



## History of the Defense Intelligence Agency

by Lieutenant General Ronald L. Burgess, Jr.

[Editor's Note: Numerous books have been written about the Central Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency; far fewer about their community counterpart, the Defense Intelligence Agency. This article in AFIO's *Guide to the Study of Intelligence* series recounts the development and evolution of the Defense Intelligence Agency.]

**D**IA's story begins at the height of the Cold War, when Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, established the new agency on 1 October 1961. McNamara's action instituted a long-standing recommendation originally in the 1946 *Congressional Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack* that recommended the integration of all Army and Navy intelligence organizations. "Operational and intelligence work required centralization of authority and clear-cut allocation of responsibility," the committee wrote.<sup>1</sup> At the time of DIA's creation, which brought defense intelligence into conformance with the Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1958, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wrote, "national intelligence and military intelligence are indivisible in practice." Since its humble origins, DIA has become a central player in both the defense and national intelligence arenas, reflecting this judgment.

DIA achieved early recognition in September 1962, when its photo interpreters noticed in the initial U-2 imagery that surface-to-air missile sites in Cuba were arranged in a pattern similar to those in the Soviet Union around intercontinental ballistic missile facilities. This photo analysis, combined with

human intelligence, claiming the Soviets were putting missiles in Cuba, led DIA's first director, Lieutenant General Joseph Carroll, US Air Force, to call for more U-2 reconnaissance flights over Cuba. The subsequent U-2 mission on 14 October 1962—its flight path based on DIA's analysis—photographed a convoy of Soviet medium-range ballistic missiles just before it pulled off the road under a canopy of trees. After the Cuban Missile Crisis abated and the Soviets removed their missiles and bombers, President Kennedy asked DIA to brief the nation. John Hughes, who was a special assistant to Lieutenant General Carroll, took the stage in the State Department auditorium on 6 February 1963. Introduced by Secretary McNamara, John Hughes used many of the slides and U-2 photos that President Kennedy had ordered declassified.<sup>2</sup>

The war in Vietnam dominated the last half of the 1960s. DIA provided current and long-term analyses to commanders and defense policymakers on the strength of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, their logistics, and air defense capabilities.<sup>3</sup> DIA deployed people into the theater, including experts to translate and exploit captured enemy documents. DIA also collected and analyzed intelligence on US prisoners of war and military members missing in action. DIA provided intelligence for the raid in 1970 to free American POWs held at the Son Tay prison camp west of Hanoi, including information from a human source in Hanoi who claimed two days before the raid that the prisoners had been moved. The raid went forward on the chance the source was wrong or that the captives had been returned. As it turned out, the source had been correct; the camp at Son Tay, flooded by monsoon rains, held no POWs.

During the same period, DIA's long-term strategic analyses focused on preventing strategic surprise by assessing potential adversaries' capabilities. In 1965 DIA assumed responsibility for managing the new Defense Attaché System, consolidating the individual services' attaché systems.

In the 1970s, DIA became involved in the collection and production of intelligence to support strategic arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union – including the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks

1. Origins of the Defense Intelligence Agency. <http://www.dia.mil/history/features/origins>

2. Video footage from that briefing can be viewed today on DIA's public website: [www.dia.mil/history/features/cuban-missile-crisis](http://www.dia.mil/history/features/cuban-missile-crisis).

3. Estimates of enemy strength in Vietnam became controversial with disagreements between DIA and the CIA. See James J. Wirtz (2004), *Intelligence to Please? The Order of Battle Controversy During the Vietnam War*. (On the web at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2152228>.)

(SALT I, SALT II) and the anti-ballistic missile treaties. Later that focus expanded to provide intelligence needed for the new nuclear deterrence strategy set forth in President Carter's Presidential Directive 59. This was a radical shift in US policy, from focusing on massive retaliation to a deterrent strategy of selected options targeting. When it came time to develop an operational nuclear war plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff relied on DIA to provide the intelligence foundation supporting the new US nuclear strategy.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late December 1979 signaled a new level of Soviet adventurism, and Western concerns grew about the pace and scale of the Soviet military build-up. Following President Reagan's election in 1980, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger briefed North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies on Soviet military developments. Eager to educate their citizens

about Moscow's intentions and growing capabilities, a number of NATO ministers asked Secretary Weinberger if there were a way to declassify his briefing, pictures, and charts. The secretary turned to DIA, and the resulting ten annual unclassified publications, the *Soviet Military Power* series, which chronicled Soviet military capabilities and intentions, had enormous impact on the public in Europe and elsewhere.

