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In his article of 7 January 2009 titled “Pricey stealth fighter not up to scratch”, Dr Dennis Jensen, MP, makes numerous incorrect claims about the capability and cost of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF).

First, Dr Jensen falsely claims Defence is hiding behind unnecessary classification of JSF performance information as there are no JSF technologies or capabilities that are not already known in the public domain. The JSF incorporates the most advanced combat technologies of the US and they are very closely protected to ensure the US and JSF partner countries maintain a capability edge. On current plans the JSF will represent 90% of the combat aircraft of the US Air Force and be the frontline combat aircraft for the US Navy—these Services demand the highest level of capability. JSF Partner countries are fortunate to have access to this level of technology and are obliged to protect it at the highest level.

Second, the report critical of JSF performance to which Dr Jensen refers was refuted by the US RAND Corporation and was never part of the US Pacific Vision Exercise as previously claimed by Dr Jensen.

Third, Dr Jensen makes a number of incorrect claims regarding JSF price estimates. Because the JSF will be purchased in US dollars the price is very sensitive to exchange rate, hence Dr Stephen Gumley’s stipulation that his estimate of A\$75M was in 2008 dollars at an exchange rate of 0.92. It is also essential to understand that the A\$75M figure refers to the basic aircraft—the so-called Average Unit Recurring Flyaway Cost. The total project cost will be considerably higher, having to take into account spares, facilities, weapons, support equipment, training equipment, etc, hence AVM Harvey’s previous advice of an Average Unit Procurement Cost in the order of A\$130 M. (Note this figure was in A\$, not US\$, and at a time when the exchange rate was around 0.75. This is consistent with the publicly available Defence Capability Plan provision for the AIR6000 Project). Cost figures Dr Jensen attributes to Norway align more with cost figures media articles attribute to Israel. These figures were based on what is referred to as a “Never To Exceed” estimate that took into account total project costs and include extensive modification of the JSF Air System to incorporate specific Israeli systems and weapons.

Fourth, in terms of its stealth characteristics, the US Government and Lockheed Martin have both acknowledged that the JSF will be a Very Low Observable aircraft. Dr Jensen’s statements in this area are also incorrect. The JSF has the benefit of experience with all previous stealth aircraft programs and the lessons learnt from them have been incorporated into the JSF. Defence has detailed insight into the stealth characteristics of the JSF and its performance has been confirmed by detailed, independent Defence Science & Technology Organisation analysis. There have been many advances since the basic radar cross section performance modelling was conducted in the 1970s, particularly in terms of incorporating stealth into highly manoeuvrable combat aircraft. Major developments in computer modelling were required to allow the design of the highly complex F-22 and JSF aircraft, modelling not available for the first stealth aircraft, the F-117, which relied on flat surfaces and had very limited manoeuvrability.

Fifth, in terms of networking, while Dr Jensen is correct that the concept has been around for many years, he fails to recognise that the JSF is implementing networking to an extent well beyond any previous aircraft.

In summary, Dr Jensen makes a large number of incorrect judgments about the capability and cost of the JSF. It is the JSF's combination of stealth, advanced situation awareness and affordability that make it so attractive to the nine JSF partner nations and many other nations that are looking to acquire it.

As Defence Minister Fitzgibbon has reiterated, however, the Australian Government will not make an acquisition decision on the JSF until we are confident that the JSF can do what we need it to do and we know what it will cost and when it will be ready.

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