

Updated January 16, 2026

Defense Primer: Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security

The Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security (USD(I&S)) (who is using Under Secretary of War for Intelligence and Security as a “secondary title” under Executive Order (E.O.) 14347 dated September 5, 2025) is a civilian official, appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, who reports directly to the Secretary of Defense (who is using Secretary of War as a “secondary title” under E.O. 14347). The USD(I&S) is the Principal Staff Assistant and advisor to the Secretary of Defense on intelligence, counterintelligence (CI), security, sensitive activities, and other intelligence-related matters. On behalf of the Secretary, the USD(I&S) also exercises authority, direction, and control over Department of Defense (DOD) (using Department of War as a “secondary title” under E.O. 14347) intelligence and security policy, intelligence organization, and intelligence support to military decision-makers and warfighters.

Congress redesignated the position of Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence (USD(I)) as the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2020 (Section 1621 of P.L. 116-92). This change increased the emphasis on the importance and scope of the USD(I&S)’s security responsibilities, which include responsibility for conducting most of the federal government’s background investigations to determine eligibility for access to classified information (consistent with Executive Order 13869)

As the head of the defense intelligence and security enterprise, the USD(I&S) has responsibility for a significant portion of the personnel and funding supporting the Intelligence Community (IC) overall. The USD(I&S) and staff, however, are not statutory elements of the IC. Title 50 *U.S. Code* §3003(4) lists the 18 organizational elements of the IC, two of which are independent—the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and Central Intelligence Agency—and 16 of which are components of six separate departments of the federal government. The nine IC elements within DOD comprise the defense intelligence and security enterprise overseen by the USD(I&S). They include the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), National Security Agency (NSA), National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), and the intelligence components of the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force, and Space Force. These elements, in turn, provide the Joint Staff and Combatant Commands with the personnel and expertise for their component joint intelligence organizations.

Origin of the USD(I&S) Position

Leadership of intelligence-related functions within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) has been realigned multiple times over the course of DOD’s history. The most recent development came when Congress established the USD(I) position in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

DOD requested the establishment of the USD(I) position, asserting that in exercising delegated oversight over intelligence, CI, and security functions, the position would “provide the Secretary of Defense with the flexibility ... require[d] to respond to heightened demands on the [DOD] to support the President’s efforts to prevent and respond to acts of terrorism against the United States.” The legislative language establishing the position of USD(I) was included under Section 901 of the Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003 (P.L. 107-314), which was codified as 10 U.S.C. §137.

Under Secretaries of Defense (I&S)

- Stephen A. Cambone (March 2003-December 2006)
- James R. Clapper (April 2007-August 2010)
- Michael G. Vickers (March 2011-April 2015)
- Marcel Lettre (December 2015-January 2017)
- Todd Lowery (acting) (January 2017-June 2017)
- Kari Bingen (acting) (June 2017-December 2017)
- Joseph D. Kernan (December 2017-November 2020)
- Ezra Cohen-Watnick (acting) (November 2020-January 2021)
- David M. Taylor (acting) (January 2021-June 2021)
- Ronald S. Moultrie (June, 2021-February 2024)
- Milancy D. Harris (acting) (March 2024-January 2025)
- Dustin Gard-Weiss (acting) (January 2025-July 2025)
- Bradley H. Hansell (July 2025-present)

Origin of “Dual-Hatted” Role for USD(I&S)

In May 2007, the Secretary of Defense and the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to establish a dual role for the USD(I). In a news release announcing the issuance of the MOA, then-USD(I) James Clapper indicated that the creation of a Director of Defense Intelligence (DDI) position was intended to “strengthen the relationship between the DNI and the DOD ... [and] to facilitate staff interaction and promote synchronization.” Under the “dual-hatting” arrangement, the incumbent within OSD serves as the USD(I&S), and within the ODNI as the DDI. In the role of

DDI, the USD(I&S) reports directly to the DNI as principal advisor on defense intelligence matters.

