

The news stories that dominated the Farnborough air show this year were probably not the ones that everybody expected: the non-appearance of the F35-B and the replacement of Phillip Hammond by Michael Fallon as defence secretary. ♦

Rumours about the non-appearance of the F35 surfaced during last week's airpower conference in London, reflects Nick Watts, Deputy Director of the U K Defence Forum, whose report on it was published here on 14th July. The planned programme had envisaged a fly past by the F35-B Lightning II at the naming ceremony of the Royal Navy's new Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier at Rosyth on July 4th. This would have been followed by a flying display at the Fairford air tattoo, over the weekend, and then on to Farnborough. But technology intervened, in the form of an engine fire and the aircraft has been grounded pending investigation.

The political rumours which keep the Westminster village on its toes permeated as far as Farnborough once the news that Phillip Hammond was heading to the Foreign Office became known. Hammond had been at Farnborough on Monday. His replacement Michael Fallon had also been at Farnborough in his capacity as Minister of State for Business and Energy at BIS. There was some reassurance around the exhibition halls and chalets that Fallon did seem to understand the importance of defence industry, even if he doesn't yet grasp the intricacies of regimental or service traditions.

As the major European air show this year, Farnborough alternates with Paris, the number of exhibitors and delegations was testimony to the resilience of this sector (We'll be reflecting on this in due course). The civil aerospace sector is watching as newer manufacturers from 'emerging' economies such as Brazil, Malaya, Korea and others begin to eat into sectors previously dominated by the big players such as Airbus and Boeing. The defence sector is also seeing increasing numbers of adaptations of civil airframes into low cost defence platforms. The days of Big And Expensive may soon be over.

For its part the UK had some good news to announce. Defence exports for 2013 were up by 13% on the previous year. The total value of contracts signed in 2013 was ♦9.8 bn for defence sales and ♦ 3.2 bn for security products. The UK has a 22% share of the global defence sales market, making it the second largest exporter after the US: the growing security products market secured a 4% share of the global security products market.

The UK also announced that the Defence Growth Partnership, a joint government- industry venture was implementing a ♦30 m programme over 3 years. A Defence Solutions Centre, to be based at Farnborough, will harness the collective efforts of industry and government to ensure that the UK retains its position as a player in an increasingly competitive sector.

Next year the flying circus moves to Paris and London will host DSEI in September. It must be hoped that by then the F35 is flying well. As to who will be in the pilot's seat in the MOD; the voters will decide on May 7th 2015.