



Updated February 2, 2026

Defense Primer: National and Defense Intelligence

The Intelligence Community (IC) is responsible for providing insight into actual or potential threats to the U.S. homeland, the American people, and national interests at home and abroad. It aims to do so through the production of timely, nonpolitical products and services to help inform tactical and strategic decisionmakers. Consumers of intelligence include the President, the National Security Council (NSC), executive branch departments and agencies, the military, Congress, and the law enforcement community.

The IC is composed of 18 elements (50 U.S.C. §3003(4)), two of which are independent, and 16 of which are component organizations of six separate departments of the federal government. These elements receive appropriated intelligence funding from the National Intelligence Program (NIP). The nine Department of Defense (DOD, using the Department of War as a “secondary title” under Executive Order (E.O.) 14347, dated September 5, 2025) IC elements also receive funding from the Military Intelligence Program (MIP). For more on intelligence funding see, CRS In Focus IF10524, *Defense Primer: Budgeting for National and Defense Intelligence*, by Michael E. DeVine.

Statutory IC Elements

DOD Elements:

- Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)
- National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA)
- National Reconnaissance Office (NRO)
- National Security Agency (NSA)
- U.S. Naval Intelligence (N2)
- U.S. Marine Corps Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Enterprise (MCISR-E)
- U.S. Army Intelligence (G2)
- U.S. Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (AF/A2)
- U.S. Space Force Intelligence (S-2)

Non-DOD Elements:

- Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI)
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
- Department of State (DOS) Bureau of Intelligence & Research (INR)
- Department of Justice (DOJ) Drug Enforcement Administration Office of National Security Intelligence (DEA/ONSI), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation Intelligence Branch (FBI/IB)
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Intelligence & Analysis (I&A), and U.S. Coast Guard Intelligence (CG-2)
- Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Intelligence & Counter-Intelligence (OICI)
- Department of the Treasury Office of Intelligence & Analysis (OIA)

Source: 50 U.S. Code §3003(4); ODNI.

National and Defense Intelligence

National intelligence addresses the strategic requirements of national security policymakers such as the President, the Secretary of Defense (who is using Secretary of War as a “secondary title” under E.O. 14347), and the Secretary of State. National intelligence programs and activities are funded through the NIP budget appropriations, which are a consolidation of appropriations for the ODNI, CIA, general defense, and national cryptologic, reconnaissance, geospatial, and other specialized intelligence programs. The NIP, therefore, provides funding for not only the ODNI, CIA, and IC elements of the Departments of Homeland Security, Energy, the Treasury, Justice, and State, but also, substantially, for the strategic-level programs and activities of the intelligence agencies within DOD, particularly the NSA, NGA, DIA, and NRO.

Defense intelligence comprises the intelligence organizations and capabilities of the military services, Joint Staff, combatant commands, and the four DOD intelligence agencies: the NSA, NGA, DIA, and NRO. Defense intelligence addresses strategic and tactical requirements; it supports military strategy, planning, and operations, providing products and services on foreign military capabilities, plans and intentions, orders-of-battle, disposition of forces, and the political, social, and economic factors influencing the environment in areas of actual or potential military operations.

National and defense intelligence are not discrete enterprises. The 18 organizational elements, regardless of whether they may primarily focus on national or defense intelligence activities, are required to collaborate closely to address intelligence gaps and disseminate timely products to appropriately cleared personnel across the government. IC elements are expected to leverage international partners on issues of mutual concern to complement the organic national and defense intelligence activities funded through the NIP and MIP.

Who Does What?

E.O. 12333, codified in 50 U.S.C. §3001, establishes general duties and responsibilities for each element of the IC. Other laws, executive orders, and policy issuances may establish additional duties and responsibilities for particular IC elements.

- **DIA** is a DOD combat support agency that collects, analyzes, and disseminates foreign military intelligence to policymakers and the military. DIA serves as the nation’s primary manager and producer of foreign military intelligence. It manages the production of intelligence for the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the combatant commands.

