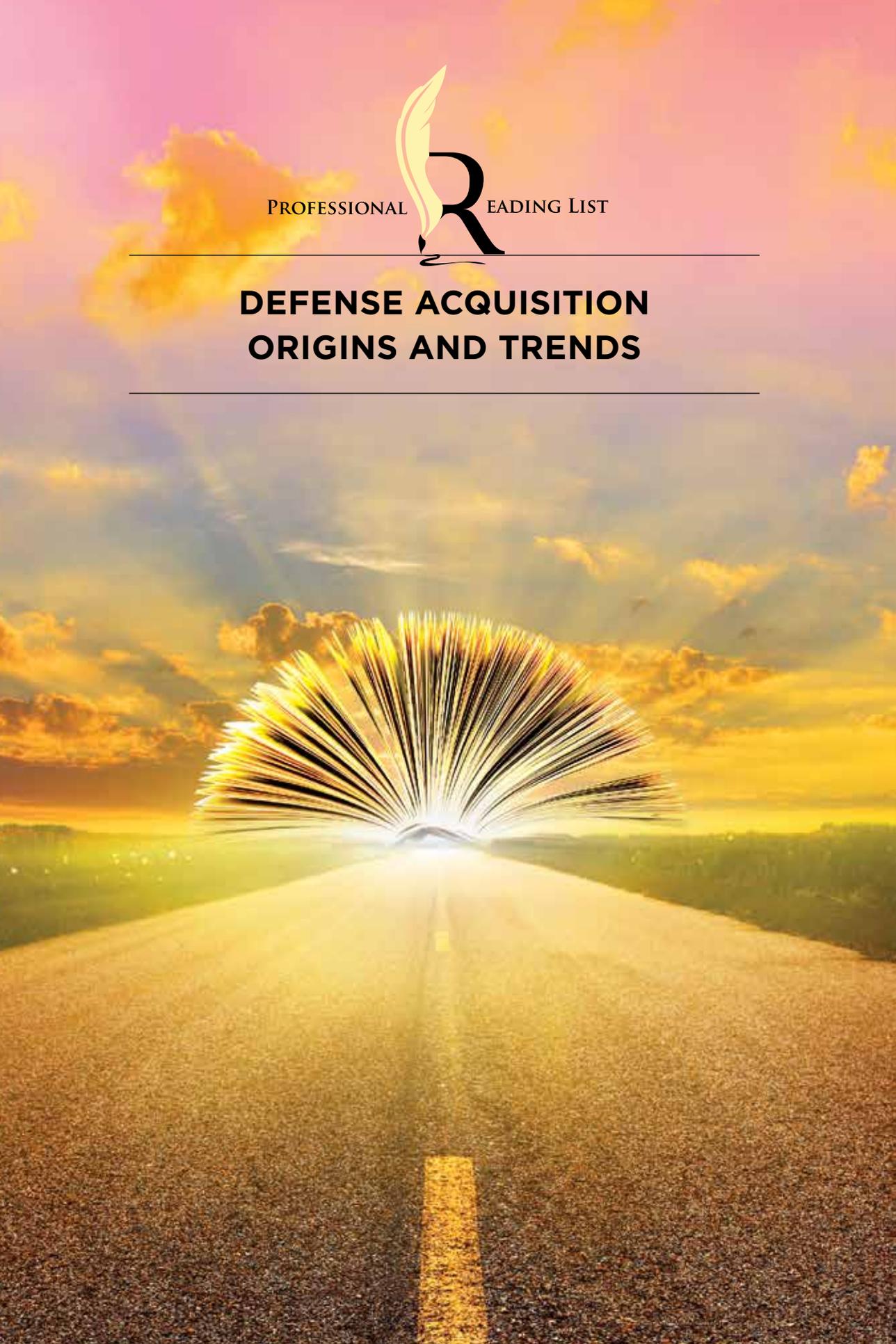


PROFESSIONAL  READING LIST

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**DEFENSE ACQUISITION  
ORIGINS AND TRENDS**

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## ***Rearming for the Cold War, 1945–1960***

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**Series:**

*History of Acquisition in the  
Department of Defense, Volume I*

**Author(s):**

Elliott V. Converse III

**Publisher:**

Historical Office,  
Office of the Secretary of Defense

**Copyright Date:**

2012

**ISBN:**

978-0160911323

**Hard/Softcover:**

Hardcover, 780 pages

**Reviewed by:**

Dr. Roy Wood  
Former Dean, Defense Systems  
Management College  
Defense Acquisition University

**Publisher Summary**

The first publication in a multivolume series on the history of the acquisition of major weapon systems by the Department of Defense, author Elliott Converse presents a meticulously researched overview of changes in acquisition policies, organizations, and processes within the United States military establishment during the decade and a half following World War II. Many of the changes that shaped the nature and course of weapons research and development, production, and contracting through the end of the century were instituted between 1945 and 1960; many of the problems that have repeatedly challenged defense policymakers and acquisition professionals also first surfaced during these years. This study is the first to combine the histories of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the military services into one account. The volume is organized chronologically, with individual chapters addressing the roles of OSD, the Army, Navy, and Air Force in two distinct periods.