DIA underwent rapid change in the 1980s. In 1984 the new Defense Intelligence Analysis Center (DIAC) opened at Bolling Air Force Base (now called Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling) in Washington, DC, allowing the Agency to consolidate many of its functions in one location. Today an expanded DIAC building serves as—and is called—the DIA headquarters.

1985 became known as the "Year of the Terrorist" with the highly publicized hijackings of the Italian cruise ship *Achille Lauro*, Trans World Airlines Flight 847, attacks on the airports in Rome and Vienna, and other deadly acts. DIA provided analytic and collection support during these crises, and provided intelligence related to the conflicts in Central America, Operation EL DORADO CANYON (the 1986 retaliatory airstrike on Qaddafi's Libya), and the nation's growing counter-narcotics efforts. DIA's Central America Joint

Intelligence Team (CAJIT) was the first national-level intelligence fusion center and became a model for similar elements within the Intelligence Community in later years.

In 1986, Congress passed landmark legislation known as the Goldwater-Nichols Act, which reorganized the US military, strengthening the roles of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the combatant commands. Intended to enhance joint efforts across the military, the Goldwater-Nichols Act also designated DIA as a "combat support agency," denoting increased responsibilities to provide timely

operational intelligence support to the unified and specified commanders around the world. In this capacity, DIA led the department-wide effort to develop joint intelligence doctrine and strengthen the infrastructure needed for timely intelligence support of military operations.



The Defense Intelligence Analysis Center (DIAC) which opened in 1984 at Bolling Air Force Base (now Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling), Washington, DC.

As the 1980s transitioned into the 1990s, a succession of crises—from the fall of the Berlin Wall, to Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama, to the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, and to Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM in the Persian Gulf—required DIA often to shift its focus. DIA organized and led an integrated effort to provide intelligence to US and coalition forces deployed in Saudi Arabia to support the initial aerial campaign against Iraq and the later ground invasion.<sup>4</sup>

The period after DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM saw significant change for DIA. In 1992, DIA was given responsibility for the Army's Missile and Space Intelligence Center in Huntsville, Alabama, and also for the Armed Forces Medical Intelligence Center, now known as the National Center for Medical Intelligence, at Fort Detrick, Maryland.

During the mid-1990s, DIA provided intelligence support during reactions to the military-led coup in Haiti and to the Balkans Crisis. In 1995,

4. The DIA website contains a detailed history of intelligence support efforts prior to, during, and after DESERT SHIELD / DESERT STORM. It illustrates the scope and complexity of the intelligence effort to support a modern military campaign. See <http://www.dia.mil/history/features/gulf-war/>.

consistent with the trend for consolidating similar activities within the separate services, the Defense HUMINT Service<sup>5</sup> was established within the Agency to oversee human source intelligence collection. In 2008, the separate Counterintelligence Field Activity (CIFA) was consolidated into the Defense HUMINT Service to form the Defense Counterintelligence and HUMINT Center.

The post-Cold War environment of the 1990s

abruptly ended on September 11, 2001. The impact of the terrorist attacks was so significant that it is common to refer to recent history in terms of “pre-9/11” and “post-9/11” eras.

Prior to the 11 September attacks, DIA had taken steps to ramp up its counterterrorism efforts. After the al-Qaida suicide bombers’ attack on the USS *Cole* in October 2000, DIA reorganized its counterterrorism office into the Joint Terrorism Analysis Center (JTAC). After the 11 September attacks, the JTAC mission was expanded and sharpened, and the organization was christened the Joint Intelligence Task Force-Combating Terrorism (JITF-CT).<sup>6</sup> JITF-CT has provided enhanced analysis and production to support worldwide efforts to counter terrorism. JITF-CT analysts produced daily assessments of possible terrorist threats to defense personnel, facilities, and interests.<sup>7</sup> The JITF-CT Weapons Branch is recognized for starting the counter-IED

5. HUMINT stands for human source intelligence, which includes overt human collectors, such as Defense Attachés, and covert sources, including controlled agents and cooperating foreign military intelligence liaison services.

6. <http://www.dia.mil/history/>

7. [https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/archived-reports-1/Ann\\_Rpt\\_2001smo.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/archived-reports-1/Ann_Rpt_2001smo.html)

effort in Iraq.<sup>8</sup> JITF-CT remains at the center of DIA’s anti-terrorism efforts today.

