Japan announces domestic stealth fighter

Jason Lomberg, Technical Editor

Responding to regional threats and the United States' refusal to share F-22 technology, Japan is developing its own stealth fighter [1]. The "land of the rising sun" intends to fly its first stealth fighter prototype by 2014.

Japan and Israel have both expressed interest [2] in the "air supremacy weapon", the F-22 Raptor. But due to security concerns over proprietary technology, the F-22 is banned from export [3]. Of course, this hasn't stopped China from reverse-engineering its own F-22 clone, the J-20. Japan and Israel are forced to settle for the F-35.

Apparently, this won't suit Japan's defense needs. According to the AP, Japan has spent 39 billion yen ($473 million) on "Shinshin" ("Spirit") since 2009 when it became clear that the U.S. wouldn't share the F-22. The 2010 National Defense Authorization Act [4] capped the Raptor at 187 planes, ensuring the F-35's preeminence on the world stage. A reversal of the F-22's congressional export ban would require overturning the relevant passage in the National Defense Act; thus far, the Obama Administration has shown no inclination to reverse itself. Secretary Gates et al. sincerely believe that conventional warfare (and the need for air supremacy) is an antiquated concept.

In this 2006 photo released by Japan's Ministry of Defense, an early life-size model of Japan's domestically designed stealth fighter is shown in Japan. A senior military official said Monday, March 7, 2011, Japan is on track to test a domestically designed prototype stealth fighter in three years.

Lt. Gen. Hideyuki Yoshioka, director of air systems development at Japan's Ministry of Defense, was adamant that Japan needed a capable stealth fighter. “Japan wanted the F-22, but Congress didn't agree to that,” Yoshioka said. "We realized that it was important for us to develop our domestic capabilities.”

Russia and China have both announced highly-advanced fifth-gen stealth fighters. Critics say the comparatively meager F-35 is no match for the PAK-FA [5] or the J-20 [6]. This doesn’t bode well for Japan, which relies heavily on the United States for its own defense.

“If the countries surrounding Japan have stealth capabilities, Japan will need to develop those capabilities itself to ensure our own defense,” said Col. Yoshikazu Takizawa of the Defense Ministry's Technical Research and Development Institute.

Again, it’s worth pointing out that Japan **does** have access to a fifth-gen stealth fighter (the F-35). But the island nation obviously feels the “Joint Strike Fighter” isn’t sufficient.

Beyond defense, there’s another important consideration—just as Japan took over the consumer electronics industry, so could they become the preeminent supplier of "air supremacy weapons" for the free world.

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