



Photo special to MDJ

An F-22 Raptor takes off from the runway shared by Lockheed Martin and Dobbins Air Reserve Base.

# MORE RAPTORS

## Obama can make win-win decision for economy

A critical decision point is rapidly approaching for President Obama. On or before March 1, 2009, our new President must decide whether to continue production of F-22 Raptors, or to shut down production after only 183 aircraft are manufactured for the U.S. Air Force. The decision will have a far-reaching impact on our national security, the economy, and on foreign affairs. As American citizens who love freedom, and as American citizens who want our nation to remain strong in both military and economic terms, we need to let our President and our elected officials know where we stand on this important issue. Most Georgia elected officials (e.g., Senator Chambliss and Congressman Gingrey) are already hard at work to preserve F-22 production, but they need our support.



Roger Graham

GUEST COLUMNIST

The date, March 1, 2009, is a critical decision point for President Obama because the 2009 Defense Authorization Act requires him, by that date, to certify that continued production of F-22 aircraft is in the national interest. Without such certification by the President, \$140 million in advance procurement money for parts for 20 new F-22s cannot be expended to keep the manufacturing lines open. Closing the F-22 production line would be costly. Thousands of American workers would lose their jobs. If our decision-makers should later change their minds, it would be even more costly to reopen the F-22 production line. By that time, key employees and suppliers would no longer be readily available to resume F-22 production.

As an Air Force Vietnam War combat veteran, I am convinced there is only one win-win decision that the President can make: Continue F-22 production beyond March 1 until the U.S. Air Force has sufficient numbers of the new, advanced F-22 Raptor air dominance fighters to replace the aging F-15 fleet. A decision to continue F-22 production will be a “win” for America if we buy enough F-22s to protect Americans at home, and deter or defeat America’s enemies abroad; and a decision to continue F-22 production will be a “win” for continued employment of 95,000 American workers who develop and manufacture F-22 aircraft. Importantly, continued F-22 production to a minimum of 250 aircraft will allow American taxpayers to realize a real return on their F-22 investment. Air dominance is key to deterring aggression and winning future wars.

Except for our senior citizens who lived through the Great Depression and World War II, most of us have never seen anything like our current situation. The U.S. and world economies are in a crisis mode; we continue to be engaged in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and, we appear to be involved in an unending war on terrorism. Banks are in distress, companies are going bankrupt or are being bailed out by the government, and workers are losing their jobs in record numbers. If that were not bad enough, Russia, under Vladimir Putin, is embarked on a course calculated to oppose U.S. interests around the world. Russia’s close ally, Iran, opposes the U.S. in Iraq, denies that the Holocaust occurred, supports and finances Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, and wants to “wipe Israel off the map.” Oh, one more thing, Iran (with the help of Russia) has developed a network of some 18 to 30

highly dispersed nuclear facilities in Iran for the development of “peaceful” nuclear power. Russia has nuclear weapons. Russia is supplying nuclear technology and military arms to Iran. Does anyone seriously doubt that Iran is acquiring or developing nuclear weapons? Israel does not.

If you don’t believe we need the F-22, consider Vice President Joe Biden’s recent comments on Feb. 7 at the international security conference in Munich, Germany: Biden warned that “the U.S. stands ready to take pre-emptive action against Tehran if it does not abandon its nuclear ambitions and support for terrorism.” That statement was not made by former President George W. Bush; it was made by Biden (obviously with the prior approval of President Barack Obama).

If push comes to shove, how do Obama and Biden plan to take pre-emptive action against Iran? We have a talented State Department. But it will not be diplomats who take any pre-emptive action against Iran; it will be U.S. military forces that are tasked with that presidential order. Will our U.S. military forces have the capability to carry out that order? That depends on how Congress and our President have equipped our U.S. military forces. Our U.S. military forces will have that capability... if our elected officials have supplied our U.S. military forces with sufficient equipment to carry out that order. Sufficient numbers of F-22s would be crucial to that equation.

