

Marine Corps Working to Equip Warfighters, Remove Roadblocks

Ensuring Simple, Rapid Response to USMC Warfighter Acquisition Requirements

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Why can't the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) warfighter simply and rapidly register an acquisition requirement and, in turn, receive a simple and rapid response (i.e., less than one year) that the requirement was either initiated or disapproved?

This article addresses the problem of delayed response time and my personal "lesson learned" in alleviating it, based on cumulative experiences over the last 12 years in varied positions. From a warfighter's perspective, this breadth of experience has allowed me to view the problem from company level to Commander in Chief (CINC) headquarters level, while also affording me the perspective of the acquisition professional trying to solve a warfighter's problem.

Registering Requirements

Before proceeding to a full-scale discussion, allow me to bound the scope of the problem. First of all, this problem is most prevalent in the less-than-major ACATs [Acquisition Categories], i.e., ACAT III and IV), and to some extent in the major system category of ACAT II. Second, registration of requirements by the Headquarters level that have been derived from Marine Corps Strategic Plans, Mission Area Analyses, etc., is not at issue.

Rather, the difficulty in registration of requirements from the CINC Service

Component level and below is the focus of my concern—where command tour lengths of 18-24 months create an expectation that an answer to the request will be forthcoming within a year.

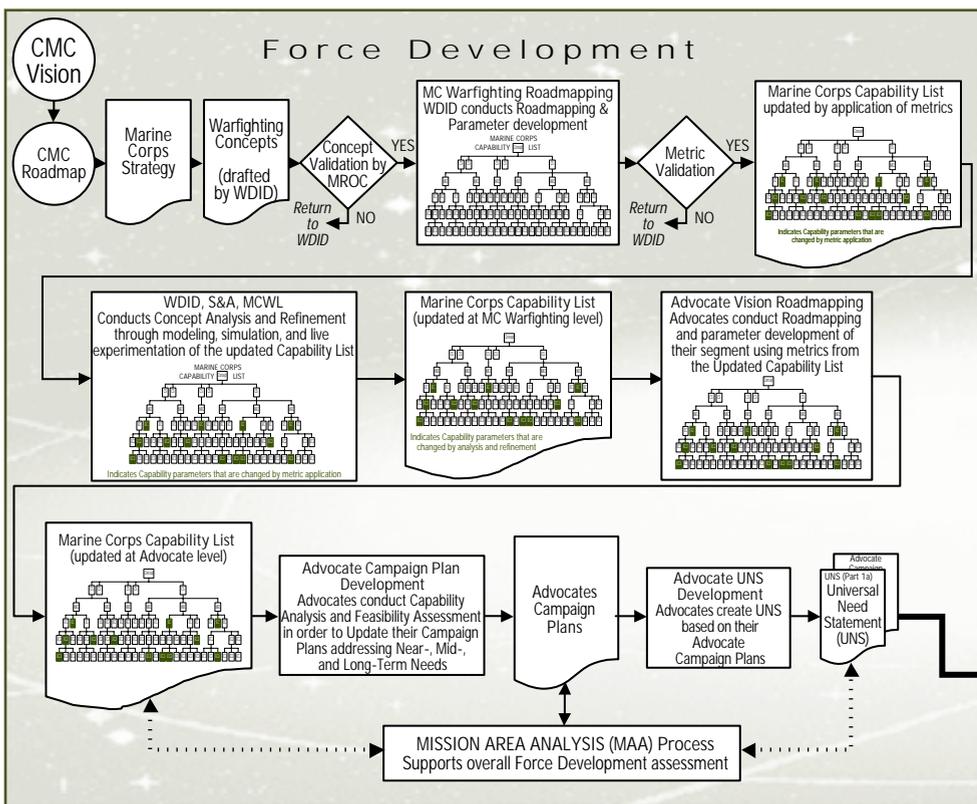
The Reality

Before solution must precede understanding. To understand a problem, we need to comprehend *what* the impact of the problem is and *why* the problem persists. Likewise, for a "lesson learned" to be of enduring worth, it needs to address an enduring problem. The fact that an enduring problem exists does not

mean that the solution must be complex, but the problem's very endurance does demand that the solution be complete and consider all stakeholders impacted by both the problem and its solution.

In this case, the impact of the problem is not catastrophic, nor does it render the warfighters ineffective, but it *does* create serious inefficiencies. Specifically, when faced with the frustration over the difficulties of rapidly initiating acquisition programs, the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) warfighters have resorted

The Concept-based Requirements Process



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to meeting their acquisition needs themselves through local purchases without benefit of comprehensive sustainment packages or adequate additional manning. Three salient examples of this situation come to mind:

- I MEF's Non-Lethal Weapons (NLW) program
- II MEF's Riverine Center of Excellence
- I MEF's Mobile Command Post.

