

# Coordinative Acquisition Strategies

## For Hyperswift Response to the Warfighter

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In an effort to expedite weapons and support systems to the warfighters in the field, the Department of Defense has been reviewing the acquisition structure processes with an eye toward another round of reform. Gordon England, deputy secretary of defense, is seeking to restructure the defense acquisition system with a focus on improving the cost and performance of major defense programs. The Defense Acquisition Performance Assessment (DAPA) project seeks to examine the current acquisition architecture to devise a more simple acquisition system that will improve accountability and speed. In essence, we must be able to condense the acquisition development and fielding cycle and get needed capability into the hands of our military combat forces in a more economical and expeditious manner. Although not directly envisioned for large defense acquisitions, the use of coordinative acquisition (CA) strategies may provide at least one new option for a newly developing toolkit to get needed capability to the warfighter in a fraction of the normal acquisition time.

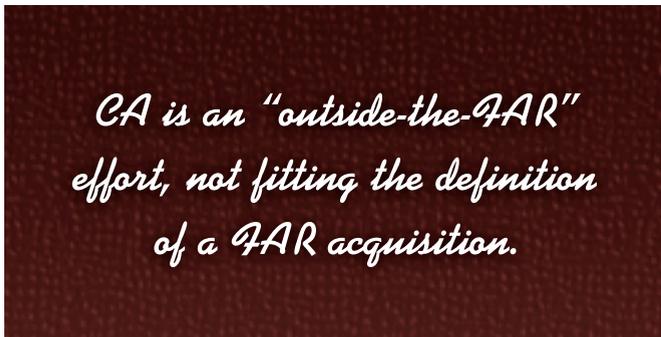
### Development of Coordinative Acquisition

I developed and first used CA at the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) during the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 to provide hyperswift fielding of urgently needed capability to American combat forces on the ground. CA is a cooperative and simplified administrative and management process using memoranda of understanding (MOUs) or agreement (MOAs) to facilitate the accelerated development and fielding of a product. This is accomplished through close coordination of critical acquisition activities and team members, often without a formal set of requirements, budget, or personnel. Depending how and when it is used, CA is technically a team management process that falls outside the purview of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS). In the case study used in this article, the government technically “acquired” nothing, although the end result was the development and fielding of a product by private enterprise at an accelerated rate.

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The bottom line is that it's possible for a program office to obtain its needed product and meet the warfighter's requirements without the need to "acquire or purchase" anything. What we must do is make the product available to the warfighter. The acquisition team can focus on coordinating activities to facilitate development and fielding of products and systems and let the customers purchase the completed production-ready product. Product is built to meet orders. The trade-off is an increase in risk by the company, but coordinative acquisition is voluntarily assumed by the private sector, and the decision is made similarly to any other business decision. This process will not apply to all acquisition programs.

In my estimation, CA is compliant with the policies and philosophy of DoD Directive 5000.1, The Defense Acquisition System, which exists to achieve our national security strategy and support the U.S. armed forces by acquiring quality products in a timely manner and at a fair and reasonable price. To facilitate achievement of these



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goals, the directive outlines the following policies to govern the defense acquisition system:

- **Flexibility.** There is no one best way to structure an acquisition program to accomplish the objective of the defense acquisition system. Program strategies, oversight, and phases should be tailored.
- **Responsiveness.** Advanced technology shall be integrated into producible systems and deployed in the shortest time possible.
- **Innovation.** Throughout the Department of Defense, acquisition professionals shall continuously develop and implement initiatives to streamline and improve the Defense Acquisition System and shall adopt innovative practices (including best commercial practices and electronic business solutions) that reduce cycle time and cost, and encourage teamwork.
- **Discipline.** Program Managers shall manage programs consistent with statute and regulatory requirements specified in this Directive.
- **Streamlined Effort and Effective Management.** Responsibility for the acquisition of systems shall be decentralized to the maximum extent practicable. The Milestone Decision Authority shall provide a single individual with sufficient authority to accomplish pro-

gram objectives for development, production, and sustainment.

