

Improving Intelligence Support to the Future Warfighter

Acquisition for the Contested Environment

CYNTHIA R. COOK, DAVID LUCKEY, BRADLEY KNOPP, YULIYA SHOKH, KAREN M. SUDKAMP, DON CASLER, YOUSUF ABDELFAH, HILARY REININGER

To access the full report, visit www.rand.org/t/RRA537-1



ISSUE

Unlike in the preceding two decades of combat operations in the Middle East, the United States now faces new and increasingly sophisticated threats from peer and near-peer adversaries. The 2018 National Defense Strategy describes an “increasingly complex global security environment, characterized by overt challenges to the free and open international order and the re-emergence of long-term, strategic competition between nations.” The Chief of Staff of the Air Force has argued that in response the Air Force needs to accelerate its improvements to meet and, to the extent possible, counter these threats or risk losing the next major war. That necessitates having an acquisition system that is postured to produce the weapon systems that can “fly, fight and win” against capable adversaries that pose a threat, both currently and in the future.



APPROACH

To address these challenges to the acquisition system, we divided the research into four tasks: (1) reviewing and analyzing relevant background material, (2) investigating the current Air Force process for intelligence support for acquisition, (3) evaluating current processes to find appropriate connections between intelligence and acquisition, and (4) documenting the research results, including making recommendations for improvement.



CONCLUSIONS

- Acquisition intelligence has not traditionally been considered an independent or unique field of intelligence support, and neither policy and guidance, nor senior leader messaging, consistently reinforce the importance of intelligence in the acquisition enterprise.
- There is no single, overarching demand signal for intelligence to support acquisition.
- Emphasis on cost, schedule, and performance in acquisition can be a disincentive to seeking ongoing threat-informed intelligence.
- Communication, collaboration, and coordination between acquisition and intelligence occurs through formal and informal channels, but the informal channel appears to be the most frequently used and currently the most effective means of information sharing.

- Intelligence and acquisition personnel often lack the proper clearances to facilitate information sharing and appropriate facilities in which to review and use classified material.
- A relatively small number of U.S. Air Force officers have the background in intelligence activities, engineering concepts, and acquisition processes coveted by the acquisition intelligence community; an even smaller number of these are assigned to acquisition intelligence organizations.
- The importance of science and technology expertise is highlighted by the growing number of, and need for, civilian scientists and engineers in the acquisition enterprise.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Leadership should stress the importance of incorporating threat information into acquisition efforts and make resources available for doing so.
- The requirements and budgetary communities should be partners with acquisition in seeking and digesting intelligence and continually trading resources to address the greatest evolving threats.
- Leadership should arrange for additional intelligence support to formal methods of communicating threats and ensuring that programs are threat-informed.
- Leadership should focus on acquisition strategies that allow programmatic flexibility in the form of open-system architectures and better mechanisms to seek additional investments in order to bring incentives into alignment with the goal of threat-informed acquisition.
- Leadership should look at improving access to classified information, including by seeking ways to extract less classified insight from higher-classification documents for wider dissemination and investing in improving appropriate clearances.
- The U.S. Air Force should continue efforts to improve hiring, training, and retention practices of intelligence personnel and include “Acquisition Intelligence” as an assignment type.



PROJECT AIR FORCE

RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF), a division of the RAND Corporation, is the Department of the Air Force's (DAF's) federally funded research and development center for studies and analyses, supporting both the United States Air Force and the United States Space Force. PAF provides DAF with independent analyses of policy alternatives affecting the development, employment, combat readiness, and support of current and future air, space, and cyber forces. For more information, visit PAF's website at www.rand.org/paf.