How many F-22s do we need? We need to replace some 800 aging F-15 air-superiority aircraft. As time passed, the “requirement” for F-22 fighter jets has decreased from 750, to 381, to 350, and now to somewhere around 250. Gen. Norton Schwartz, the new Air Force Chief of Staff, has indicated that we need at least 60 more F-22s beyond the 183 already delivered or currently on contract order. Although difficult, we must decide *now* how many we need.

We need sufficient numbers of F-22s to deter or defeat actual or potential enemies. Russia is placing increased emphasis on fighter aircraft development and deployment. The latest Russian fighter aircraft (SU-27, SU-35 and MiG-29) are highly maneuverable and effective aircraft. When combined with state of the art ground-to-air missile defenses (e.g., SA-10 and SA-20 anti-aircraft defenses with a reported 75 mile radar radius), the latest Russian fighter aircraft and missiles are a real threat to American interests at home and abroad.

In March 2008, Russian President Putin directed the defense ministry to add more SU-35s and MiG-35s (upgrade of the MiG-29) in the time period before the Sukhoi’s “fifth-generation” PAK-FA type is developed. Iran is buying SA-10 and SA-20 surface-to-air missile batteries from Russia, and Iranian pilots are flying Russian fighter aircraft. The F-22 is the only currently operational American stealth fighter capable of surviving and winning in that environment.

The F-22 is considered to be a transformational fighter aircraft because it is the only fifth-generation air dominance fighter aircraft currently operational in the world. It is a stealthy, highly maneuverable (vectored thrust engines) aircraft capable of sustaining higher than speed-of-sound speeds (supercruise) without engaging afterburn-

ers. It is designed to perform air-to-air combat missions, in addition to air-to-ground combat strikes in a sophisticated ground-to-air missile threat environment. F-22 performance is exceeding expectations.

This is probably the last chance that we (and our new President) are going to get to make the right decision with respect to F-22 production. The F-22 represents the culmination of the latest iteration of fighter aircraft competition in the U.S. defense industry. Initially, in the 1980’s, the F-22 was envisioned to become the premier U.S. fighter aircraft in the Cold War involving the U.S. and the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, some American citizens questioned the need to invest in the development and production of advanced fighter aircraft. However, with the resurgence of Russia’s aircraft and missile industries and foreign policies opposing U.S. interests, the need for the F-22 becomes clear.

In his first televised national press conference, President Obama emphasized that one of the major aims of the “stimulus bill” is to create or “save” at least four million jobs in America. According to the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, a decision by President Obama to continue F-22 production would *save* more than 95,000 direct and indirect jobs in 44 states at Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Pratt & Whitney and the supplier base.

Continued employment is important, so is national defense, and so is worthwhile taxpayer return on investment. As taxpayers, for more than 20 years, we have invested some \$24 billion in F-22 development costs, and we have committed (through our elected representatives) to pay for production costs for 183 F-22 aircraft. We need the F-22 to replace the F-15 for the air dominance mission in a dangerous world. The F-35 multirole fighter, designed to replace the F-16 and complement the F-22, will not start becoming operational until about 2014. If given more time, the F-22 has real potential for foreign military sales to our close allies. Australia, Japan and Israel have expressed strong interest in the F-22.

Air Force leaders have concluded that there is a requirement to buy no fewer than 250 F-22 aircraft to protect America and deter enemies abroad. I cannot think of a better way to spend some of the \$800 billion “stimulus” dollars that the President and Congress are poised to spend in an effort to turn the economy around. If the window of opportunity has passed for stimulus funding for continued F-22 production, Congress and the President can utilize the normal appropriations process.

We “win” if we buy enough F-22s to protect Americans at home, and deter or defeat America’s enemies abroad. We “win” if we save the jobs of some 95,000 employees in 44 states involved in the F-22 Program. Continued F-22 production is essential if American taxpayers are to realize a real return on their investment. We can afford this vital defense program, but we cannot afford to lose this important opportunity.

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