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November release planned

WYNNE-LED GROUP TO PITCH IT SYSTEM RECOMMENDATIONS TO DOD

An industry group led by former Air Force Secretary Michael Wynne is putting the finishing touches on a report that recommends overhauling DOD's acquisition of IT systems.

The IT Acquisition Advisory Council (IT-AAC) -- chaired by Wynne and co-chaired by Kevin Carroll, the Army's former program executive officer for enterprise information systems -- is comprised of retired Pentagon officials such as Lewis Shepherd, former chief technology officer of the Defense Intelligence Agency, retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Paul Nielsen and Dave Oliver, now EADS North America's chief operations officer. Many of the group's members now work in the commercial world.

Founded eight months ago, the 32-member voluntary council aims to "help the ideas on acquisition reform," primarily the buying of IT systems rather than weapon systems, Carroll told *Inside the Pentagon*. Though a number of studies have been carried out on the subject, including work by the Defense Science Board, "there are some things that just never got implemented" due to the lack of "a strong champion," Carroll asserted. The administration shift may be the right time to usher in change, he added. The group produced a draft report last month and plans to unveil a final version at a defense acquisition conference in November.

A key belief of the group is that purchasing IT systems must be treated differently than buying weapon systems, Carroll noted. Instead of developing big systems, DOD should "chunk it down into smaller, functional pieces and build it in a more open system, [an] integrated fashion" already being used in the commercial world, he said.

"Therefore, you need kind of quicker products," he added. "Instead of waiting a couple of years for a system to be delivered, you go ahead and deliver stuff within six months to a year and then you build upon that. And so it requires a little different oversight model than the typical weapon system oversight model."

Jacques Gansler, a former DOD acquisition executive, told *ITP* he knows of the IT Acquisition Advisory Council's work and believes "it makes sense to consider" how the commercial world evolves -- IT in particular -- because a lot of the IT that DOD uses comes from the commercial world.

From an acquisition perspective, "it's very clear we are going to need to develop an acquisition process that would be applicable to the software-intensive IT systems that may be different than if you're developing a new weapons system," Gansler noted. "The problem is that there's a big overlap. If you now look at most weapons systems or even systems of systems -- where we have information-intensive systems of systems, or information-intensive weapons even -- now the question is are they IT systems or

are they weapons systems?”

IT-AAC has also looked at workforce issues. IT requires additional disciplines and skills often not present in the defense acquisition realm, the group notes. The work force must be bolstered in a significant way, ensuring qualified and experienced staff are encouraged to understand the technology domains they are supporting, according to IT-AAC. The Federal Acquisition Institute, Defense Acquisition University and National Defense University should “build out their current programs to not only train, but mentor acquisition [program managers] to make sure they are vested in the success of the program,” the draft report states.

The group argues the agency acquisition strategy must clarify the roles and responsibilities of all participants involved in an IT program, and seek to “optimize contributions and buy-in from the entire value chain” using well-established measures of effectiveness.

IT requires great leadership support, accountability and authority to be effective, maintains the group. “This was the intent of the Clinger-Cohen Act,” the draft states, referring to 1996 legislation reforming acquisition laws and information technology management of the federal government. “Good policy, poor implementation. Leadership must be engaged, and drive cultural, process and technology changes,” notes IT-AAC.

The aim of the administration is to bring in new acquisition staff, Gansler said, which means “you have to bring in people with the 21st century skills, not the 20th century skills.” He said “a key piece” of this plan is to hire people with the “necessary IT skills.” By that token, a recommendation about workforce skills and leadership is “certainly important,” he said.

The roles and responsibilities associated with acquisition systems must be clarified, Gansler said. The 1986 Goldwater Nichols Act streamlining the military chain of command, the Clinger-Cohen Act and the Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act establishing the deputy chief management officer, who reports to Deputy Defense Secretary William Lynn, are “in conflict and unresolved,” he declared.

Goldwater Nichols “says the under secretary for acquisition is responsible for all acquisition, and certainly what we’re talking about is IT acquisitions,” Gansler noted. Clinger-Cohen states the Pentagon’s chief information officer is “responsible for all IT acquisitions,” he added. And the new law about the deputy chief management officer says this individual, Elizabeth McGrath, is “responsible for all business systems,” he added. “So, therefore, you have three people all responsible for the same thing. “I think there’s a need to clarify the roles and responsibilities associated with this.”

IT-AAC also advocates that Congress and defense agency leadership must “codify and re-certify program vision, architecture and outcomes through the entire life-cycle,” especially when leadership and program manager changes occur. -- *Fawzia Sheikh*

PENTAGON-25-37-13

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