

# Marrickville Peace Group

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## Briefing Paper – F-35 Joint Strike Fighter

### Summary

- The purchase of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter has been plagued with controversy.
- Criticisms include serious design defects, performance inferiority and cost overruns.
- Lockheed Martin's marketing of the F-35 has also been described as a form of 'political engineering' which makes the cancelling of the contract by government too politically costly.
- Another criticism asserts that Australia's national security has been unduly influenced by the Australia/US alliance and corrupted by an 'industrial-military complex' addicted to profiting from the global arms trade.
- It is also claimed that the purchase of the F-35 exacerbates the primary tension within defence policy, namely defending the continent of Australia as opposed to off-shore military interventions with the aid of expensive high-tech hardware.
- It can be argued that the F-35 purchase is part of the increasing militarisation of society. Defence policy is predicated upon the notion of 'military security' rather than 'humanitarian security' which has tended to increase insecurity, both at home and abroad, rather than reduce it.

### Review of the Issue

In June 2002, former Prime Minister John Howard signed Australia up to the F-35 development program in a secret deal with the American manufacturer Lockheed Martin in a Washington hotel.

In April 2014, current Prime Minister Tony Abbott announced that Australia will buy 58 more F-35 Joint Strike Fighters at a cost of more than \$12.4 billion. It will cost another \$12 billion to keep the fighters operational over their active lifetime. The 58 aircraft are an addition to the 14 F-35s Australia already had on order. This represented the largest military procurement in Australia's history at the time.

The purchase of the F-35 has been plagued by controversy. Criticisms of the F-35 include its design defects, performance inferiority and ever-increasing cost overruns.

Lockheed Martin's marketing of the F-35 has also been described as a form of 'political engineering' i.e. in relation to defence spending, this means that bureaucrats, politicians and business design a project so that no matter what happens, it can't be stopped.

It has also been claimed that Australia's national security has been unduly influenced by the Australia/US alliance and corrupted by an 'industrial-military complex' interested in promoting the global arms trade.

As well, it is argued that the purchase of the F-35 exacerbates the primary tension within defence policy, namely defending the continent of Australia on the one hand and engaging in aggressive military interventions off-shore with high-tech hardware on the other.

This tension is expressed by Adam Lockyer in the following terms: "So conceptually every defence White Paper that comes out still has defence of Australia as its overriding framework,

that our planes, our aircraft, our army are intended to defend the continent of Australia. But yet operations are pulling us in a different direction and that's tearing at the fabric, so now we are stuck in a bit of limbo where we've got half our equipment and doctrine that's aimed at offshore contingency and other stuff is just designed for territorial defence.”<sup>1</sup>

The F-35 purchase is part of the increasing militarisation of society. The purchase is also part of Australia's increasing integration into the US global military system, involving about 1,000 military bases around the world, many of them surrounding China. It can be argued that defence policy is predicated upon the questionable notion of 'military security' where the credible alternative of 'humanitarian security' is excluded from consideration and debate. MPG argues that limiting the policy debate in this way undermines our capacity to objectively evaluate the cogency of the dominant paradigm that has resulted in such destabilising calamities as the wars in Vietnam and Iraq in which Australian military forces have been involved.

The references below relate to all these aspects of the F-35 controversy.

## Notes

1. Adam Lockyer in Stan Correy and Alex McClintock, [‘Defence spending from the F-111 to the Joint Strike Fighter’](#), ABC RN ‘Rear Vision’, 18 May 2014.

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29<sup>th</sup> September 2014

