost estimates.

A spokesman for Senator Ray said the price would be "favourable" because the US was planning to retire about 250 F-111s as part of its force reduction and appeared willing to sell the 18 aircraft relatively cheaply.

Australia has two squadrons of F-111s, No 1 and No 6, at Amberley in Queensland, but another squadron will not be created with the purchase of the additional aircraft.

The new F-111s will be stored, upgraded and introduced into service as required, either to counter attrition or to extend the length of service of the fleet.

But the Opposition spokesman on defence, Mr Alexander Downer, described the purchase as policy-making on the run.

The Government had given no indication how the purchase would be financed or what strategic assessment had led it to double its airborne strike capability, he said.

The purchase of the F-111s could delay the acquisition of other high-priority defence equipment, such as airborne early warning and control aircraft and mine countermeasure vessels.

The Democrats also criticised the decision, saying it gave the wrong message to the regional neighbours.

"Our F-111s carry huge weapons payloads and can get to Jakarta and back without refuelling. Together they provide Australia with offensive air-strike power against our South-East Asian and South Pacific neighbours," the spokesman on defence, Senator Sid Spindler, said.

"This is a force which our neighbours can't match and which is not justified by any strategic assessment."

Australia first purchased 24 F-111s in 1973 to modernise its airborne strike capability in the face of perceived threats in the South-East Asian region.

Flight Lieutenant Andy Seaton and navigator Mark Streat with an F-111 at Amberley air base in Queensland last night — Picture: DAVID SPROULE

Dramatic increase to unique regional force

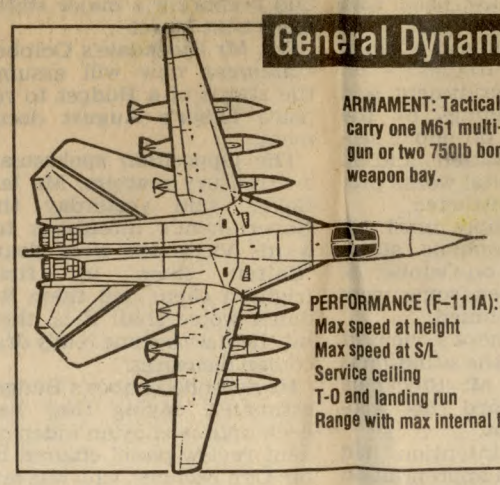
Analysis by CAMERON STEWART

AUSTRALIA'S purchase of up to 18 F-111s from the United States will dramatically boost an airborne strike capability that was already clearly superior to that of other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

During the past two years, South-East Asian countries have embarked on major defence equipment modernisation programs, in stark contrast to the large-scale cuts in military arsenals by the superpowers following the end of the Cold War.

Only last month, Taiwan bought 150 F-16 fighters from the US in a $7.8 billion deal which angered China.

The arms push reflects concern among some Asian nations of the shape of the post-Cold War security structure in the region, and in particular concerns that China may, in part, seek to fill the vacuum created by the reduced superpower presence.



General Dynamics FB-111A

ARMAMENT: Tactical fighter versions carry one M61 multi-barrel 20mm gun or two 750lb bombs in internal weapon bay.

PERFORMANCE (F-111A):

Max speed at height	Mach 2.2
Max speed at S/L	Mach 1.2
Service ceiling	over 15,500m (51,000ft)
T-O and landing run	under 915m (3000ft)
Range with max internal fuel	over 2750nm (5093km)

But despite this military build-up, no country in the region has acquired the long-range airborne strike capability that is provided by an F-111 or an equivalent long-range attack aircraft.

The power of an effective airborne strike force was starkly demonstrated in the Gulf War and it is Australia's vast superiority in this area that makes the purchase of an additional 18 F-111s a particularly sensitive issue for our regional neighbours.

The 1987 Defence White Paper described the 23 F-111s Australia had at that time as "a unique force in regional terms".

With the purchase of another 18 F-111s, that force will virtually double — a move that may be difficult to justify to our neighbours.

The Minister for Defence, Senator Ray, has attempted to defuse the potential diplomatic problems arising from the purchase by arguing that the new aircraft are needed primarily to extend the life of the F-111 fleet beyond the present target of 2010.

He has said the new aircraft will be stored rather than used to create a third F-111 squadron and will only be introduced into service as required to maintain rather than increase the two squadrons already in existence.

The refurbishment of the F-111 fleet has been a long-term plan of the Government and Senator Ray's argument is that some relatively cheap, appropriate aircraft have become available, so why not acquire them now.

That argument is valid to an extent, but the purchase of up to 18 F-111s — a virtual doubling of the existing force of 22 — will be seen by many in the region as overkill.

The size of the purchase appears puzzling given that the Government would be aware of the sensitive nature of the F-111 fleet and the possibility, which the Indonesian ambassador raised yesterday, that it may work against Australia's attempts to forge closer defence links in the region.