### The CA Technique

In the following case study highlighting coordinative acquisition techniques, the wartime requirement was so immediate and apparent that the entire formal requirements process was bypassed to produce a fielded product from concept phase to use by the warfighter, in 49 days. That timeframe could have been reduced even further. In limited circumstances, the coordinative acquisition process can be adopted to provide hyperswift fielding of new systems and capability in days, weeks, or months, rather than years and decades. Coordinative acquisition is a facilitation tool that is bound by limited applicability and circumstances. In its current rudimentary form, it will not apply to the vast majority of defense programs. It appears to be well-suited to modified commercial-off-the-shelf procurements. However, it may be used as a foundation to design a new set of behaviors and relationships between the government and contractors to streamline and speed the development and fielding process.

As mentioned previously, there is a drawback to the implementation of the CA process to field a new capability. First, it will probably work best with simple and smaller-dollar projects that need quick fielding. Second, and to its benefit, CA is an "outside-the-FAR" effort, not fitting the definition of a FAR acquisition. Consequently, the FAR and DFARS requirements do not apply. According to FAR 2.101 (b), an acquisition, in part, "means the acquiring by contract with appropriated funds of supplies or services (including construction) by and for the use of the Federal Government through purchase or lease." In stark contrast, coordinative acquisition does not use a contract; nor does it involve appropriated funds; nor does it plan to procure, purchase, or lease a product. Consequently, one can view this process as officially falling outside the purview of the FAR and DFARS. It comes closer to an Other Transaction Authority action, but it also fails to meet that criterion.

Action through the CA process is normally agreed to through a no-cost MOA with a private contractor; verbal agreements have been used but are not recommended. It is often used in conjunction with a government tiger team or IPT to interface between government agencies, users, and commercial contractors; however, that is not required either. In the case that follows, one government acquisition officer managed the entire coordinative acquisition process solo as a voluntary and additional task to his regular workload. He achieved the objective by coordinating the activities of others in a cooperative effort and agreement that was beneficial to all parties.

### A Case in Point: RIFF Test Kit

DTRA is quickly becoming the military's go-to agency for hyperswift acquisition and fielding requirements. The first

known use of coordinative acquisition in a more formal sense was performed at the DTRA during the invasion of Iraq. DTRA is a DoD agency known for its exceptionally swift acquisition efforts. One such was development in a matter of weeks of the 5,000-pound GBU-28 “Bunker Buster” deep penetrator bomb. During Operation Desert Storm, this accelerated acquisition effort took an astonishing 129 days from concept to bombs on target. In December 2001, DTRA once again organized a quick response team to develop, in a matter of weeks, the BLU-118/B Thermobaric Weapon, designed to attack the enemy in deep cave areas.

The CA concept was based upon this history and another creative effort that was launched at DTRA to quickly supply the warfighter in the field. Ground combat forces needed a unique capability in Iraq and Afghanistan to quickly differentiate between covert hostile enemy insurgents—makers of improvised explosive devices—and more benign, peaceful civilians. DTRA’s 49-day acquisition effort to develop and field the Rapid Identification Friend or Foe (RIFF) Test Kit was a remarkable accomplishment considering that the DTRA program manager had no formal requirements, no budget, no formal program office, and no assigned personnel. The user requirement was directly communicated by the commanders and soldiers in Iraq by commercial cable television to the DTRA Technology Development Directorate. The following sequence of events described the time-reducing DTRA coordinative acquisition process.

### Requirements Formulation

Budget: \$0

Cost: \$0

Time: 2 Days

CA does not always use the formal DoD requirements process. Requirements can be obtained from a telephone conversation, watching war footage on television, listening to combat forces being interviewed, or by an e-mail message from the area of operations or unit commander. The source of the requirement is not paramount, but the validity and timeliness of the need are. Time lost is lives lost. A super-fast response to a validated field re-

quirement in a war zone can save lives. Initially, there may not even be time to seek formal funding.

So what can the DoD Acquisition workforce do if the need is so immediate that there is no time to procure funding, a formal requirements document, or even allocated personnel? Improvise and use what you have available now within the limits of the law. Some may fear that the FAR and DFARS will throw in a monkey wrench and slow the entire response to a snail’s pace. Yes, FAR requirements have a reputation for doing that. However, CA is an outside-the-FAR action that can be used to ensure fast acquisition response.

By observing and listening to our soldiers and commanders in the field during the invasion of Iraq, the program manager ascertained a requirement from our combat forces. The need was to “distinguish covert enemy insurgents from peaceful civilians.” There was no method or tool to do so if they were not caught in the act of firing on American forces, or caught making improvised explosive devices. The need was apparent and immediate, and lives were being lost by the inability to distinguish between friend and foe.