The DNI and the USD(I&S) together coordinate interagency activities facilitating the integration of national and tactical-level intelligence activities. The USD(I&S) coordinates defense intelligence with IC programs and priorities, and addresses strategic, tactical, and operational requirements supporting DOD strategy and operations. The USD(I&S), therefore, provides strategic direction and oversight of the products and services derived from DOD's collection and analysis of information, providing insight on the capabilities, plans, intentions and disposition of forces of foreign militaries, non-governmental foreign adversaries, and areas of actual or potential military operations.

Roles and Responsibilities of the USD(I&S)

DOD Directive 5143.01, updated April 6, 2020, establishes the responsibilities, functions, relationships, and authorities of the USD(I&S) within DOD, as defined by law, executive order, and DOD policy, including those responsibilities and authorities delegated by the Secretary of Defense to the USD(I&S). Among the USD(I&S)'s major responsibilities listed in DOD Directive 5143.01 are

- advising the Secretary of Defense and the Deputy Secretary of Defense regarding defense intelligence, CI, security, and other intelligence-related matters;
- serving as DDI and principal advisor to the DNI on defense intelligence, as well as facilitating the integration of defense intelligence and DOD support with IC activities;
- engaging the National Security Council (NSC) staff, other government agencies (OGAs), and DOD components to develop defense intelligence policies, plans, and programs;
- serving as DOD senior official for the insider threat program, and providing strategic direction and oversight of defense CI programs generally;
- exercising authority, direction, control, and oversight over the activities of the DIA, the NGA, the NRO, the NSA/Central Security Service (CSS), and the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA), on behalf of the Secretary of Defense;
- establishing strategy, policy, programs and priorities for, and providing oversight of, the Defense Intelligence Enterprise, including all intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) manned and unmanned activities (including cyberspace activities), human intelligence collection operations, and defense signals intelligence, geospatial intelligence, and measurement and signature intelligence capabilities and performance;
- ensuring DOD IC elements are responsive to the intelligence requirements of operational military forces;
- establishing and maintaining defense intelligence and CI relationships with foreign defense intelligence entities in coordination with the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USD(P) (using Under Secretary of War for Policy as a "secondary title" under E.O. 14347), and in consultation with Combatant Commanders, as appropriate; and
- providing strategic direction and oversight of defense security programs, including activities to protect the

supply chain and conduct personnel background investigations and security clearance adjudications.

Other major responsibilities and functions of the USD(I&S) include acting as the Program Executive for the Military Intelligence Program (MIP) and managing the MIP through the DOD Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) process. The USD(I&S) also has acquisition authority for intelligence, CI, and security-related technologies, systems, and equipment, and exercises oversight of personnel and manpower issues for defense intelligence positions.

Program Executive of the MIP

IC spending is the sum of two separate budget programs: (1) the National Intelligence Program (NIP), covering IC-wide programs, and activities related to the strategic requirements of decision-makers; and (2) the MIP, which funds the tactical intelligence and intelligence-related activities of the DOD in support of military operations. The DNI manages the NIP budget through the IC budget process (Intelligence Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Evaluation Process, or IPPBE). The USD(I&S) manages the MIP separately through the DOD's PPBE process. The DNI and USD(I&S) thus coordinate and integrate the two programs within the constraints of two separate budget processes.

Issues for Congress

- Congress may consider whether or not codifying the USD(I&S)'s function as DDI and the relationship to the DNI would enhance U.S. national security by adding explicit congressional direction for these functions.
- Because of the highly technical nature of the USD(I&S) position, Congress may consider further, more explicit direction on the qualifications for such an appointment on par with those for the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) (10 U.S.C. §135(a)(2)).

Relevant Statutes

Title 10 U.S. Code §137

CRS Products

CRS In Focus IF10524, *Defense Primer: Budgeting for National and Defense Intelligence*, by Michael E. DeVine

CRS In Focus IF10525, *Defense Primer: National and Defense Intelligence*, by Michael E. DeVine

Other Resources

DOD Directive 5143.01, Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security, Change 2 effective April 6, 2020.

Executive Order 12333, *United States Intelligence Activities*.

Michael McConnell, DNI, and Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense, *Memorandum of Agreement*, May 2007.

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