In the case of the NLW program, I MEF was responding to the needs of the Somalia peacekeeping operation and procured a variety of NLW items from Commercial Off-the Shelf (COTS) vendors. It took a number of years before the program was initiated Marine Corps-wide, resulting in I MEF meeting CINC needs in the interim through purchases from Operations and Maintenance (O&M) vs. procurement funding.

Similarly, II MEF, in response to CINC-SOUTH [Commander in Chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe] requirements for a capability to train South and Central American countries in riverine operations, cobbled together a variety of COTS and Government Off-the-Shelf

(GOTS) small boats. Capitalizing on USMC skills, II MEF created a capability "out of hide." In the interim, to equip the Riverine Center of Excellence until the program was formally established, II MEF yet again used O&M funds at hand vs. waiting to budget more procurement dollars in the next POM [Program Objective Memorandum] cycle.

Currently, the I MEF Mobile Command Post is another case in point, where the warfighter, in response to CINC CENT [Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command] requirements, has purchased COTS vans and configured them with a mix of COTS and GOTS command as well as control equipment to meet tailored theater demands.

In characterizing the situation, we find the MEF-level warfighters rapidly responding to individual CINC's demands with acquisitions in relatively small increments (i.e., ACAT IV), but when applied in aggregate over time and across all MEFs, can reach low ACAT II thresholds. These acquisitions, in turn, are at least initially devoid of any life cycle sustainment support. As a result, they have proven to be effective *immediate* re-

sponses to CINC needs, but are inefficient in the *long term*.

Root Causes

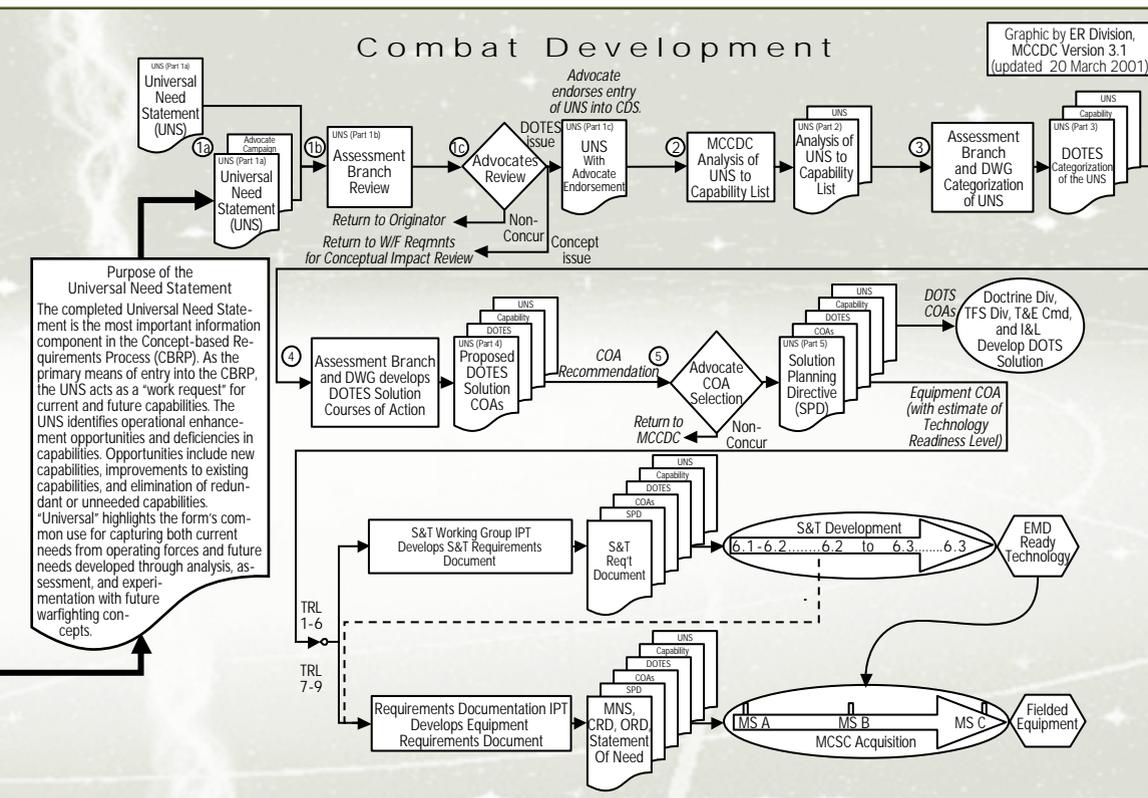
Why does this problem persist? In analyzing the problem, three root causes are readily identifiable:

- First, both ignorance of, and lack of confidence in the current requirements initiation procedures on the part of Marine Corps warfighters prevails.
- Second, the current requirements initiation procedures, codified in Marine Corps Order (MCO) 3900.4D, *Marine Corps Program Initiation and Operational Requirements Documents*, published in 1991, create a process that is, at best, ponderous.
- Third, the growing pace of CINC demands on the warfighters drive local, short-term, band-aid remedies.

