



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

MAR - 6 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP  
COMMANDERS OF COMBATANT COMMANDS  
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOD FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: Directing Modern Software Acquisition to Maximize Lethality

The Department of Defense (DoD) has been slow to recognize that software-defined warfare is not a future construct, but the reality we find ourselves operating in today. Software is at the core of every weapon and supporting system we field to remain the strongest, most lethal fighting force in the world. While commercial industry has rapidly adjusted to a software-defined product reality, DoD has struggled to reframe our acquisition process from a hardware-centric to a software-centric approach. When it comes to software acquisition, we are overdue in pivoting to a performance-based outcome and, as such, it is the Warfighter who pays the price.

It is a top priority for DoD to reform its acquisition processes in order to acquire, deliver, and iterate on our weapon and business systems — including software — at speed and scale for our Warfighter. To start, DoD must maximize the use of its existing authorities, contracting strategies, and processes for software acquisition. This will enable us to immediately shift to a construct designed to keep pace with commercial technology advancements, leverage the entire commercial ecosystem for defense systems, rapidly deliver scaled digital capabilities, and evolve our systems faster than adversaries can adapt on the battlefield.

To meet this challenge, I am directing all DoD Components to adopt the Software Acquisition Pathway (SWP) as the preferred pathway for all software development components of business and weapon system programs in the Department.

The Department must also align contracting strategies and maximize the use of existing authorities. Effective immediately, for efforts that meet the threshold requirements enabling the application of authorities provided at title 10, U.S.C., § 3458 or title 10, U.S.C., § 4022. I am directing the use of Commercial Solutions Openings and Other Transactions as the default solicitation and award approaches for acquiring capabilities under the SWP. This applies to any software pathway program in the planning phase prior to execution. Department Components are prohibited from implementing further guidance on this point that would set out restrictive measures, guidelines, frameworks, directives, or policies other than required by statute.

The Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, in coordination with the Director of the Defense Innovation Unit, will develop and submit an implementation plan within 30 calendar days.

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OSD001079-25/CMD001535-25