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Defense Primer: Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System (JCIDS)

Introduction

The Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System (JCIDS) is the primary U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) process for determining military weapon systems requirements. According to the JCIDS Manual, which was last publicly updated in 2021, the JCIDS process includes “assessing joint military capabilities, and identifying, approving, and prioritizing gaps in these capabilities, to meet applicable requirements in the National Defense Strategy (NDS).”

JCIDS is designed to formally document recommendation and justification for the development and acquisition of new or enhanced military materiel, equipment, and weapon systems. DOD refers to these recommendations, with their justifications, as “capability requirements.” The requirements validated during the JCIDS process are then incorporated into the broader DOD procurement process.

In Section 811 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2024 (P.L. 118-31), Congress required that DOD modernize its requirements process, including JCIDS, “to improve alignment between modern warfare concepts, technologies, and system development and reduce the time to deliver needed capabilities to warfighters.”

Background

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) are the most senior leaders of the U.S. military services. Per 10 U.S.C. §§153 and 163, the Chairman of the JCS (CJCS) is responsible for joint military capability development, including serving as spokesman “especially on the operational requirements of [combatant] commands.” This role includes evaluating and integrating such requirements across the department, and providing advice to the Secretary of Defense regarding such requirements. JCIDS exists within the JCS’s broader Joint Strategic Planning System (JSPS), the system used by the JCS to perform its statutorily required functions. JCIDS is maintained by the Joint Staff, a DOD organization that is led by the most senior officers from each of the military services. For more information about the JCS, see CRS In Focus IF10543, *Defense Primer: The Department of Defense*, coordinated by Michael J. Vassalotti.

JCIDS is one of DOD’s three main acquisition-related support systems, along with the Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) process, which allocates resources across DOD, and the Defense Acquisition System (DAS), which manages acquisition programs. For more information on PPBE, see CRS In Focus IF10429, *Defense Primer: Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) Process*, by Brendan W. McGarry.

JCIDS identifies and validates capabilities to fill gaps in military requirements. These requirements are then fulfilled by the acquisition of weapon systems using the DAS, which is funded through the PPBE process. According to the Joint Staff, JCIDS and PPBE collectively “foster the horizontal integration of planning, resource prioritization, current readiness, and Joint Force Development.”

In 2003, DOD released guidance creating JCIDS, which updated and replaced its predecessor, the Requirements Generation System. The Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC), a body chaired by the Vice Chairman of the JCS, manages JCIDS. Title 10 U.S.C. §181 establishes the JROC and describes its mission as “identifying, assessing, and approving joint military requirements ... to meet the national military strategy” and “ensuring that appropriate trade-offs are made ... in the establishment and approval of military requirements.”

In Section 925 of the FY2017 NDAA (P.L. 114-328), Congress amended 10 U.S.C. §181 to direct the Joint Staff to revise its requirements process and reorient the JROC to focus less on individual military service-specific programs and more on joint programs. In the 2024 NDAA, Congress required that the Secretary of Defense, working with other civilian and military leaders, implement a streamlined requirements development process, including revising JCIDS. The law specified that the effort focus on programs below the major defense acquisition program (MDAP) threshold and align such programs with the Adaptive Acquisition Framework (AAF). Congress received an interim report on the effort on October 1, 2024, and required a final report by October 1, 2025.

JCIDS Process

JCIDS supports the National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS), authored by the National Security Council (NSC) and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), respectively. The NSS and NDS set the President’s and DOD’s national security goals and priorities. JCIDS catalogues and enables validation of requirements before entry into the broader DOD acquisition process. Once validated by the JROC, the documents inform various DOD program acquisition milestones.

The JCIDS process is initiated when a military service or agency identifies a need for a new capability. JCIDS includes two broad categories of capability requirements: “deliberate capability requirements” or “urgent/emergent capability requirements.” Deliberate capability requirements align with historic DOD requirements and acquisition processes, and, as such, go through the formal, consensus-based JCIDS staffing process that aligns with

DOD's major capability acquisition process. According to DOD, urgent requirements are those that, "if unmitigated would result in unacceptable loss of life or critical mission failure." This allows for an expedited review and validation process to allow a capability to be developed on a timeline within two years and aligns with DOD's urgent capability acquisition process.

