



### **Why Canada's Fighter Jet Deficit Threatens Canadian Security and the NORAD Mission**

*Admiral Bill Gortney completed 39 years of military service as Commander of the binational North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and Commander of the United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM).*

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#### **CI: What are the threats Canada faces in the fulfillment of its NORAD mission?**

In the context of the early Cold War, NORAD commanders thought the battle would take place right over the United States and Canadian border. Now, the territorial range of threat is much larger. Russia has the firepower and weapons technology to hold a great deal of North America at risk. As well, there are now more states with the ability to deliver lethal force to the North American homeland. As technology opens the door to greater threats, so must the technology of the NORAD partners be continually upgraded to defeat current and future threats.

Today's NORAD mission demands that fighters have the ability to fly great distances and stay on station for a long time with the right amount of signature reduction, integrated active defensive measures, Active Electronically Scanned Array radars, and long-range infrared systems.

#### **CI: How important is interoperability between the United States and Canada?**

No air force fights alone, not the U.S. Navy, not the U.S. Air Force, and not the RCAF. No one air force owns all of the capabilities required to succeed in today's—and tomorrow's—threat environments.

For this reason, interoperability is essential. With the same type of equipment and a common language, it is very easy for military personnel from the United States and Canada to train and operate together. Both forces have the same missions, and operate in very similar threat environments. Both are required to surveil and defend a vast amount of battle space. This may mean engaging hostile fighters, bombers, and small radar cross-section cruise missiles in extremely harsh conditions.

For these reasons interoperability crosses into procurement of capability. The current debate by the Canada over their fighter force has impacts on the United States Navy and Naval Aviation. It is for this reason I am having this discussion with you.

**CI: Will Canada's current fighter jets be sufficient to fulfill the NORAD mission?**

Canadian fighter pilots are the best I have flown with or commanded. I have been taught by Canadian F-18 pilots and have taught Canadian F-18 pilots. Historically, Canada has done an excellent job meeting its NORAD commitments with the F-18s. Against the odds, it continues to do a remarkable job with its Legacy Hornets. But, Canada's current fleet is more than 30 years old, down from 138 to 76 aircraft. There are finite limits to how long you can extend the operational life of an aircraft and it is difficult to modernize an aging aircraft without adding too much weight.

**CI: What choices does the Government of Canada face as it seeks to upgrade its fighter jets?**

As they seek to replace the current fleet, Canadian decision makers have to consider both capability and capacity. Capability means that an aircraft meets such core criteria as power, weight, technology, interoperability with allies, and the ability to fight and win in today's and tomorrow's threat environment. Capacity refers to whether there are enough aircraft available to be deployed to meet mission demands.

Guided by the criteria of capability and capacity, I see three potential courses of action for Canada. **The first** is to launch a formal competition and choose from among the best proposals. While this is a rational course of action, it will take many years to complete. Until the new aircraft are delivered, Canada will continue to face both a capability and capacity gap.

**The second** course of action is to purchase used F-18s from Australia. This will assist with the capacity gap, but does not address the capability gap the RCAF faces today. Additionally, the cost of this decision is unclear.

For one thing, the Australian aircraft might not be in optimal condition. High-speed flight and repeated takeoffs and landings take a heavy toll. Second, it is more and more difficult to find spare parts for these older models. Maintenance crews are forced to cannibalize some jets to keep others in the air. There are only so many times the lives of the current aircraft can be extended before putting the safety of pilots at risk. Third, it is more costly to maintain older aircraft than newer ones. The United States Navy's most expensive aircraft to maintain are its Legacy Hornets. And again, used Legacy Hornets will still not provide the modernized fighter capability that the RCAF needs to counter rapidly evolving global threats. For these various reasons, the United States Navy is accelerating the retirement of its Legacy Hornets, and replacing them with new, more advanced Super Hornets.

**The third** course of action is to fulfill the IFCP and purchase new Super Hornets. They are available, can be delivered quickly and, their acquisition does not preclude a full

competition for complementary aircraft later. This option assists with both the capability and capacity challenges, and would be less expensive than purchasing, updating, and maintaining the Australian Legacy Hornets. Remember, today's Super Hornet is not yesterday's Hornet. It carries more fuel, more weapons, and possesses signature reductions that give it much better offensive and defensive capabilities.

**CI: What about the Arctic?**

The Arctic is challenging terrain characterized by short runways and austere environments. Hard landings for aircraft are common. The Super Hornet is well suited to operate in the harsh Canadian climate and respond to the rapidly evolving Russian bomber/long range cruise missile threat

**CI: How important is stealth?**

Despite what we see in the movies, stealth does not make an aircraft invisible. It is a combination of technologies that provides a slight head start in the time it takes your opponent to identify and engage you. But technologies are always improving and today's physics will always be defeated by tomorrow's physics. So counting on current stealth technology to be effective against future threats is not a 100 percent safe bet. And, it is prohibitively expensive to have a fleet with 100 percent stealth, when having 100 percent of your fleet stealthy is not required. Instead, we look for the right balance of blended signature reduction capabilities, self-protection, weapons capacity and range at an affordable cost. The United States Navy is finding the right balance with a combination of F-35C's and Advanced Super Hornets.

**CI: What's at stake for Canadians?**

Regardless of which country we are in, purchasing and maintaining military capability is heavily influenced by politics, and I have no desire to enter that political debate. It is a fact that there is a both a capability and capacity shortfall in the RCAF and Canadians will decide how to either solve those shortfalls, or decide to place the risk associated with those shortfalls onto their Airmen. As global threats escalate, it is important that Canada chooses a course of action – quickly – that fills these critical gaps, and that the solution allows the critical interoperability we discussed previously.