Understanding the requirement, personnel then analyzed the situation in search of a quick interim solution. The requirement was identified in a day or two and the concept solution the next day. The PM knew that local law enforcement was currently using the Instant Shooter Identification kits (ISID) to help test criminal suspects accused of firing a weapon. (The law enforcement kits were initially developed by Sandia National Laboratory in cooperation with Law Enforcement Technologies, Incorporated, of Colorado Springs, Colo.)

### Concept and Development

Budget: \$0

Cost: \$0

Time: 25 Days

The goal was to quickly insert such a test capability into the hands of our ground combat and special operational forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. We needed a quick-and-easy kit that could be used to test suspect civilians to discover whether or not they had been firing weapons or handling explosives—the rationale being that peaceful civilians would be doing neither. However, the problem was that the current civilian law enforcement kits initially developed by Sandia National Lab and commercial vendors were too large, flimsy, complex, and expensive to be used by thousands of combat soldiers in a war zone.

Consequently, a lot of coordination, diplomacy, cooperation, and fast talking between government representatives and civilian vendors would be needed to quickly field a usable version of this ISID kit, especially consid-

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ering the lack of budget, formal requirements, office, or personnel. In this case, government personnel performed the activities as an adjunct to their normal duties. After a day of online market research, two key commercial vendors of shooter identification kits were found, and they enthusiastically agreed to miniaturize, simplify, and militarize their law enforcement products for military field use and to supply prototype samples for field testing—at no cost. These types of inexpensive but important products well lend themselves to the coordinative acquisition process.

### **Test and Fielding**

Budget: 0

Cost: 0

Time 22 Days

Each vendor volunteered to carry out the work. No promises or guarantees were made to the vendors regarding government use or purchase. However, an agreement was made that all requests for RIFF kits throughout the DoD and military services would be directed to the two RIFF kit producers. In the test phase of the coordination process, the DTRA PM called a representative of the Army's 7th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, N.C., and he agreed to field test the contractor prototypes at Fort Bragg at no cost during normal firearms training.

Within a couple of weeks, the contractors forwarded their prototypes of the RIFF kits to the Army, which successfully field tested the two different kit configurations and confirmed their effectiveness. To expedite the team's efforts, the DTRA manager agreed to serve as the DoD point of contact and coordinator for RIFF Kit information and awareness, and to notify all military services of RIFF kit availability and ordering instructions. It would be the responsibility of the military services and government agencies to use their unit funds to independently order the RIFF kits from the two vendors. The entire development and initial operational capability process from concept to fielding took about 49 days.

### **The Win-Win Equation**

Through CA, the government used the processes of coordination and facilitation to make a new militarized product quickly available to our military forces in the field. However, CA will work only with the creation of a win-win equation in the relationship between the government agency and the contractor. The development and fielding cost to the government for the RIFF kit was zero, and the time for provision to the warfighter was just a matter of days. The vendors were subsequently rewarded with orders for tens of thousands of RIFF kits to be used by the U.S. Marines, Army Special Forces, Army Ranger and infantry units, U.S. Central Command, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, among other organizations. Furthermore, the use of the kits by the Department of Home-

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land Security is also a possibility since the RIFF Kit can detect many of the explosives and ammunition on the market.

Another consideration in the win-win equation is working with nontraditional defense companies. Many do not know or understand the DoD acquisition system or process. Consequently, these nontraditional vendors must be protected; the government project manager or team lead must look after their interests. For example, the vendors should be warned not to mass produce developed product until orders are received from government agencies or the armed forces. Since there is not always a guarantee of future orders, to do so is too much risk for a company to assume. The only exception to this rule is if the MOU or MOA states that the government promises to order a minimum quantity of the product by a certain date and time after development is completed, and the program manager has confirmed that funds will be available to purchase such product.

Considered an outside-the-FAR tool, CA may not have general applicability across the DoD acquisition spectrum, but it can be used in limited situations that lend themselves to its application. The process can be used in isolation, or it may form the front end of a major defense acquisition program, permitting high priority programs to start while providing time for the defense acquisition system to catch up with funding, personnel, and definitive requirements.

The future of acquisition will demand flexibility, creativity, and manageable risk, and CA provides one tool to reduce time and expense while meeting these key requirements.

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