

F35 - The New Starfighter?

Suppose, the doorbell rang and a man stood outside, holding a drawing of an airplane up. "This is a new model air-craft with unique features, which will make your son's friends jealous if you buy it."

"Why do you show me the plane but just this drawing?"

"Well, it has not yet been set in production, but all your neighbours have bought it."

"Then it must at least be cheap."

"Not exactly, but it shall be brilliant (if it can fly), therefore it is also much more expensive." As you silently close the door, you hear him add, "But if you buy it, you can take part in our bubble-gum production and there are also other more personal advantages." From the window you see the unsuccessful seller part.

His colleagues from Lockheed Martin had more success with their somewhat similar marketing of their ... eh ... product. Somehow, many politicians were fast in forgetting the problems around a similar construct from the same firm.

The technical details in this article were taken from various Wikipedia articles.

The Lockheed F-104 Starfighter

The Starfighter was used in the years 1958-2004. The poor safety record of the Starfighter brought the aircraft into the public eye. The subsequent bribery scandals surrounding the original purchase contracts caused considerable political controversy in many countries.

In particular the German nation was plagued by frequent accidents. Almost a third of the 916 planes they bought were lost by accidents – there would not have been much left for the enemy – and ironic designations as 'Widowmaker' or 'Flying Coffin' prevailed. In Denmark, 12 of 29 planes crashed.

Perhaps the F35 will fly better and possibly we shall not so easily discover the inevitable corruption scandals. However, from the little which is yet known about this ambitious project, I fear you will experience a 'déjà-vu.'

F35 - the Concept

Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II is a stealth-fighter not yet available. It is tested in different versions since 2006, but mass-production is still years ahead. It is a stealth-aeroplane, manoeuvred by an advanced technology, but it is also a single-engine plane, thus lacking an object of security that most fighter-planes now have. Different versions were projected, but if a single of these is realized, the constructors should now be happy.

It is claimed that the F-35 is superior to all other war-fighters, but this has been doubted – and remains to be proven with the availability of the real plane. In 2008 it was reported that RAND Corporation conducted simulated war games in which Russian Sukhoi Su-35 fighters apparently defeated the F-35.

F35 – the Price

We do not know, how much the F-35 will cost, but realistic estimates may surpass \$ 1/3 trillion a piece, to be combined with much higher maintenance costs than previously known (perhaps one battle and then a week in service?). Thus, a Pentagon study found that it may cost \$1 trillion to maintain the entire fleet over its lifetime. No wonder, for several of the eager costumers, including the United States government, these huge expenses may contribute to their economic disaster.

Let the USA maintain aerial superiority (if the F-35 can really fly reliably). Other countries should then consider if they really need this enormous expense. There are alternatives which are well tested. There is no point in competing with the big brother, whether you consider him an ally or not.

The Danish War against Libya

Such economic considerations were taken in Denmark, origin of the author. Discussing if we need this crippling acquisition (nobody could fear the bankrupted country thereafter), even a conservative parliamentarian (and he also an officer) raised the provocative question, if we at all need an air-force. Hoping to answer it positively, the Danish air-force threw themselves into bombing Libya back to stone age from being the most sophisticatedly developed country in Africa. The army got its war in Afghanistan, the marine hunts Somalian pirates in the Indian Ocean and now the air-force got its air-planes-only war in Libya.

However. The air-force alone cannot win a war, and now, in the fourth, the parties in NATO are seriously discussing, whether or not they should ignore the UN-resolution permitting some limited air-force activity; this resolution talked about enforcing a no-fly-zone for humanitarian reasons, not about unilateral war-fare with the purpose of inducing regime-change in a member-state, and the humanitarian aspect has long been lost. "The mightiest military alliance in history is only 11 weeks into an operation against a poorly armed regime in a sparsely populated country, yet many allies are beginning to run short of munitions," said Gates, the American Minister of war on June 10 [1]. No, Mr. Gates, I do not consider myself one of your allies (I am not a fan of Mr. Ghadafy either). And the air-force can destroy a lot, but alone win no war.

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1 http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110610/ap_on_re_eu/eu_gates_nato_doomed