

By Dr Carlo Kopp

The Barrow Island Gorgon gas processing plant will more than double the economic output of the gas-rich Pilbara region. To the northeast the Timor Sea also shows enormous promise for exports.

This developing economic bonanza also creates a strategic vulnerability of major proportions.

Indonesia's acquisition of modern Russian weapons such as the 750nm-radius Sukhoi Su-30 fighter with long-range, stand off missiles, will provide the capability, perhaps as early as 2005, to attack the gas-processing infrastructure and offshore platforms.

A single, supersonic Raduga 3M-82/Kh-41 Sun burn, MBRPA 3M-55/Kh-61 Yakhont or subsonic Novator 3M-54E1 Alfa anti-shiping cruise missile could cripple – if not destroy – any of these large facilities in a single strike.

These missiles were designed to cut small war ships in half. A single hit could start uncontrollable fires in petrochemical plants and offshore rigs.

Each of the LNG tank farms at Burrup and Gorgon, when full, stores energy equivalent to a 1.3-megaton nuclear war head. The size and enormous radar signature

Keeping the RAAF on its toes



This Sukhoi (a navalised Su-33) has the Sun burn slung in the centreline tunnel, with the Yakhont in the foreground.

of such targets makes them hugely vulnerable to such missiles.

Historically Australia's north has not been regarded as vulnerable. Key targets such as RAAF Learmonth, Tindal, Darwin and Curtin would require a pounding with concrete-piercing bombs to destroy underground or retented fuel tanks and close down runways, or many precision weapon hits or low level strafing to destroy protected aircraft and other infrastructure. A strike package with a dozen or more aircraft would be needed to deliver decisive damage.

However, stand off missiles could do serious damage if there

are tankers and Wedgetail AEW&C aircraft on the apron. They are too large for refuelments and exposed to spall and shrapnel damage.

Unlike guided bombs which require good delivery technique, profiles for shooting Russian anti-ship and land attack cruise missiles are undemanding. Climb to cruise altitude, fly to a pre-planned IP, program the missile with the target position and hit the pickle but ton up to 160 nautical miles away. Then fly home and watch CNN for bomb damage assessment.

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India will buy Israeli AWACs

NEW DELHI – Israel and India are likely to sign a billion-dollar deal for three Phalcon AWACS radar systems within weeks, as a result of

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's curtailed visit to India. The deal is likely to include transfer of source code for the system.

The Phalcon is an Israeli-developed long-range radar warning and control system carried in a Russian Ilyushin-76 cargo plane.

The United States, which had been blocking the sale of Phalcons to both India and China, gave Israel the go-ahead last month.

The Israeli leader arrived in India with a delegation including chief executives of major Israeli armaments firms.



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The notion that the RAN using Aegis class war ships can defend gas industry sites belies several realities – the number of possible high-value targets exceeds any reasonable number of hulls the RAN could operate. Then the sea-skimming profile hides them under the radar horizon until the final 15- to 20-mile run to impact. The 3M-82/Kh-41 and 3M-55/Kh-61 flying mach 2+ at sea level are challenging targets.

Interceptors scrambled from Learmonth with tanker and Wedge-

tail support fare much better, but need to be launched very early on JORN track data to nail the bogey before it can get its shot off.

This presents a hypothetical for Australia. Once the TNI-AU builds up its fleet of Sukhois and missiles, an Indonesia at odds with Canberra would have the option of posing significant economic damage and political embarrassment.

If Australia confined its response to sorties challenging inursions, the RAAF would have to scramble fighters, Wedgetail and tankers to block every sortie tracked by JORN. Repeated probes and U-turns by Su-30 – a Cold War

Russian tactic – could put an enormous strain on the RAAF with out firing a single missile.

Australia may or may not have the option of launching a counter force strike to knock out the Sukhois and their operating bases – like Australia's airfields Indonesia's would require a decent pounding to disable.

We could argue ad nauseum about the intentions of a future Indonesian government – ultimately intent is unknowable, given the ongoing instability in Indonesia. But post-2005, Indonesia's options for sticking it to a recalcitrant Canberra broaden

North Korea rattles new rocket

WASHINGTON – The US has confirmed that North Korea has a new intermediate-range missile capable of striking neighbouring countries, but not the United States – and by inference Australia.

The new weapon is an advance from Scud and No Dong-type missiles, which are based on Soviet-era technology and lack accuracy.

A missile is classified as intermediate if it has a range of between 500km and 5500km. The source would not confirm the weapon is based on an old Soviet submarine-launched missile, the SSN-6

Sawfly. The Seoul newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* reported that the new missile had a range of up to 4000km.

The Scud-type missiles have a range of about 1300km.

In 1998, the Taepo Dong-1, fitted with a solid-propellant third stage, was able to deliver a satellite into an elliptical orbit.

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**John Stackhouse, Killara
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