The Joint Staff's JCIDS manual functions as DOD-wide guidance for both Joint Staff personnel and the relevant military service and other DOD agencies, which the JCIDS manual calls "sponsors." This manual was last updated in 2021 with an acknowledgement that the JCIDS process still needs further adjustment to incorporate new acquisition pathways that DOD created as part of its Adaptive Acquisition Framework (AAF).

Staffing and Document Development

JCIDS involves both the Joint Staff and sponsors. The Joint Staff's role is to review sponsor-developed documents and validate them. The Joint Staff also must make sure that it involves other DOD stakeholders (such as military services with potential equities in a capability, the research and development [R&D] community, and oversight offices like the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment [OUSD(A&S)]) in the process. The JROC maintains six "Functional Capability Boards" (FCBs), which act as oversight and assessment bodies to ensure that their respective functional areas receive proper consideration throughout the JCIDS process. These include cyber, battlespace awareness, force application, protection, force development and design, and logistics and sustainment.

Through a formal comment and resolution process, the Joint Staff and sponsors adjudicate relevant stakeholder inputs throughout the process. Any documents that are developed also must ultimately be approved by the JROC. Some of these key documents are listed below.

The preliminary document in the JCIDS process is the Capabilities Based Assessment (CBA), which identifies capability requirements in a given mission area based on the findings of the NDS and NSS. The JROC then assesses whether gaps exist given these requirements. The result of this assessment feeds directly into the next document.

The next document developed in the JCIDS process is an Initial Capabilities Document (ICD). Sponsors identify a capability gap and present potential options, or "capability solutions," that would address this gap. Capability solutions may be materiel (e.g., a new weapon system) or nonmateriel (e.g., operational or doctrinal changes). Should the defined capability solution be materiel, the JCIDS process develops a Capability Development Document (CDD).

A Capability Development Document (CDD) further defines the military requirements for a materiel capability that addresses the previously defined capability gap. It also defines the specific measures of performance that such a capability would require.

Potential Issues for Congress

Congress may consider whether to direct DOD to further change the JCIDS process, and if so, how; or whether to allow past changes to take effect, and assess their efficacy. In weighing these options, Congress may consider:

Whether DOD, and Congress, has adequate information for assessing the effectiveness of the JCIDS process.

According to a 2021 Government Accountability Office (GAO) study, the Joint Staff is unable to measure "the actual length of time that documents take to go through the JCIDS process." Congress may consider asking DOD for additional information, including detailed timelines for how specific DOD programs went through JCIDS, to better understand how JCIDS functions in the context of broader congressional goals concerning DOD procurement.

Whether the consensus-based nature of JCIDS allows efficient capability development. Critics of JCIDS cite the process's long time frame as a hindrance to rapid and flexible capability development. While the urgent requirements capability category allows DOD to expedite some of the JCIDS process, the deliberative JCIDS process is consensus-based. While this may allow for collaboration within DOD, it may also mean that potentially advantageous capability solutions could be delayed or not developed due to lack of consensus.

Whether the JCIDS process could better foster innovation. JCIDS analysis addresses reported capability gaps, rather than identifying opportunities to anticipate gaps. Some critics have asserted that the structure of the JCIDS process and incentives for sponsors lends itself to predetermined capabilities. Congress may consider adjusting the statutory roles and responsibilities of the JROC to include anticipatory analysis of innovative technologies. Alternatively, it may consider tasking DOD's innovation organizations with collaborating earlier in the JCIDS process, or requiring that the CBA include identification of potential opportunities to outpace threats in addition to identifying requirements to meet threats.

Whether the JCIDS process fully accounts for overlap or duplicative programs. The FY2017 NDAA revised the requirements process to limit the JROC's focus to programs with joint requirements. An unintended consequence may be that the services' internal program developments may unintentionally duplicate other services' efforts.

Whether or not JCIDS adequately considers nonmateriel solutions compared with materiel solutions.

Congress also may consider whether or not the JCIDS process overemphasizes materiel solutions (instead of nonmateriel solutions, such as changes to operations or doctrine) in a deterministic manner. Congress may consider asking DOD for data and information on the earlier stages of the JCIDS process, particularly ICD findings, to understand what proportion of ICDs lead to materiel or nonmateriel capability development.

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