## Review

If Dickens were to have written about the years following World War II, he might have started this tome, “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.” It was certainly the best of times. The United States and its Allies had just waged a war against global domination and won, liberating Europe and the Pacific from aggression and devastation. Economies were on the mend and diplomacy again took center stage. Yet, it was also the worst of times. The Soviet Union had just cordoned off much of Eastern Europe behind an “Iron Curtain” and aimed nuclear-tipped missiles at its former allies.

It is within this context that Elliott Converse chronicles the evolution of the U.S. military from waging the largest and most deadly war in history to managing a tense and competitive Cold War. As the title suggests, Converse focuses on America’s efforts to rearm and modernize its arsenal in the face of this new and dangerous threat. The author tells an engaging story of the rapid emergence of technology and how a wartime bureaucracy was transformed and reengineered to acquire advanced missiles, aircraft, computers, and of course, nuclear energy and weapons.

At its heart, however, is the compelling story of the people who led this transformation. There are familiar players, like Vannevar Bush, James Forrestal, and Hoyt Vandenberg. But there are also intriguing stories of lesser known, but no less influential bureaucrats, including Wilfred McNeil, Clay Bedford, and Walter Whitman.

This is a well-researched and engaging book. The author captures the human side of the story through liberal use of quotes and good storytelling to get at why and how important decisions were made. In the process, Converse explores Service rivalries, budget battles, high-stakes intrigue, and behind-the-scenes dealing—and sometimes double-dealing—within Washington’s halls of power. The book is richly footnoted and laced with data charts, tables, period photographs, and biographical sketches of many of the key players.

This book is of particular importance to today’s defense acquisition community because it explores our roots. Many of the decisions and actions from this time period are still evident in the organization and processes we use today. As philosopher George Santayana once noted, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Through the clear lens of hindsight, therefore, we should read this book and learn from the brilliant successes and sad foibles of those who came before us.

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## ***Adapting to Flexible Response, 1960–1968***

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**Series:**

*History of Acquisition in the  
Department of Defense, Volume II*

**Author(s):**

Walter S. Poole

**Publisher:**

Historical Office  
Office of the Secretary of Defense

**Copyright Date:**

2013

**ISBN:**

978-0160921834

**Hard/Softcover:**

Hardcover, 467 pages

**Reviewed by:**

Dr. Roy Wood  
Former Dean, Defense Systems  
Management College  
Defense Acquisition University

**Summary**

This second volume of the *History of Acquisition in the Department of Defense* describes the U.S. armed forces' acquisition of major weapon systems from 1960 to 1968. Its chronological organization includes individual chapters that address the new need for flexibility in defense acquisition to keep pace with the rapidly changing security environment during the administrations of President John F. Kennedy and President Lyndon B. Johnson.

The book discusses weapon acquisitions for the Vietnam War, the rise of nuclear threats, strategic missile systems, military helicopters, and nuclear submarines. Covered topics include dissolving the link between incentives and profits, total package procurement, the creation of Federal program managers, and prototyping vs component-based systems, among others.

## Review

John F. Kennedy had won the 1960 Presidential election and entered office with a strong and growing Soviet menace held at bay by his predecessor, Dwight D. Eisenhower's warning of mutual assured nuclear destruction. The Cold War strategy of containing communism also meant fighting surrogate brush wars and conducting bold—sometimes rash—covert operations. Many of these were underway in Europe, Southeast Asia, and in the Caribbean. Vietnam was quickly becoming a focal point for U.S. military support and intervention in this ideological battle of wills. For the United States, 1960–1968 was a time of strategic change abroad and brewing social upheaval at home. This was the environment Kennedy stepped into when he took the oath of office in 1961.

Meanwhile, within the Pentagon, under the newly appointed Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, change would likewise become the order of the day. Supporting Kennedy's shift from a military strategy of mutual destruction to one of "flexible response" meant moving away from near total reliance on nuclear weapons to building capable new conventional forces and weapon systems. This tumultuous period of change and refocus is the backdrop of Poole's book, *Adapting to Flexible Response, 1960–1968*. This important book is the second volume in the acquisition series from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Historical Office (released in 2013).

Poole discusses the acquisition of new systems to support the flexible response strategy. Some of these included producing and fielding helicopters in large numbers and in direct combat roles for the first time, continuing to build nuclear submarines and surface ships, and creating fleets of aircraft including the F-111 fighter-bomber and heavy cargo lift C-5A. To produce these systems, defense acquisition management changed dramatically under McNamara's Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System and Five Year Defense Plan. The Office of the Secretary of Defense and McNamara's "whiz kids" applied systems analysis to requirements and acquisitions, and encroached as never before on what had previously been Service prerogatives.