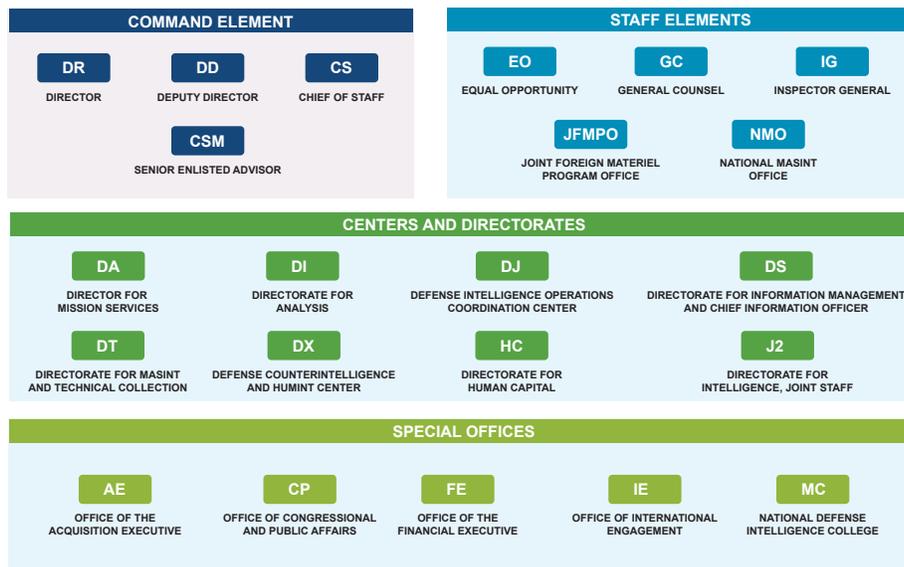
In the months after the 9/11 attacks, the US and coalition partners embarked on Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, toppling the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Antiterrorist initiatives took place in other parts of the world as well, including in the Philippines and the Horn of Africa. In March 2003, the United States and coalition forces also launched Operation IRAQI

FREEDOM. In each of these operations, DIA provided intelligence on enemy troop dispositions, weaponry, and damage assessments from air-strikes. The agency also helped locate high value targets and assessed insurgent capabilities, intentions, and potential.

DIA produced fine-grain tactical and operational intelligence for combat forces as well as strategic estimates for policy and decision makers. The agency also supported the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), an interagency body tasked with searching Iraq for weapons of mass destruction.<sup>9</sup> DIA’s work is not limited to antiterrorism and counterinsurgency. In addition to its protracted commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, the agency monitors North Korean missile launches and tracks the development of Iran’s nuclear program. It is also heavily engaged in supporting efforts to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, interdict narcotics trafficking, conduct global information operations (cyber), and assess foreign military capabilities in space and cyber-space. In 2004 and



## Organization of the DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY



DIA Organization Chart as of 2011-2012

8. IED stands for “improvised explosive device,” – a homemade bomb. (Stephen Phillips, “The Birth of the Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell,” *Small Wars Journal*, see [www.smallwarsjournal.com/mag/docs-temp/52-phillips.pdf](http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/mag/docs-temp/52-phillips.pdf))

9. <http://www.dia.mil/history/>

2005, DIA also provided an unprecedented level of support to foreign and domestic humanitarian missions, especially the Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Katrina.

While DIA deployed personnel forward during Vietnam, DESERT STORM, and Haiti, the Agency's deployments in the post-9/11 era have increased by an order of magnitude. Since DIA absorbed the civilian intelligence professionals at the nine combatant commands, the majority of DIA employees now work outside of the Washington area. Some have observed that DIA has gone from a Washington-based agency with small numbers of deployed personnel to a forward-deployed agency, supported by a headquarters in Washington. This is a significant change in DIA's culture. Today DIA, with 16,500 civilian and military personnel, is approximately twice the size it was before 9/11. Approximately 800 personnel are forward deployed temporarily to Afghanistan and elsewhere worldwide. Hundreds more reside at the combatant commands, and others are stationed at overseas regional support centers that operate and maintain classified networks. Still others are assigned to liaison offices in Ottawa, London, Canberra, Auckland, and elsewhere.

Today DIA's responsibilities are focused on four core operational capabilities: all-source analysis, human intelligence (HUMINT), counterintelligence, and measurement and signature intelligence (MASINT). In addition, DIA manages the nation's premier worldwide top secret communications network – the Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System (JWICS). DIA also is the executive agent for a number of Director of National Intelligence (DNI) centers and activities that serve the entire intelligence community. These include the Underground Facility Analysis Center (UFAC), the National Center for Medical Intelligence (NCMI), the National Media Exploitation Center (NMEC), the Prisoner of War-Missing in Action (POW-MIA) Analytic Cell, and the National Intelligence University (NIU).

