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# The Defense Management Challenge: Weapons Acquisition

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war with volunteers. Nobody really believes that it could, nor was the AVF ever intended to be able to do such a thing. Should the need arise, the Reserves would be mobilized and the Congress would be asked for authority to activate the standby draft. The real question is whether the peacetime armed forces should be all volunteer or mixed volunteer/conscript. And as to this question, in spite of the thin treatment during the last 68 years, Chambers offers an absolutely correct observation: "As the postwar experience has shown, the difficulty of achieving a durable American format is more than military."

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Fox, J. Ronald with Field, James L.  
*The Defense Management Challenge: Weapons Acquisition*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 1988. 348pp. \$24.95

"Superb but depressing" is probably the best way to describe *The Defense Management Challenge: Weapons Acquisition*. Everyone concerned about America's future should understand the material contained in this book. Our national security depends upon our ability to develop, procure, and support effective and appropriate weapons systems. This book does an excellent job of indicating how the weapons acquisition process really works, what its more important problems are, what approaches have

been tried in past efforts to improve the process and why they have had such little impact.

The book begins with a succinct description of the U.S. defense establishment and its complicated acquisition process. Then it examines the varied roles of the government personnel involved in the weapons acquisition process. It includes congressmen and senators, secretaries and assistant secretaries within DoD and the military services, senior military officers and civilians in the Pentagon, program managers and contracting officers, and both military officers and civilians at all management levels. It discusses interactions among these different groups, as well as career considerations for both civilian and military personnel who take part in weapons acquisition. It also addresses the relationships between DoD and industry as well as their impact on the acquisition process. Throughout the book, past proposals for improving defense acquisition are identified and reasons for their limited impact examined. The focus is on financial aspects of weapons acquisition, not on technical capabilities of the weapon systems.

The authors, Fox the senior, Field the junior, are extremely well-qualified to address this subject. Few people have been both personally and academically involved in Army, Air Force, and Navy acquisition processes; but the primary author has been. J. Ronald Fox's interest in this subject began almost 30 years ago when he became involved in design-

ing and testing a cost control system for the Navy's Polaris program. During the mid-1960s, he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, and in the early 1970s was Assistant Secretary of the Army responsible for procurement, installations, and logistics. Between these two stints in the Pentagon, Fox taught defense-related management courses at the Harvard Business School. In 1974 he published *Arming America: How the U.S. Buys Weapons*, which was used extensively by students in national security programs. The one-trillion-dollar five-year buildup of defense spending in the 1980s provided an unusual incentive for Fox to reexamine the defense acquisition process and to try to understand what changes had occurred in the 15-year period since his earlier book. Currently he is again a professor at the Harvard Business School, where James L. Field is an associate fellow.

Why is this book depressing? The reason is simple. It leaves the impression that significant problems in weapons acquisition are not merely intractable, but are unsolvable without drastic and revolutionary changes in the way the defense establishment does business. Fox comes to the conclusion that the situation in weapons acquisition is worse in 1988 than it was in 1973 when he wrote *Arming America*, and worse than in 1960. This has occurred in spite of every Secretary of Defense having a commitment to efficient management of the defense acquisition process, in spite of many studies which have identified problems with the process

and suggested ways to reform it, and in spite of numerous efforts from within DoD and/or instigated or supported by Congress.

Fox describes how Rockwell turned Congress into its lobbyists for the B-1 bomber by spreading the work among 5,200 subcontractors in 48 states and 400 congressional districts. This enabled the Air Force, with help from Congress, to channel funds to the B-1 contracting team at Rockwell from 1977-1981 and sustain Rockwell's B-1 team after the 1977 decision by President Carter to cancel the B-1 until its revival after the 1980 election. Fox brings to light many other problems and how they impact defense acquisition. These problems range from the impact of the current military promotion system on DoD program manager decision making to congressional micromanagement of DoD activities.

Why is this book so important? If enough people interested in American national security come to understand how the weapons acquisition process really works, perhaps a consensus about the vital need to reform the system can be developed among a large enough and influential enough group to allow the currently prevailing obstacles to such reform to be overcome. This book facilitates development of that understanding.

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Codevilla, Angelo. *While Others Build: The Commonsense Approach to*