**F-111: Our soundest aircraft**

This critical component.

The RAAs’s wing replacement program resulted from gaps in the fatigue analysis of the FB-111A/F-111C ‘long’ wing and delays in analyzing fatigue test tiles in Australia. With per-haps 90 percent or more of its key, fatigue-limited components concentrated in the wings, the fatigue life of the RAAs fleet can be extended by swaps as long as surplus wings remain in store. The fatigue life of the RAAs fleet can be extended by swaps as long as surplus wings remain in store.

The F-111 fleet has considerable more structural integrity can be demonstrated as safe.

Stretching the F-111 is a cheap and low-risk way to save taxpayers’ money. A billion dollars buys very few shiny new fighter, but it does buy an enormous amount of life-extension upgrades on the F-111 fleet. New fighter buys put enormous cost spikes into the budget, incremental, life-extension upgrades on the F-111 can be spread over decades in small block upgrades.

Why is there so little interest within Defence in the idea of extending the life of the F-111? The budget crunch be tween 2005 and 2015 is a major agenda item.

Deffering F-111 replacement decisions sig nificantly will not affect budgetary or strategic balance.

Avionics

Avionics retro fits are not an issue given the size of the F-111 – with newer liquid cooling this becomes even easier. With large radar and avionics bays it can be commod ii cated many alternatives.

There are no obvious engineering reasons why the F-111 can not be life-extended into the 2030-2040 period, like the US Air Force B-52H and B-1Bs – both programmed for use until 2040, using small block retro fits during scheduled down time.

Budget spikes

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Engines

The existing pool of TF30 engines will last until at least 2020. GE initiated a design project on adapting the F110 retrofit kit for the F-14B/D to the F-111 during the early 1990s. In principle, an F-111 retrofit with high-thrust, low-maintenance F110 engines, common to the F-16 fleet, is a low-risk, low-cost version.

Wings

The main fatigue issue in the F-111 is that the air craft is structurally unsafe because of age and could soon fall out of the sky. This is absurd.

The F-111, in structural terms, is arguably the safest air craft in ADF service. With structural, cold-proof load testing, it is the only ADF air frame where primary structural integrity can be demonstrated as safe.

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**Last of a series on F-111 options**

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