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## Introduction

# Stealth, the Edge for the Twenty-first Century

"Stealth gives us back that fundamental element of war called surprise," John J. Welch, Jr., assistant secretary of the Air Force for acquisition, said shortly after the end of Operation Desert Storm. "Anytime you're able to keep surprise, you keep the advantage."

That edge or upper hand that Secretary Welch refers to was spectacularly demonstrated night after night over the skies of Baghdad, Iraq, by the Air Force Lockheed F-117A Stealth Fighters during the six weeks of Desert Storm. The Black Jet flew into the heart of the world's most heavily defended air space and came back unscathed. The air over Baghdad was tougher, in fact, than North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces would have encountered if they would have gone against in Eastern European forces and targets, said Secretary of the Air Force Donald B. Rice.

"We've seen that not only does stealth work, but that it puts fewer assets at risk and saves lives," Rice said at a briefing during Stealth Week activities in mid-June 1991.

During the 1991 Gulf War, F-117As represented only two percent of the attack aircraft in the theater but took out over forty percent of the strategic targets. The force of forty-three F-117As that operated during the air campaign of Desert Storm suffered no losses, even though it went against one of the most modern and highly integrated air defense systems in the world.

The advantage of stealth technology can best be demonstrated during the air raids on the nuclear reactor facility south of Baghdad. A strike force of conventional aircraft made up of sixty attack, fighter, Wild Weasel (surface-to-air missile [SAM] destroyer), and electronic countermeasures (ECM) aircraft, plus fifteen KC-135 aerial tankers, failed in their efforts to destroy the reactor facility.

Call in the F-117A Stealth Fighter. With the support of only two aerial tankers, versus fifteen for the unsuccessful raid, eight F-117A aircraft, versus sixty conventional aircraft, eight F-117As carrying sixteen laser-guided bombs destroyed three of the four reactors in one raid. Fewer planes and, more importantly, fewer lives were put at risk because of stealth.

"Stealth saves lives, money, and does the job better," Rice said. "It sounds like the kind of thing we need in the force," he added, advocating the need for the B-2 Stealth Bomber and the F-22A Advanced Tactical Fighter.

With the F-117A and Advanced Cruise Missile already fielded, adding the B-2A and F22A will give the Air Force the right mix of stealth and conventional technology to tackle mission requirements well into the twenty-first century.

Stealth does not spell an end to conventional forces, said Rice. "Stealth aircraft will complement, not replace nonstealthy aircraft in the current inventory. We will still have F-16s and F-15Es and other nonstealthy aircraft in the force structure for a long time to come," the secretary added. "But we need that cutting edge component of the force that can go in the lead on day one against the toughest defenses."

"Everyone now agrees the F-117 was a real bargain," Rice said. "I visited with F-117 pilots who came back from the war and asked them what would they do to improve their machines. And their answers were more range and payload. Sounds like the B-2 to me. The B-2 will give us five to six times the unrefueled range, will carry up to ten times the payload of the F-117, but cost five to six times as much. Any way you slice it, we're getting a lot more delivery payload per dollar expended from the B-2 than we get out of the F-117."

Stealth costs more, initially. The B-2 bomber's flyaway cost is \$437.4 million in fiscal 1991 dollars. But comparing total costs for the B-52 and B-47, the B-2 actually costs less. "We have to keep affordability in context," said Secretary Welch. "What things do you buy today that don't cost two, three, even seven times as much as they did in the 1950s [when the Air Force purchased the B-52 and B-47]?" He pointed out that we spend a smaller percentage of our military budget on the B-2 than we did on the B-52 and B-47. When you add into the equation all the dollars spent over the last thirty-five years to keep the B-52 current, the B-2's cost seems even more reasonable.

A recent Air Force Association paper on the B-2 put the value into proper context. "The B-2 has a greater range than the B-1B and B-52H when flying comparable mission profiles with the same or larger payload. Stationed in just three bases, one in the continental United States and two overseas (Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and Guam in the Pacific), B-2s could hit targets virtually anywhere in the world in a matter of 10 hours with just one refueling, minimal preparation time, and few support assets. No other weapon system can."

With the B-2, the United States gets a multirole weapon that can perform conventional, strategic, and even maritime missions if purchased in sufficient numbers.

Aviation Week & Space Technology for the week of January 20, 1992, reported that the House of Representatives has already voted to keep the B-2 production at fifteen airplanes, and said that ten operational B-2s are sufficient to conduct military operations.

But Air Force Secretary Rice said ten B2s are not enough. "The latest independent studies show that kind of conventional operations, which would call strongly for the use of the capabilities that the B-2 offers, demand operational forces in the range of forty, fifty, or sixty bombers, depending on what range of scenarios you're handling," Rice told the Senate Armed Services Committee on 19 June 1991.

In making a case for the F-22A, Secretary Welch said, "With the F-22, we can ensure air superiority, an element we've controlled since World War II. Once you get air superiority, you can do all the other things. Without it, you can't do

very much."

The same feeling was voiced by Gen. John Michael Loh, commander of Tactical Air Command, in testimony to Congress. "We need the F-22 for three reasons," he said. "First, air superiority is our most critical mission because it gives all our forces the freedom of action and ability to conduct all other air and ground missions.

"Second, the former Soviets [now called the Commonwealth of Independent States] continue to modernize all elements of their air defense system and are willing to export them virtually around the world (this is our greatest threat now that the Soviet Union no longer exists). We need the ability to penetrate, operate in, survive, and destroy targets in the sophisticated air defense environment of the future for all regional contingencies.

"Finally, it is impossible to give the aging F-15 the combination of stealth, supersonic cruise, supportability, and the weapons we get with the F-22—a combination we must have to maintain our advantage in the air."

The F-22 will be the first aircraft to combine low-observable technology (stealth) and air superiority capabilities. With its superior radar system and weapons such as the Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM), it will have firstlook, first-shoot, and firstkill capabilities.

The arguments against the F-22 include its cost (just under \$60 billion for approximately 650 aircraft) and the fact that the Air Force currently enjoys air superiority with the F-15 that saw its first flight over twenty years ago with its roots going back to the Robert S. McNamara generated requirements of the early to mid-1960s. (McNamara was secretary of defense during the John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson administrations.) By the time the first operational F-22A goes into squadron service in the mid- to late 1990s, the basic F-15 design will be over thirty-five years old.

Advanced aircraft such as the Russian MiG-29, MiG-31, Su-27, and France's Mirage family of aircraft are in the hands of many third world countries. These same aircraft have already been called aerodynamic equals to the F-15. Secretary Rice said the real issue is "air superiority into the next century. We're not interested in an even match in the skies. We're interested in maintaining American air superiority."

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