The 360 Brief
Analysis and opinion on U.S. defense acquisition, strategy, and industrial base issues —
blending operational insight with proposed reforms to inform decision-makers and industry
leaders.

The Age of Iteration: Build – Kill – Learn – Discard – Repeat

BLUF
The United States is entering a pivotal period in defense acquisition. The new administration
and Department of Defense leadership are openly acknowledging the gap between our
acquisition timelines and the speed of threat evolution — and they are taking meaningful
steps to address it. Expanded use of **Other Transaction Authority (OTA)** and **Commercial
Solutions Openings (CSO)**, public emphasis on shortening timelines, and recognition that
time is as much a weapon as any munition are all signs that the problem is understood at the
highest levels. These are important moves, and they deserve recognition as the right first step.

But acknowledgment alone is not enough. The tools are now on the table; the test will be how
rapidly and consistently they are applied at scale, beyond pilot programs, and embedded into
acquisition culture. History defines eras by the forces that reshape how wars are fought — the
Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Industrial Revolution. Each marked a leap in capability and
speed. Today's leap is not in metal or machines, but in our ability to **build, kill, learn,
discard, and repeat** faster than the enemy. We are now in the **Age of Iteration**.

The United States must develop unmanned systems — drones, loitering munitions, and
robotic ground platforms — at a pace set by adversary innovation cycles, not our own
bureaucracy. These systems don't require exquisite performance. They must be good enough,
fast enough, and cheap enough to keep up with an enemy that is already iterating in weeks,
not years. In peacetime, this might mean 180 days from concept to fielding. In wartime, that
cycle should compress to 30 days or less. This is a fundamental departure from the
sustainment-heavy, milestone-driven acquisition model. Time itself becomes the decisive
weapon.

Legislative Disruption — The "Six-Month Fight Act"

Congress should create a new authority under Title 10 — **Operational Iteration and Volume
Production for Tactical Autonomy (OIVP-TA)** — that bypasses JROC and JCIDS
requirements and is not tied to Milestone B. This authority would allow rolling 180-day
funding cycles in peacetime, tied to validated results from U.S.-based experimentation, high-
fidelity simulation, and data from active conflict zones. Once the U.S. declares imminent
involvement in a conflict or a contingency operation, the cycle would automatically accelerate
to 30 days. Execution authority would be "use it or lose it," with a pre-cleared OTA vendor
base and no protest period for awards under $250 million per year. After three iterations,
certain critical components — such as autonomy stacks, guidance systems, or propulsion
designs — would transition to perpetual open license to accelerate industry-wide
improvement.

Contracting for Iteration — Lethal-as-a-Service

Traditional contract vehicles — Firm Fixed Price, IDIQ, even many OTAs — are too static for this mission. Instead, a "Lethal-as-a-Service" model would turn prime contractors into iteration platforms rather than one-time product vendors. Production awards would be made in short bursts based on performance and cost in the previous cycle, with multiple vendors holding simultaneous production slots for different mission profiles. A contractor who cannot scale from a pilot run of 500 units to 10,000 units in 60 days would be replaced. In peacetime, replenishment cycles could remain at 90 to 180 days to allow for red-teaming and analysis. In a contingency, production runs would be awarded every 30 days based purely on battlefield results.

Industrial Base Reimagining — The Strike Garage Network

Sustainment-heavy industrial infrastructure is poorly suited for expendable systems. Instead, the DoD should establish a network of 25 "Strike Garages" — microfactories equipped with CNC machines, 3D printers, surface-mount soldering lines, and composite layup facilities. Each would be pre-certified under the Lethal-as-a-Service model, located near military installations or university drone programs, and capable of delivering units directly to the employing unit. By building within 150 miles of the end user, the logistics chain collapses from months to days. Reserve component facilities and SBIR-qualified partners could be leveraged to expand this distributed manufacturing web.

Procurement Through Performance — Reverse Fly-Off Tournaments

Instead of paper competitions, the government should adopt continuous, performance-driven down-selects through "reverse fly-offs." Every 45 to 90 days, vendors would bring their latest systems to proving grounds like Yuma or White Sands. The best-performing designs — based on range, time on station, lethality, survivability, and cost — would be awarded the next production run immediately. These awards could be processed through MIPR-fed OTAs, using DIU, SOFWERX, and AFWERX-style contracting cells embedded inside PEOs. This eliminates months of contracting lag and forces competition on performance, not paperwork.

The Meta-Munition Model

A **Meta-Munition** is not a fixed design. It is an expendable unmanned system that mutates with every production run. Each batch is identified by its software build, not a static platform designation. The objective is "mutation dominance" — making sure the enemy never has time to adapt. This requires abandoning the concept of "system maturity" for certain categories of weapons. For short-life, low-cost systems, the Army Materiel Release process under AR 770-3 is unnecessary. An urgent release based on operational field trials should be enough. No sustainment tail, no depot-level maintenance — just field, kill, learn, discard, and rebuild. AI-

driven red-teaming in simulation would run nightly, with results shared across the vendor base to ensure the next build incorporates the latest battlefield lessons.

Killing Obsolescence Before It Kills Us

Obsolescence should be a deliberate design choice. These systems are meant to be relevant for weeks or months, not decades. Every production batch must either improve on the last or be replaced. Component sourcing should rotate constantly to avoid dependency on any single foreign supplier. Battlefield feedback — automated kill scoring, operator debriefs, and onboard telemetry — must feed directly into the next build without bureaucratic filtering.

MOSA Selectivity

Modular Open Systems Architecture (MOSA) has its place — high-cost, low-volume platforms like aircraft or armored vehicles benefit from it. But applying MOSA to low-cost, high-volume expendables only slows iteration and raises cost. The policy should be explicit: if a system will be obsolete in 30 days, modularity is a liability. Build it, kill with it, learn from it, and replace it.

Bottom Line

Unmanned systems evolve at the pace of software, not steel. We cannot apply Cold War acquisition timelines to weapons designed for a single campaign. The acquisition system must be redesigned to prize adaptation over sustainment, rapid competition over long-term incumbency, and mutation over permanence.

History has always been marked by the tools and methods that defined victory — the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Industrial Revolution. Each brought a fundamental shift in how wars were fought and won. Today's defining shift is our ability to iterate faster than the threat. This is the **Age of Iteration**, where the side that can design, field, and replace in 30 days will own the battlespace. Every other approach is latency.