Ignorance of, Lack of Confidence in Current Procedures

To understand why there is both ignorance of, and lack of confidence in, the requirements initiation procedures, we need to understand both the past and the current context in which warfighters

have experienced the requirements process. At first blush, a simplistic analysis might conclude that the lack of confidence was the result of the drawdown of the Armed Forces in the 1990s. During the drawdown years, it could be argued that it frequently did not matter what requirement initiation procedures were in place due to endemic lack of both Research, Development, Test and Evaluation (RDT&E) and procurement funding. This, however, is not the case. Even during the Reagan boom years of acquisition funding in the 1980s, requirements initiation was problematic. At that time, responsi-



bility for requirements determination rested upon the acquisition executive—then Marine Corps Development Center. This situation did not facilitate linking requirements to evolving doctrine/concepts.

Accordingly, the Marine Corps took a big step forward and repositioned responsibility for requirements determination in the Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC) to facilitate linkage with the USMC concepts-based requirements philosophy. The 1991 MCO 3900.4D codified this responsibility and went a long way toward ensuring complete requirements determination once MCCDC received the request from the warfighter. However, it did not change the dynamics for the warfighter in terms of the rapidity of initiating requirements.

On the contrary. In the 1990s, as the Defense Reform Act of 1986 kicked into gear, the increased quality of requirements documentation necessary to initiate an acquisition effectively increased MCCDC's workload dramatically. This increase in quality documentation was essential to ensure that programs got off to a coherent start, but it did complicate the issue for warfighters. Simply, it introduced greater lag time for MCCDC to produce the required documentation. Lag time continued to grow, while MCCDC concurrently struggled with falling manpower levels resulting from drawdown of the Armed Forces. Lag time grew even longer as the limited manpower at MCCDC concentrated on higher-priority programs vs. fairly inexpensive ACAT IV-level requests.

While delay at MCCDC elongated, available time (which quality requirements documentation demands) drastically shriveled for the warfighter to expend on increased user liaison with MCCDC, due to a skyrocketing OPSTEMPO [Operations Tempo] in the 1990s. The end result was that despite real qualitative improvements in requirements initiation documentation and synchronization with doctrine, rapidity and simplicity for the warfighter did not

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improve. Hence, warfighter ignorance of, and lack of confidence in the requirements initiation procedures persisted.

Requirements Initiation Procedures

This brings us to our second root cause of the basic problem—the current requirements initiation procedures as codified in MCO 3900.4D. As already covered, this order has improved quality through linkage to the concept-based requirements system, but it did not improve the speed of the process. Essentially, a request from a warfighter, normally in the form of a Fleet Operational Need Statement, will be translated into

a feasibility estimate and then staffed through MCCDC, Headquarters Marine Corps, and the other principal Marine Corps warfighters' headquarters (i.e., Marine Forces Atlantic, Pacific and Reserve). While thorough but frequently sequential in nature, this process does not promote rapid consensus building or quick issue resolution.

CINC Demands on Warfighters

This lack of consensus is the crux of the third root cause for the problem, which is the growing pace of CINC demands on the warfighters. CINC demands are inherently parochial to the specific theater, and hence do not necessarily apply to all Marine Corps warfighter organizations. Without consensus among warfighters, a requirement is not likely to be validated and initiated, thus frustrating the Marine Corps CINC Service Component trying to comply with a specific CINC's demands. Though the CINCs have recourse to initiate a requirement themselves through the JROC [Joint Requirements Oversight Council] process, the relatively low level (i.e., ACAT III and IV) of the requirements in question mitigate against the overextended CINC staffs ever taking action. This leaves Marine Corps warfighters responding to their CINCs between the proverbial "rock and a hard place," as they are unable to rapidly and simply register their acquisition requirements. And, in turn, they cannot receive a simple and rapid answer (i.e., less than one year) that their requirements were either initiated or disapproved.

What Will It Take?

The Marine Corps is solving this problem as I write through a two-part approach. Part one of the solution addresses improving the rapidity of the basic staffing process to request and initiate an acquisition requirement. Part two of the solution addresses creating a mechanism to expedite consensus building among USMC warfighters regarding evolving requirements.

