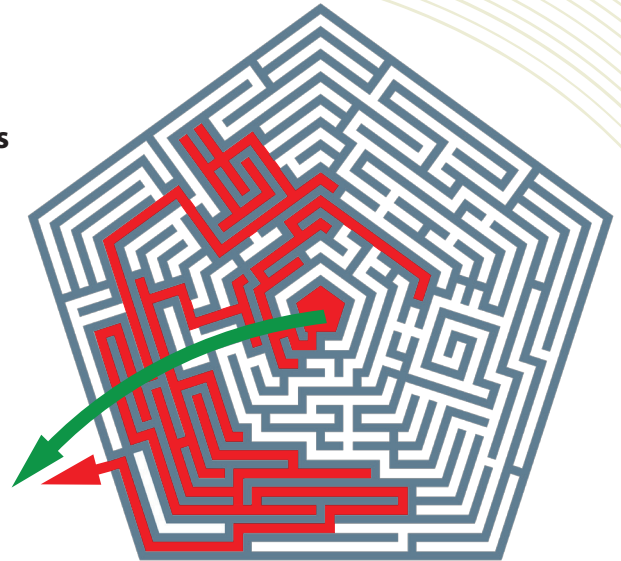


More Agile Acquisition Risk Management for Urgent and Emerging Military Needs

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Numerous risk-based requirements and mitigation factors are considered before a capability can be acquired and deployed. The Office of the Secretary of Defense wanted to identify obsolete statutes and unnecessary process requirements that may hinder a more agile acquisition process, particularly when the operational need is urgent or emerging. **A team of IDA researchers reviewed statutory language and Department of Defense (DoD) policies and regulations for meeting risk management requirements and interviewed subject-matter experts to support the analysis.**

IDA found that statutory requirements were not the primary driver hindering acquisition agility. In fact, the existing military Risk Management Framework (RMF) process already supports agile acquisition in cases of urgent and emerging operational need. The problem seems to be one of execution (see box). Although the RMF process encourages tailoring of security authorization packages and other required documents to accurately reflect the urgency of the operational situation, RMF documents become mired in compliance-based administration and lose their intended focus on performance. Thus, acquisition programs quickly take on an overly risk-averse posture, resulting in unnecessary delays and cost increases. **The IDA team recommended three actions to streamline the RMF process for urgent and emerging military capabilities.**



In one example, a Joint Urgent Operational Need was established in March 2017 after 14 days during which a Combatant Commander identified a capability urgently needed for an ongoing operation. Procurement, development, and testing for the capability took 72 more days, but the RMF process took over 210 days before an Authority to Operate (ATO) decision was made. (An ATO signals that a designated approving authority accepts the risk that a capability may pose to DoD operations.) In this case, the 600-page RMF document was returned to be redone three times—once for formatting changes. IDA estimated the cost of the process was six times the cost of the items to be deployed, which, once fielded, arrived “late to need.”

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NS D-10516

First, DoD should develop a tactical overlay to emphasize appropriate tailoring of core minimum security controls that are relevant to the operational environment. This tactical overlay would serve as an accelerated proof of concept. IDA provided a list of security controls from two core regulatory documents—Committee on National Security Systems Instruction 1254, “Risk Management Framework Documentation, Data Element Standards, and Reciprocity Process for National Security Systems;” and National Institute of Standards and Technology Special Publication 800-53, “Security and Privacy Controls for Federal Information Systems and Organizations”—that could be removed or modified. The list ranged from controls on content and records (publicly accessible content, awareness training, training records, audit record retention, software usage, and visitor access records) to controls on equipment and maintenance (emergency lighting, temperature and humidity controls, and voice over internet protocol).

Second, the RMF process should consider reciprocity first—emphasizing performance and operational value over a checklist or compliance methodology—**to prevent duplication of effort and reduce the time to deployment.** The IDA team recommended that use of an existing capability on a DoD network—perhaps with a different configuration, data flow, or use case than the current need—be actively pursued as a first step. In such cases, the existing ATO and other authorizations should be reused.

Third, DoD should allow for an urgent and emerging capabilities off-ramp for the time-consuming ATO decision process when mission need demands that a solution not be delivered late to need. Potential ways to streamline the process include implementing timelines, submitting review requests simultaneously, or omitting the ATO review request entirely.