- **NGA** produces geospatial intelligence products and services in support of policymakers, warfighters, other intelligence agencies, and first responders.
- **NRO** builds and operates satellites and ground stations whose main purpose is collecting imagery and signals intelligence to support other agencies' intelligence products and services.
- **NSA** specializes in cryptology, encompassing signals intelligence and information assurance, and is responsible for computer network operations in support of national security requirements.
- **Military service intelligence components** collect, analyze, and disseminate strategic, operational, and tactical intelligence supporting the military services jointly and separately. Support can range from tactical intelligence in a theater of operations to operational and strategic support of military planning. Military service intelligence organizations, such as the Navy's Office of Naval Intelligence, specialize in long-range threat analysis and strategic intelligence assessments that can, among other things, support defense platform and weapons systems development.
- **CIA** collects, analyzes, and disseminates foreign intelligence and counterintelligence in support of a broad range of senior national security consumers including the President, NSC, and military. In addition to its clandestine and overt collection activities, CIA historically has been the leading agency in conducting covert action as directed by the President.
- **Other non-DOD elements** within the Departments of Energy, Homeland Security, Justice, State, and the Treasury provide intelligence in support of the national requirements particular to national security threats related to the mission of each department.

IC Leadership

Together, the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) and Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security (USD(I&S), using Under Secretary of War for Intelligence & Security as a “secondary title” under 14347) coordinate programs and activities across the IC to promote an integrated approach to intelligence collection, analysis, and dissemination.

Director of National Intelligence

The DNI is the principal advisor to the President on intelligence matters, a position established by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA; P.L. 108-458). The core mission of the DNI and, by extension, the ODNI is to spearhead intelligence integration and collaboration among the diverse elements of the IC.

Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security (USD(I&S))/Director of Defense Intelligence (DDI)

The USD(I&S) position is dual-hatted: When acting as the USD(I&S), the incumbent reports directly to the Secretary

of Defense and serves as the Secretary's principal staff assistant for intelligence, counterintelligence, and security. When acting as DDI, the incumbent reports to the DNI and serves as the DNI's principal advisor regarding defense intelligence, counterintelligence, and security matters.

Strategic, Operational, and Tactical Levels of Intelligence

Table 1 provides an overview of the intelligence corresponding to what DOD calls *strategic*, *operational*, and *tactical* levels of warfare.

Table 1. Levels of Intelligence

Strategic Intelligence assists senior military and civilian leaders in developing national strategy and policy; monitors the international situation; helps with developing military plans; assists in determining major weapon systems and force structure requirements; and supports the conduct of strategic operations.

Operational Intelligence focuses on military capabilities and intentions of adversaries; analyzes the operational environment; identifies adversary centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities; monitors events in the joint force commander's area of interest; and supports joint campaigns and operations.

Tactical Intelligence supports military commanders in the planning and execution of battles, engagements, and other joint force activities; and provides commanders with information on imminent threats and changes in the operational environment.

Source: CRS adapted from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication 2-0, *Joint Intelligence*, May 26, 2022, pp. I-15—I-19.

Relevant Statutes

Title 10, U.S. Code, Chapter 21 – DOD Intelligence Matters
Title 50, U.S. Code, Chapter 44 – National Security

Related CRS Products

CRS In Focus IF10523, *Defense Primer: Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security*, by Michael E. DeVine

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

CRS In Focus IF10574, *Defense Primer: Intelligence Support to Military Operations*, by Michael E. DeVine

CRS Report R45175, *Covert Action and Clandestine Activities of the Intelligence Community: Selected Definitions*, by Michael E. DeVine

Other Resources

DOD, Joint Publication 2-0, *Joint Intelligence*, May 26, 2022
DOD, Joint Publication 2-01, *Joint and National Intelligence Support to Military Operations*, July 5, 2017

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