

CONFERENCE CALL



To counter the growing threat of improvised explosive devices, DOD and the Army employed multiple contractors simultaneously to rapidly produce and deploy thousands of MRAP vehicles within a short, 2-year time span. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Mark B. Matthews.)

Army Acquisition Evolves During Overseas Contingency Operations

Kris Osborn

The U.S. Army acquisition community can best serve Soldiers at war by seeking at times to properly blend traditional acquisition practices with rapid and so-called hybrid approaches, said MG R. Mark Brown, Deputy for Acquisition and Systems Management in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology (ASAALT).

“We have to remain flexible. We have to be responsive to the warfighter’s theater needs,” Brown said, speaking to an audience of military and industry Jan. 14, 2011, at the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) Institute of Land Warfare’s Aviation Symposium and Exhibition, National Harbor, MD.

Flexibility includes innovation to adjust to enemy techniques and tactics.

The current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have required the Army to adapt its acquisition practices to be more efficient and more nimble in certain critical situations. The Army can accelerate, adjust, and, in some cases, bypass traditional acquisition processes in order to meet urgent operational needs. For example, DOD and the Army moved to rapidly produce and deploy thousands of Mine Resistant

Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles needed to counter the growing threat of improvised explosive devices.

This critical flexibility requires weighing traditional, DOD 5000 series acquisition procedures against more rapid approaches that promise speedier delivery of needed wartime gear and technologies. The Army has learned to perform this delicate balancing act and

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respond quickly when enemy tactics have outpaced current technology, Brown said.

Traditional Acquisition

Traditional approaches, which follow procurement practices delineated in DOD 5000 Defense Acquisition System guidelines, are much more deliberative, Brown said. They require extensive checks and balances including numerous certifications, specified plans, and documents at various stages in the acquisition process.

For example, a traditional, DOD 5000 Program of Record must have an approved requirement, Analysis of Alternatives Guidance, Initial Capabilities Documents, and a Capability Development Document. In addition, each of the milestones requires specific certifications such as verification of an approved technology development strategy, and a requirement to fully fund research and procurement plans for the life of the entire program.

“The hurdle gets increasingly high as you go through Milestone A and Milestone B. ... There is something called Section 2366 certification [DOD 5000]: Under Section 2366A, you must certify certain things for Milestone A. You must have an approved Technology Development Strategy, and RDT&E [Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation] must be fully funded for the entire program. You must have an improved Technology Readiness Assessment,” Brown said.

Milestone B requires an additional host of certifications, such as a fully funded

production program throughout the life of a given program before it can enter Milestone C, Brown said.

“So what we really need is some kind of hybrid process: shorter acquisitions, more mature acquisitions—buying less more often,” he said.

Nevertheless, these traditional processes are worthwhile and are indispensable to the success of many programs, such as those requiring a multiyear procurement strategy. Brown cited the UH-60 Black Hawk M helicopter as an example of the successful use of traditional acquisition approaches.

“There were some needs associated with this program [UH-60M] after it was fielded. Those needs were met through

the official way under the DOD 5000 traditional system; those needs were fly-by-wire, Common Aviation Architecture System, full authority digital engine control, and a composite tail cone,” he said.

“If you are going to have a big program that is going to have a long-term, far-reaching impact where we are going to spend billions and billions, like the Joint Strike Fighter, you might want to go the traditional route. But one size does not fit all,” Brown told the AUSA audience.

For instance, shorter processes can succeed for most Soldier equipment, Brown said. Improvements to Soldiers’ body armor fall in this category, Army officials indicated.

Rapid Acquisition

“In the rapid acquisition system, you get an ONS [Operational Needs Statement] or JUONS [Joint Urgent Operational Needs Statement]. You go to the Army Requirements and Resources Board and get some OCO [overseas contingency operations]

The UH-60 Black Hawk M helicopter is an example of the successful use of traditional acquisition approaches. (Photo courtesy of the National Guard Bureau.)





The acquisition strategy of the Army's Gray Eagle Unmanned Aerial System blended traditional and rapid approaches. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Roland Hale, Enhanced Combat Aviation Brigade, 1st Infantry Division Public Affairs Office.)

dollars. You go out and buy something off-the-shelf and run it through a very rapid safety assessment and a Capabilities and Limitations Report. Then you send it into the fight. We have had a substantial amount of success with this," Brown said. As an example, Brown cited the UH-72A Lakota Light Utility Helicopter, which went from vision and concept to first unit equipped in four years. Trade-offs were made to accommodate the accelerated developmental time frame, Brown explained. Due to its speedy developmental cycle, the Lakota was not certified for combat; however, the arrival of the Lakota—now deployed in various key regions throughout the world—freed up Black Hawks, which were needed in Iraq and Afghanistan, he said.

Hybrid Acquisition

Acquisition strategies that blend traditional and rapid approaches can be particularly useful when the Army seeks both to develop a needed future technology and to deliver capability rapidly to Soldiers at war, Brown explained.

An example is the Army's Gray Eagle Unmanned Aerial System program,

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Brown said. The Army has deployed two Quick Reaction Capabilities (QRCs) of the aircraft to Iraq and Afghanistan while pursuing a traditional Gray Eagle Program of Record.

From the time the Gray Eagle was designated as a QRC, a rapid acquisition, it took the Army 18 months to get it into the fight. "Somewhere in between QRC 1 and QRC 2, it was designated as a Program of Record," Brown said. "Because of its urgency to the fight, putting eyes on the enemy, the Defense Department and the Army leadership were willing to defer some of those high hurdles typically associated with traditional acquisition practices."

As with the Gray Eagle, hybrid approaches can afford the Army the opportunity to fast-track a needed technology and still preserve the checks, balances, and certifications

typically associated with traditional acquisition practices.

However, each method—traditional, rapid, or hybrid—meets the specific demands of a particular situation. This calls for a balanced approach whereby the Army selectively calls upon and employs a range of acquisition techniques.

The slides from Brown's AUSA presentation are available at <http://www.crprogroupp.com/2011%20AVIATION%20PRESENTATIONS/Thurs/PM/MG%20Mark%20Brown.pdf>.

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