Today DIA is truly a global agency, operat-

---

#### MULTIPLE RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to overseeing DIA's operations, the Director, Defense Intelligence Agency also has a number of other responsibilities, including:

- Program manager for the General Defense Intelligence Program (GDIP), which funds important intelligence activities at the nine combatant commands and the Military Services
- Program manager for all Department of Defense human intelligence
- Director of the Defense Attaché System
- Program manager for Department of Defense counterintelligence
- Functional manager for all measurement and signature intelligence (MASINT)
- Oversight of all-source analysis conducted throughout the Department of Defense, including work conducted at the combatant commands, the Military Services, and their Service centers: the Army National Ground Intelligence Center, the Office of Naval Intelligence, the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, and the Air Force National Air and Space Intelligence Center

ing 24/7 wherever US forces are engaged and at every echelon of the chain of command, providing the daily intelligence updates for the unified and specified combatant commands, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. DIA analysts also write for the President's Daily Brief, prepare target packages for national-level special operations units conducting raids against high-value targets, and provide strategic assessments for commanders in combat zones. The story of DIA's evolution is one that finds the agency serving as the hub of the defense intelligence wheel and simultaneously as the engine integrating national and military intelligence.

---

#### READINGS FOR INSTRUCTORS

---

The following titles are recommended for a more in-depth understanding of intelligence successes and failures, lessons on leadership and organizational change, and optimizing performance:

Richard K. Betts and Thomas G. Mahnken, Eds. (2005): *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel*. London: Frank Cass. This collection of essays covers a variety of salient topics, including intelligence and combat leadership, intelligence failure, surprise, and politicization of intelligence.

Cynthia M. Grabo (2004), *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis of Strategic Warning*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America. This is a seminal study of the warning discipline from a leading practitioner.

Ephraim Kam (1988), *Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective*, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University. Kam's book has been called a definitive examination of strategic surprise. The author delves into the psychological factors that may contribute to an inability to assess accurately indications and warning of an impending attack.

John A. Nagl (2002), *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. Westport, CT: Praeger. This book focuses on counterinsurgency lessons from the 1950s war in Malaya and from the Vietnam War, and addresses how institutions learn when confronted with change.

Robert Jervis (2010), *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the*

*Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. New York: Cornell University Press. This is an unblinking look at intelligence failure leading up to the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the Iraq weapons of mass destruction (WMD) debacle.

Simon Sinek (2009), *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. London: Penguin. All too often, individuals and organizations focus first on WHAT and do not have a clear WHY. The author finds that great leaders lead with WHY and personify a sense of purpose that inspires peers, subordinates, and seniors alike.

Peter F. Drucker (1997), *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc. This book will challenge readers to take a close look at the very heart of their organizations and what drives them. It provides a simple tool for self-assessment and transformation.

Michael Useem (2003), *Leading Up: How to Lead Your Boss So You Both Win*. New York: Crown Business. This book effectively uses historical examples to discuss how leaders have built successful organizations. It discusses organizational communications and leadership challenges related to building a common purpose within a group that everyone then works to achieve.

DIA maintains an extensive website ([www.dia.mil](http://www.dia.mil)) useful for further information about DIA. Of particular interest is the 2012-2017 DIA Strategic Plan at [www.dia.mil/about/strategic-plan](http://www.dia.mil/about/strategic-plan), DIA's history at <http://www.dia.mil/history/>, and articles at <http://www.dia.mil/history/features/>. Also worth exploring are the websites for the DIA-hosted National Intelligence University ([www.ni-u.edu](http://www.ni-u.edu)) and its associated press ([www.ni-u.edu/ni\\_press/press.html](http://www.ni-u.edu/ni_press/press.html)), which has many on-line resources. 🐦



LTG Ronald L. Burgess, Jr., US Army, is the 17th director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, appointed in March 2009. He has served previously as Director of Intelligence, J-2, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), Director of Intelligence, J-2, US Southern Command, and

Director for Intelligence, J-2, The Joint Staff. From August 2005 to February 2009 Lieutenant General Burgess was the Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Customer Outcomes later transitioning to Director of the Intelligence Staff. During this period he twice served as the Acting Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence.