**By Dr Carlo Kopp**

Before Christmas, Sky News screened an in ter view with De fense Min ister Rob ert Hill in which he made a num ber of cu ri ous state ments about the F-111, rais ing se ri ous ques tions about the qual ity of the brief ings he has been re ceiv ing. Min is ters are al ways in the in di vi dual po si tion of be ing large ly re liant upon tech ni cal ad vice from the De part ment – when the qual ity of this ad vice is com pro mised, the min isters are ex posed to crit icism, usu ally undeserved.

• **Hill:** There’ll be a se ri ous is sue as to their [the F-111s] sur vi vabil ity in con flict.

This is cu ri ous in so far as armed with the planned for cruise mis sile, eg AGM-158 JASSM, the F-111 can egress a threat area much faster than an F/A-18A can. The F-111s are now re ceiv ing the Block C-3A up grade in cor po rat ing the DRFM based Elta EL/T-8222 de fensive jammer, which is a gen er a tion be yond the ALQ-126 car ried by the F/A-18A-D and tech no logi cally a peer to the ALQ-165 ASPJ, which will pro vide a more effec ti ve cri sis bombs, to pro vide them with a fol low-on stand-off weapon, a lon ger range mis sile. And that will give us a bet ter strike ca pa bil ity in those dis tant years that you’re talk ing about.

The F-111 debate – and far away?

**Over the Hill – and far away?**

The F-111 has more us able in ter nal vol ume for ad di tional hard ware com pared with a now very cram med F/A-18A HUG. The ar gu ment about hav ing to do up grades con stantly ap plies to all com bat air craft, and will be true of the JSF and F/A-22A as well – Moore’s Law and rap idly evolv ing sen sor and weap ons tech no logy will see to this. It is worth add ing that the bal ance of pay ments fa vours in te grate new weap ons on the F-111 at Amber ley rather than hav ing the work done on the F/A-18A at St Louis.

• **Hill:** So the best ad vice we have is to con cen trate our in ves tment on a fur ther ca pa bil ity in the F/A-18s to give them fur ther pre cision bombs, to pro vide them with a fol low-on stand-off weapon, a lon ger range mis sile. And that will give us a bet ter strike ca pa bil ity in those dis tant years that you’re talk ing about.

US calls for missile guard

Washington – The US has named Northrop Grum man, United Air lines and the North Amer i can subsidiary of British-owned BAE Systems to de vel op and test equip ment to pro tect ci vilian air li ners from sur face-to-air mis sile at tacks. They will de vel op a plan and test proto types to help de termine whether a viable tech no logy ex ists that could be de ployed to coun ter the po ten tial threat that man-port able mis sile sys tems pose to com mercial air craft.

The pro gram had a bud get of US$2 mil lion in 2003 and will pick up anoth er $60 mil lion dol lar in fis cal 2004 and FY 2005.

RSAF close to fighter choice

Singapore – Pre sum ably timed for the Asian Aerospace Exhibition next month, Singapore ex pects to de cide early this year on its choice of 20 new fight ers.

Last year, Singapore short listed three – the Eurofight er Typhoon, France’s Raf ale and Boe ing’s F-15 Eagle.

Singapore faces slowing economy

Singapore – Singapore’s bud get de cline will rise sharply in the year to March 31, forc ing the gov ern ment to cut spend ing in its next bud get due in Feb ruary.

The Min ister of Fi nance is tar get ing a two per cent cut in spend ing by all gov ern ment min is tries for the next fi nan cial year.

The bud get for this year to March is likely to show the de cline in nom i nal GDP, worth about S$1.244 bil lion, be cause of a com bina tion of a weak econ omy and gov ern ment spend ing to off set SARS.

The econ omy grew by an es ti mated 0.8 per cent in 2003, down from 2.2 per cent in the pre vious year.

The report did not ex pect any growth in nom i nal GDP, worth about S$155.7 bil lion, in fis cal 2003.
The F-111 debate

From previous page

than what we have at the moment.
Yet another curious argument, in so far as given the choice of putting the JDAM and JASSM on F-111 or F/A-18A, the Block C-4 F-111 presents a core avionic system easier to integrate these weapons into, while the F-111 can carry twice as many weapons to about twice the distance, and is in strike roles demonstrably more survivable.

The investment argument is no less curious, since the expensive NRE component of the F-111 Block C-4 upgrade has largely been spent, and per forming a full Mil-Std-1760 upgrade on the F/A-18A HUG to give it the same weapons capability now being put into the F-111, duplicating that expenditure on a second platform.

* Hill: You wouldn’t send an F-111 out with out fighter support, so you’re really bound by the range of the fighter. But when you talk about the F/A-18’s range, you’ve also got to appreciate that by 2010/2012 we’ll have new tanker air craft, a new fleet of tanker air craft.

Whether the strike air craft is an F/A-18A or F-111, F/A-18A escorts will be required if Sukhois are expected to be air borne in the target area — this is an inevitability. The idea that F/A-18A escorts protect F/A-18A bomber – the F-111s require no tanker out to 1,000 nautical miles.

Given the errors of fact, the Sky News interview demonstrated the Min is ter was very poorly briefed.

JSF bothers GAO, partners

COPENHAGEN – Danish companies involved in the US-led Joint Strike Fighter program are considering leaving the project because they haven’t received orders from contractors Lockheed Martin.

“If we don’t get firm contracts for the JSF before the summer, we’ll give up on the project as a sub-contractor,” the head of Systematic Software Engineering, Michael Holm, said.

Four Danish firms agreed in the early 1990s to pay the equivalent of €23 million each and the Danish government 722 million kroner to participate in the project.

One Danish executive said: “The Americans have to give for foreign software with a more realistic cost estimate, Comp troller Dov Zakheim says...

To keep within the program’s overall budget, Zakheim approved shifting $5.1 billion from production to the ongoing research phase and he approved reducing to 90 from 160 the total aircraft bought through 2009. In addition, the first production models will be a year later than promised.