Poole's book masterfully sets the stage for this complex drama and describes the forces inside and outside the Pentagon that drove defense acquisition during this period. He then dives deeply into individual weapon systems acquisition, creating rich case studies that give us glimpses into the policies and practices that went well—and those that did not. For instance, he compares the successful C-141 with the troubled C-5A programs to provide long-range airlift and describes the Army's fascinating political struggle to

choose between the M-14 and the AR-15 to outfit its infantry. He discusses Navy shipbuilding and the love-hate relationship with Admiral Hyman G. Rickover and nuclear power, as well as the reliability issues of the Navy's "3-T" missile (Talos, Terrier, and Tartar) and the move toward a "standard missile" replacement program.

Poole's tome is highly recommended reading for today's acquisition professionals. Many of the challenges Poole highlights from programs in the 1960s will seem familiar to those encountered in today's programs—stringent requirements, tight schedules, emerging technologies, a risk-averse bureaucracy, and an assertive Congress that purports to "help." Set in a tumultuous period of evolving threats, international crises, domestic social unrest, and Pentagon bureaucratic struggles, there are important lessons to be learned and insights to be gained from Poole's well-written and thoroughly researched history.

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## ***Defense Acquisition Reform, 1960–2009: An Elusive Goal***

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**Author(s):**

J. Ronald Fox

**Publisher:**

Center of Military History  
United States Army

**Copyright Date:**

2014

**ISBN:**

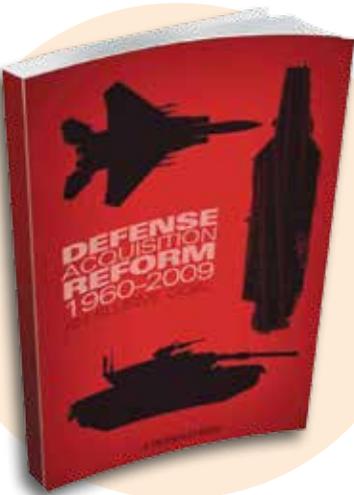
978-1505475159

**Hard/Softcover:**

Softcover, 286 pages

**Reviewed by:**

John Alic  
Former Staff Member  
Congressional Office of Technology  
Assessment



## **Publisher Summary**

From 1960 through 2009 there were more than twenty-seven major studies of defense acquisition commissioned by presidents, Congress, and secretaries of defense, government agencies, studies and analyses organizations, and universities. Numerous other noteworthy studies of defense acquisition have been conducted and published by the Government Accountability Office during the same period. Much to the surprise of many, the reform studies over the forty-nine-year period arrived at most of the same findings and made similar recommendations. But political will to make the changes, combined with internal dynamics resistant to change, led to only minor improvements. The problems of schedule slippages, cost growth, and technical performance shortfalls on defense acquisition programs have remained much the same throughout this period. *Defense Acquisition Reform, 1960–2009: An Elusive Goal* provides historical and analytical accounts of the defense acquisition process for major weapons systems in order to identify long-term trends, insights, and observations that could provide perspective and context to assist current defense decision makers, acquisition officials, and the acquisition schoolhouse.

## **Review**

The Harvard Business School's J. Ronald Fox, a long-time student of acquisition, prepared this volume drawing on work by the other contributors. All five have been associated with the Defense Acquisition History Project. Although the book's front matter implies that the project ended in 2009—incomplete—in fact it is now housed in the Historical Office of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and further volumes can be expected. This is something to look forward to, since Fox's volume itself offers little that is new; as a review of past studies, it will be most useful for newcomers to the subject of acquisition reform.

The volume, however, does include some fresher sections. In one of these, Fox and his colleagues relate how the Air Force, Navy, and to a lesser extent the Army, sought, with considerable success, to circumvent or otherwise neutralize provisions of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act (see pp. 127–146). Mostly, however, and despite considerable use of oral histories and internal Department of Defense (DoD) documents, *Defense Acquisition Reform, 1960–2009* adds only marginally to our understanding. This is not so much a criticism of the book as an acknowledgement of how many studies have gone over the ground reviewed, reaching many of the same conclusions.

What is needed most is analytical insight. Six decades of attempts at reform have largely failed. The message is plain in *Defense Acquisition Reform, 1960–2009*, if largely implicit, and soft-pedaled even in the subtitle.

The book's treatment of workforce quality illustrates the unsatisfactory state of analysis. The subject is one that Fox has examined previously and mentions repeatedly here. It is well and good to urge more and better training of the acquisition workforce, stronger incentives for exemplary performance, and lengthier tenures, especially for program managers, to build capability through experience. But a quick glance at the private sector is enough to show that a skilled and experienced workforce is no assurance of organizational performance. For decades, U.S.-based firms like General Motors and IBM had their pick of the best graduates of the best schools. With the help of formal training and internal labor markets that rewarded experiential learning, they held onto many of these employees. IBM, after running into competitive difficulties some years ago, managed to revivify itself. But smart and capable employees were not enough for GM to find its way out of the organizational routines that entrapped the firm beginning in the 1950s. Will GM finally make it this time? How about Hewlett-Packard? Sony? DoD would certainly benefit from a better qualified acquisition workforce. Yet how much difference would this actually make for major programs dominated by bureaucratic power politics? The audience for studies of acquisition, certainly the policy-making audience, would benefit from attempts to answer questions of this sort, no matter how tentative the answers might be.