Improving Rapidity

To improve the rapidity of the basic staffing process, the Marine Corps is

streamlining the procedures set forth in MCO 3900.4D. The chart at the beginning of this article captures the gist of the upcoming revision. In essence, it will provide for a simplified warfighter request in the form of an electronic Universal Need Statement, concurrent staffing, and most importantly, capitalization upon rapid warfighter consensus deriving from establishment of top-level (i.e., 0-8 and 0-9) warfighting advocacy boards. This streamlining is heavily reliant upon the current, maturing Integrated Digital Environment, which was not available when MCO 3900.4D was published in 1991.

Consensus Building Mechanism

Streamlining of the basic staffing process will not be successful, however, without the critical mechanism to expedite warfighter consensus building of advocacy boards. These boards were instituted by the current Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. James L. Jones, and comprise a Ground Combat Element board (i.e., USMC Divisions), an Aviation Combat Element board (i.e., USMC Aircraft Wings), a Combat Service Support Element board (i.e., USMC Force Service Support Groups), a Command Element board (i.e., MEF and Marine Force Headquarters), and a Supporting Establishment board (i.e., USMC Bases/Air Stations). The membership of these quarterly boards constitutes the respective warfighting General Officers of the USMC.

Inserting the deliberations of these top-level advocate boards into the streamlined staffing process will provide the rapid and simple validation of an acquisition requirement and, in turn, prompt an equally simple and rapid answer as to whether the requirement was initiated or disapproved. It should be noted that while this solution remedies the prolonged uncertainty a warfighter currently experiences as to whether a requirement will be initiated, it does not remove the inherent tension between CINCs and their Marine warfighters when the theater-specific requirement is not applicable Marine Corps-wide.

Top-Down Approach Should be Emulated

To solve an enduring problem, the basic enduring process/processes generating the problem must be remedied. In this case, that was the lack of a rapid consensus building mechanism for the stakeholders (USMC warfighters) to validate a proposed requirement. The Commandant's top-down approach to create forums for the stakeholders through the advocacy boards should be emulated, ensuring like mechanisms are available at all levels for stakeholders when addressing any problem. Geographic CINCs, in my view, should be authorized limited, discretionary RDT&E and procurement funds to address evolving theater-specific ACAT III-

and IV-level requirements, which, in turn, would require changes to current law and regulations.

Need for an Enduring Process

In addressing the problem of prolonged delays in initiating warfighter-generated acquisition requirements, the Marine Corps is creating an enduring process that not only will provide a simple, rapid procedure for the warfighter, but a process that distills and focuses all warfighter requirements into a coherent, synchronized warfighting road map for the future.

Editor's Note: The author welcomes questions or comments on this article. Contact Dulin at DulinPJ@mcs.usmc.mil.

ACQUISITION MANAGERS RECRUITING, HIRING, AND RETENTION HANDBOOK (<http://www.dacm.rdaisa.army.mil>)

Online Handbook Contains Wealth of Information for Acquisition Managers of Civilian Employees

The way we recruit, hire, promote, pay, and retain employees in the Federal Government is governed by civil service laws, rules, Executive Orders, regulations, and policies to ensure fairness to applicants and employees—usually referred to as merit system principles. The challenge for federal managers and human resources specialists is to work within this complex, rule-based system while still meeting operational staffing and mission requirements.

The *Acquisition Managers Recruiting, Hiring, and Retention Handbook* is a quick reference for use as a first step when considering recruiting, hiring, or retaining employees. It is intended to provide a general understanding of the civilian personnel authorities and vehicles available to meet the staffing needs of acquisition managers. It must be used, however, in conjunction with the support and advice available from servicing personnel offices, who are responsible for advising managers on how the laws, rules, regulations, precedent decisions, and terms of applicable negotiated bargaining agreements apply and what actions can and cannot be taken to accomplish objectives. The handbook

summarizes options managers can pursue to meet their staffing needs.

A number of DoD organizations are now participating in the Civilian Acquisition Workforce Personnel Demonstration Project (AcqDemo). Its purpose is to demonstrate that the effectiveness of DoD acquisition can be enhanced by allowing greater managerial control over personnel processes and functions, while expanding the opportunities available to employees by providing a more responsive and flexible personnel system. In addition to the traditional hiring, recruiting, and retention methods discussed in this handbook, the demonstration project adopted initiatives permitting waiver of certain laws and regulations. Many of these initiatives (available to AcqDemo participants only) are identified and discussed in the AcqDemo section of the handbook.

While this handbook is not a substitute for statutory, regulatory, or local requirements or agreements, it will help managers understand not only the barriers and problems, but also what flexibilities may be available within the current system.