The Defence Watch public briefing provides some interesting insights into the thinking of the Defence bureaucracy – especially its capacity to accept obvious contradictions in its own reasoning.

The biggest contradiction lies in thinking on Beyond Visual Range (BVR) air combat.

Defence observed that combat within visual range with two equal combatants leads to “mutually assured destruction”... “We believe you need to be out there engaging Beyond Visual Range.”

The premise that close-in combat is non-viable is reasonable. Exchange rates have historically been below rates using ambush tactics, including modern BVR combat. However, the exceptional off-bore sight and high G capability now in close combat missiles will increasingly become a feature of BVR missiles.

Modern BVR combat involves getting off the first shot. Advantages go to players with bigger radars, long ranging missiles, lower radar signatures, bigger fuel loads and higher sustained speeds. Fuel is energy, energy is life.

Speed is especially valuable as it permits opening and closing distances as quickly as possible to defeat opposing weapons kinematically, provide firing opportunities early, and improve missile range.

The US Air Force F/A-22A tops the pack in precisely these parameters – recently a sole F/A-22A defeated five F-15Cs in a trial engagement.

If BVR combat will do minute future operations, two in immediate contradictions in current Defence bureaucracy thinking emerge.

The first is that the reduced stealth export JSF will be a viable player in this game – its BVR survivability depends on its X-band stealth capability, as it is not a high performance high speed design. Even if the RAAF were to spend a fortune adding a unique and improved EWS suite to offer the hobbled stealth, the battle field strike optimised JSF will never be a strong BVR combat player. The F/A-22A does everything better than the JSF in this game, yet remains ignored in Canberra.

The second contradiction arises when comparing the F/A-18 family and the F-111. In the BVR combat game, the F-111 aerodynamically beats the F/A-18 family on all cardinal parameters. It is much faster, almost twice as fast at the high altitude top end. It carries almost three times the internal fuel of the F/A-18A.

No less importantly, the F-111 can be driven down to a lower radar signature than an F/A-18 A-B, as it can carry stores.

The Pentagon clears tanks for ADF

WASHINGTON – The Pentagon has formally advised it plans to sell 59 General Dynamics M1A1 Abrams Integrated Management tanks and related equipment to Australia in a deal valued at up to US$475 million.

The Defense Security Cooperation Agency notified Congress of the deal.

Australia will buy 59 tanks, seven M88A1 me dium recovery vehicles. The ADF will also get 80 AN/VRC-92F dual long-range single channel ground and air radio systems, 146 night vision goggles, 73 M2 machine guns, and other equipment.

The M1A1/2 Abrams main battle tank is manufactured by General Dynamics Land Systems.

Toray cashes in on B-7E7

TOKYO – Japan’s top maker of synthetic fibre, Toray Industries, has been chosen as Boeing’s sole supplier of carbon fibre for the primary structure – wings and floor beams – of the new 7E7 passenger jet, along with an order for more than US$3 billion worth of carbon fibre materials over 18 years.

Each plane requires about 30 tonnes of carbon fibre. To ray will build a plant in the US for the order.

“We also expect an additional $1 billion order to supply carbon fibre materials for the 7E7’s fuselage,” Toray President Sadayuki Saka kibara said.

The company is also in early discussions with European planemaker Airbus to supply fibre materials for the 55-seat A380.

Italians snatch W’land choppers

ROME – Italy’s Finmeccanica, 32.4 per cent by the Italian government, will buy British partner GKN’s half of the helicopter joint venture, AgustaWestland, for £1.06 billion.

GKN will use the proceeds from selling its stake in the world’s second largest helicopter maker to eye new acquisitions in aerospace or the automotive sector.

It also plans to pay down debt, chief executive Kevin Smith said.

GKN’s chief executive denied reports that it was interested in three US commercial aircraft component factories, which Boeing has put up for sale.

Westland’s fate caused a political furore in Britain in when it seemed Sikorsky would buy it.
Brazil serious on Amazon drugs

BRASILIA – Brazil may shortly allow its air force to start shooting down aircraft suspected of smuggling drugs across its jungles after a six-year delay.

Defence Minister Jose Viegas said the shoot-down law was necessary to “avoid a constant violation by drug traffickers of our airspace,” adding that he expects the decision to be well-received internationally.

A decree has been drafted requiring Brazil’s air force pilots to follow rules of engagement. A law allowing drastic action has existed for six years but as not been ratified by the president.

Brazil’s Amazon jungle region, bordering on drug producers Colombia and Peru, is in increasing used to transport cocaine to Brazilian markets and beyond. Growing consumption of cocaine fuels gang violence in Brazilian cities.

Controversy has surrounded the policy of shooting down suspected drug planes since the Peruvian air force shot down a small plane in April 2001, killing an American missionary and her daughter.

Brazil does not need US help to shoot down suspected planes because it has its own radar tracking capability and fighters.

RAF Hercules in Asia collision

LONDON – Some 20 crew and passengers had a lucky escape over Central Asia when a RAF Hercules was involved in a mid-air collision near the Caspian port of Tuksen-ku shi—but landed safely.

The Hercules, on a flight from Kabul over Turkmenistan, collided with an unidentifiable jet.

“Another transit aircraft managed to clip two propeller blades,” said a ministry spokesman.

The Hercules was able to land safely in Baku, Azerbaijan.