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The Hon J.Howard  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT

Dear Prime Minister,

I am a retired RAAF Air Commodore Aeronautical Engineer who left the Service after gaining some 35 years' experience, and am not prone to criticize Defence matters without serious cause. I have been following developments in Defence since the Tange restructuring with increasing concern for the progressively damaging impact upon the RAAF's force structure and its capabilities, and hence Australia's security. Many of the continuing problems seen with the source selection, procurement, and management processes within Defence and the Defence Materiel Organisation can be traced to the reorganisation, down-sizing, and de-skilling of the RAAF. The inevitable consequences should have placed a premium on using fully and building upon the limited expertise and experience that remained, but the Defence bureaucracy has instead refused consistently to accept any input, whether internal or external, and no matter how well substantiated, where it is seen to conflict in any way with its bureaucratic position. In short, it has not been possible for me or others having some experience and knowledge in Air Power matters to debate or influence Defence in any way, from the Minister down.

As a result, and contrary to well-documented and supported analyses, Defence planning is for:

- The early retirement of Australia's F-111 force based upon operational, technical and financial grounds that have been wholly discredited, a move that will lose completely Australia's current strategic strike capability.
- The procurement of the Joint Strike Fighter which will result in a distorted force structure and ensure that Australia will become a second tier power in our region, unable to regain regional air superiority over the next three decades or longer.
- The purchase of 24 'Super Hornets' to fill a capability gap that Defence has obstinately refused to acknowledge as existing. Unfortunately, this decision will entrench our lost F-111 deterrent capability and make it most difficult, if not impossible, to obtain the capabilities Australia will need to face the growth we are seeing in high-capability Russian fighters in our region.

None of these proposals can withstand informed challenge. Singly and in combination they represent a dangerous and very costly distortion in Australia's force structure which will result in a reduction in Australia's diplomatic and military credibility and capability in our region.

As I see it, the central question is not 'What is wrong with Defence?' That has been largely identified, as has the appropriate corrective action. The central and far more worrying questions are why Defence has demonstrated continually an inability or unwillingness to reform itself, and why Australia's normal Parliamentary checks and balances are not working. At present, Defence is clearly not under adequate supervision and control.

I write to you as a last resort to propose that the decisions being taken by Defence be subjected to rigorous checks and balances by a group having a background of operational and technical experience in the areas concerned. We shall not be leaving Australia's security in a better condition than we found it if these proposals are not challenged.

With kind regards,