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[Inside the Pentagon - 4/30/2009](#)**JRAC aims to be in sync with Gates**

DEE: PENTAGON PLANS TO ALTER SYSTEM OF DELIVERING WARFIGHTER NEEDS

The Defense Department is mulling whether to retool the way it meets the urgent needs of deployed forces by rolling these functions into the overall defense acquisition system, a senior DOD official tells *Inside the Pentagon*.

Over the next couple of years, the department will change how it manages this process, said Thomas Dee, the director of the Joint Rapid Acquisition Cell (JRAC), the organization charged with fulfilling urgent warfighter needs. He has been in the post for less than a month.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates has discussed these issues, remarking about the “need to be able to not only support future needs . . . but immediate warfighting needs as well, and not necessarily have to do one at the expense of the other,” Dee explained in an April 23 interview. The JRAC is trying to reinvigorate the process, ensuring urgent combatant command needs remain a priority consistent with Gates’ message, Dee said.

The Pentagon will examine whether the JRAC, this “little niche of requirements,” may be incorporated into the larger defense system, or whether the two systems should be kept apart, Dee said. “Is there a way to leverage a lot of the good things that have happened in the longer term fight, a lot of the discipline that comes with that process, but be able to provide an urgency that uses that system but in a much more compressed time frame?” he questioned.

The JRAC was established in 2004 after department officials realized the Office of the Secretary of Defense needed someone to ensure warfighter requirements receive “the right level of priority” and to facilitate finding solutions, he added. He said the Joint Staff and the combatant commands also play a role in the process.

The organization is responsible for gauging which DOD office has the programs, the competencies in a particular area and the biggest stake in a warfighter need that would make it “the most likely executor of the solution,” Dee maintained. For instance, a need relating to an improvised explosive device may be assigned to the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization, he stated.

As the JRAC explores ways to fine-tune the process, however, it does not want to take away the services’ Title 10 responsibilities to man, train and equip their forces, Dee said.

Roughly 270 immediate joint needs have been identified over the last several years, and the vast majority have been fulfilled through this process, Dee told *ITP*, adding that most are classified. “I can’t tell you how many are still in progress but probably 70 percent to 75 percent have found a solution to satisfy the warfighter,” he said.

The bulk of these warfighter needs were funded by the services, while the JRAC paid for 38 of them, Dee added. These 38 immediate warfighter needs have cost \$471 million to date, according to a Feb. 19 DOD overview of the JRAC. It was written by William Beasley, then acting director of the organization.

The list includes robotics, biometrics and intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance (ISR), Dee stated. A DOD robot or an armor solution may be a fairly simple undertaking, while ISR is more complex, he said. Other examples include Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles, the Active Denial System and command, control and communications capabilities, according to Beasley’s overview.

For simple solutions, the JRAC tries to provide a capability in “a couple of months,” whereas more complicated solutions “could take up to a couple of years,” Dee said. A solution needing more than a couple of years may fall to the services, which can work within their normal Program Objective Memorandum cycles to identify monies, he added.

The organization has learned two major lessons since its inception. The first is to integrate the requirements, acquisition and budgeting processes, which is not necessarily unique to urgent needs, he asserted.

The second is the need for good metrics, Dee stated. He said the 270 joint urgent operational needs that have been addressed need to be tracked, and everyone involved in the process must understand all the “decision points.”

“We can provide information back to the combatant commanders, who we’re trying to serve, if a decision is taken to partially support his need, to fully support his need, or that we’re going to have to defer this because of the technical complexity or because we found a non-material solution or maybe the threat has changed,” explained Dee.

“My personal goals within the JRAC are to look at those two things that I just mentioned.”

Although the processes to address immediate warfighter needs are working, obstacles remain, according to the DOD briefing from February. “Sourcing, allocating and prioritizing funding remains a challenge,” it states.

“There is no budget for this,” Dee explained. “What we do is provide a priority and assistance helping to identify how the components or, if necessary, OSD can reprogram funds and provide offsets in order to fund an urgent need, which goes back to an issue of priority, making sure everybody understands what the priority is.”

Excluding MRAP and counter-IED funds, historically the joint need has been \$2 billion to \$3 billion a year, the DOD briefing states. “I don’t have very good visibility over the total for all urgent needs,” Dee told *ITP*. He said this figure is a mix of “joint money and service money” funding joint urgent operational needs as well as needs from the services.

Improvement in the ability to predict funding needs in “an asymmetric warfighting environment would be helpful,” adds the Pentagon overview. Other challenges include maintaining “visibility” of sponsor actions, schedules, and commitments once funding has been provided, states Beasley in the briefing.

The Government Accountability Office will examine how the Pentagon handles joint urgent operational needs in a report due to be published around September, while the Defense Science Board will issue a similar report in July, Dee told *ITP*. Although his office is involved with the reports and “knows what some of those recommendations are going to be,” the JRAC is not awaiting their release before making changes, he said. -- *Fawzia Sheikh*

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