



THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: CAN THE MUNITIONS INDUSTRIAL BASE SURGE?

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Shyam Sankar in his piece, “[The Defense Reformation](#),” explains that, “If we’re in a hot war, we would only have days’ worth of ammunition and weapons on hand.”

Even more alarming is our lack of capacity and capability to rapidly repair and regenerate our weapon systems. The US Army has sent multiple munitions and weapons systems to Ukraine to assist in the ongoing war with Russia. Because of our arsenal depleting, the US has a shortage in the munitions industrial base. One major problem is that we only have days’ worth of ammunitions and weapons on hand, as Sankar explains, and the US munitions industrial base does not have a solution for the problem. The munitions industrial base suffers through lack of awareness, miscommunication on identifying resourcing requirements, and the antiquated state of military acquisition pathways. For the US Army, specifically, once the testing process is complete the prototypes are not technologically advanced to keep up with the pace of PRC’s

technology. The elephant in the room is that prime vendors will not sell their intellectual property to the government so that the government can solicit contracts with new innovative companies. New contracts would diversify the munitions industrial base and add more munitions to the inventory.

Lack of awareness on resourcing requirements

Industrial partners in recent years have been openly invited to wargaming scenarios and symposiums. Historically, government officials have hesitated to meet with industry because it was seen as improper. Associations such as National Defense Industrial Association have industrial partners as members and host events inviting government officials. In turn, the Army at Combatant Command levels will invite industrial partners leveraging opportunities to discuss relevant issues at wargames. Michael R. Bloomberg’s [report](#) on defense innovation outlines one key challenge in that industry lacks direction from the government, leading to misaligned efforts and wasted resources. He further explains that acquisition executives avoid engagement in communication with industry to prevent the perception of a competitive advantage. Industry stakeholders cannot guess requirements or demand signals from the Department of Defense’s priorities written in policy.

Outdated acquisition pathways

If military leaders and acquisition executives continue with the current acquisition process, without awareness of emerging technology, Bloomberg explains that the results will be what is seen in today’s inventory: familiar, incremental solutions rather than transformative advancements. This is a disadvantage to the warfighter and, ultimately, Sankar notes that the PRC is the best at mass production and we will remain at a warfighting disadvantage against Beijing. The acquisition pathways to surge innovative equipment technology is outdated by the time it arrives to the warfighter. The testing and evaluation process for the Army is outdated and does not assess disruptive capabilities allowing lethality on the battlefield. Even with new technology, the monetary process and testing of equipment portions has to catch up.

Munitions intellectual property

Prime contractors, as defined by Sankar, already have billion-dollar defense contracts with the government. Because of the time, effort, and intricacies of the parts on these exquisite systems, prime vendors have placed certain restrictions to the government on outsourcing or bidding new contracts with new munitions companies. Prime vendors claim that they own the intellectual property and that it is their technology. The US Navy and Airforce specifically has the development of the LRASM (long-range anti-ship missile) and other missiles being produced in lower quantities and are being produced by two prime vendors. The prime vendors do not have the abilities to surge munitions production with their current capacity in their factories, but they are refusing to sell the intellectual property to the Army. This is the elephant.

The elephant

Defense contractors are to deliver quality items on time so that the warfighter can have their commodities—this is the totality of the defense industrial base. The PRC, today, is out-producing the United States in mass production of ships, munitions, weapon systems, etc. There are innovative companies with solutions to the current assembly problems identified for surging munitions, yet the stopping point is intellectual property rights and current defense contractors not selling the rights to the Army and other services. Defense contractors claim that the data needed for other companies to finalize the assembly required to begin the testing and evaluation process is “propriety.” The intellectual property in the equipment that our warfighters use to secure our nation’s defense and security of our American freedoms is proprietary? Unlikely.

Data breaches

It is very possible that data is not being secured properly by defense prime vendors. The argument from the defense prime vendors is that the munitions data is proprietary and that they own the technology, yet what if it isn’t secure? The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) have begun

illuminating cyber incidents with the newly stood up industrial control security advisories. Defense contractors, within tier companies, are having their data comprised, breached, and stolen by hackers, even on a daily basis. The data, intellectual property, is at risk and the necessary protocols and security systems are being compromised. Are prime vendors confident that their data is not being compromised? Are they giving the same oversight to their tier companies to ensure that they have the right cyber protocols in the munitions industrial base? The data and intellectual property that the prime vendors refuse to sell to the Army and other military services is perhaps already compromised.

Solutions

Solution 1

Prime vendors could sell the intellectual property to the military and make capital gains. They could create a system in which they collect royalties or percentage repayment through the technology that they sell.

Solution 2

Prime vendors can partner with the innovative companies that have the additional capacity for producing the exquisite munitions and sponsor them into the defense industrial base. Such partnerships do exist and are possible.

Solution 3

Industry partnership could co-produce at an existing Army arsenal—such as the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant (IAAAP)—and develop plans for expansion for production of munitions.

Solution 4

The Army could look at the requirements for the exquisite munitions and develop commercial solutions outside of the Defense Industrial Base.

Solution 5

Congress could designate a critical munitions and weapons systems manufacturing budget overriding

the monetary concerns for production allowing existing munition partners to get the necessary production surge capacity to produce at scale.

Munitions supply chain redundancy

The munitions industrial base does not have the capacity to surge and China is outpacing the United States. The overall addition of more industrial partners in the munitions industrial base would provide munitions and weapons systems for the military and commercial sectors, and it would add to the defense of the United States. The munitions industrial base having redundancy in its' supply chain is more important than ever with emerging world requirements changing hourly with tariff concerns. Newer munitions companies and weapons manufacturing companies are using advanced technologies and different resourcing options alleviating the dependencies on outdated materials that are becoming scarce and critical in today's economy. Because these newer companies can provide a viable solution to the intellectual property concerns that are the biggest elephant for the Army and other military services, it is imperative that it is addressed immediately.

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.