

Serious Changes Coming for Military Acquisition

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The way the military buys weapon systems needs serious reform, and it appears that the House Armed Services Committee agrees. Chairman Mac Thornberry (R-Texas) recently introduced H.R. 4741, the Acquisition Agility Act.



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This legislation is a good start toward fixing a system that not only saddles taxpayers with the unnecessary costs of a broken procurement system, but remains unresponsive to the needs of the warfighter.

First-Hand Experience. Having served as officers in the U.S. military, both authors witnessed the disconnect between needs on the ground and the technology provided. For example, when the Army moved from the five-ton truck to the Family of Medium Tactical Vehicles (FMTV), it failed to account for the fact that this vehicle would be the prime hauler of heavy M198 howitzers. The tow pintle for the FMTVs were greatly recessed, causing the trails of the gun to ride up against the lower portion of the vehicle at every turn. As a result, every FMTV that pulled a howitzer had its lower bumper bent upward almost 45 degrees.

Also, cargo bows and tarps for troops transport vehicles were constantly breaking and ripping because the bows were not strong enough to support the tarps during inclement weather. The Army spent enormous time, money and manpower repeatedly fixing failed materials instead of having new ones designed that could withstand the elements.

The fighter aircraft acquisition process for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter proved equally cumbersome. The government and contractors rarely appreciated technological realities or understood the time needed to develop them. Moreover, neither the government nor its contractors had incentives to provide the warfighter with this next generation platform on-time and within budget. These multi-billion dollar programs became Too Big To Fail. Taxpayers have since paid the bill on this and other contracts — such as for the F-22 Raptor Stealth Fighter — that have consistently experienced costs overruns and repeatedly failed to meet deadlines.

The Acquisition Agility Act Could Improve the System. The proposed legislation would no longer allow officers and enlisted to be single-tracked in an Acquisition career. Officers and enlisted would return to “dual tracking,” which means they would retain their career field, but could serve an assignment as an Acquisition officer. This approach would allow an active duty member to bring knowledge and on-the-ground experience to the acquisition field to ensure the military purchases products that units need.

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Moreover, dual tracking means individuals will likely have to deploy and operate those acquired systems. In other words, they will have skin in the game. Short-term assignment will also limit opportunities for uniformed members to develop conflicting allegiances due to their desire to promote closer relations with the defense industry and their military service.

The bill could also improve incentives for delivering weapon systems on time and on budget, especially for major defense programs like the U.S. Air Force's latest next-generation project, the Long Range Strike Bomber (LRS-B). One critical piece of this involves holding the services accountable by creating a milestone system for these enormous programs.

In order to ensure transparency in ongoing processes, *The Acquisition Agility Act* would implement an "Acquisition Scorecard" system. This new practice would be based on existing reports and documents, and therefore would not impose new work on DOD personnel. The transparency a scorecard demands is another key to incentivizing efficiency in a system that currently lacks it. Thus:

"Milestone A Scorecard: Compares program and independent estimates of cost, schedule, and technical risk, and analysis of alternatives sufficiency.

"Milestone B Scorecard: Shows program and independent estimates of cost, schedule, and technical risk.

"Milestone C Scorecard: Shows program and independent estimates of cost, schedule, and manufacturing risk."

Concerns with the Bill. The specific directive in the bill to the Secretary of each military department to establish an "oversight board" for managing prototype projects for weapons system components could very well promote further growth of an already bloated Defense Department bureaucracy. Instead, the military services could utilize their respective experts in order to provide objective oversight of prototype projects. For instance, if it is a new communications system, the U.S. Army Signal School at Ft. Gordon should be used. Likewise, new fighter aircraft systems have Naval and Air Force experts to pull from, such as Top Gun. The DOD must decentralize decision-making on weapons

systems acquisition. Less Beltway and more practitioner input.

Additionally, the bill does not specify how the defense industry would be held accountable. The proposed legislation could spell out more explicitly when and how a defense contractor will be held responsible for inefficiencies and cost overruns. It could also encourage development of risk-sharing agreements between the government and each contractor to ensure those responsible for delays are properly identified. In short, a transparent and well-organized system could help the U.S. government avoid the seemingly endless process of "changing requirements" that often leads to costly interruptions in the acquisition process.

Conclusion. *The Acquisition Agility Act of FY 2017* is a good start to repairing a severely broken system. It reforms the acquisition system to provide more warfighter input and less from DOD bureaucrats. Additional modifications to address auditing prototypes and defense contractors' performance incentives would only strengthen the bill.

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Recommendations for Military Reform

- **Build** a military ready to deploy and capable of defending America.
- **Reduce** the growth of the DoD bureaucracy.
- **Transform** warfighting strategies so as to not create unnecessary risk for our men and women in combat zones.
- **Reform** the military acquisition process so warfighters receive modern weapon systems on time and under budget.
- **Compensate** our men and women in the military at a pay rate above poverty level.

Source: *Provide for the Common Defense Now!* National Center for Policy Analysis. Available at <http://www.ncpa.org/#sthash.cPRNm1gd.dpuf>.