

# The CIA as Executive Agent on Climate Change

By [Marc Ambinder](#)

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Theme: [Intelligence](#)

In-depth Report: [Climate Change](#)

Gen. James Clapper (ret.) gets his Senate Select Committee on Intelligence hearing today, and it's very likely he'll sail through with a large number of votes from Republicans. Last week's public hearing didn't tell us too much about Clapper's insight into a variety of institutional issues, but [his answers](#) to [some written](#) questions provide us with a snapshot of how the man's mind works.

Clapper does "not believe a 'Department of Intelligence' is a viable alternative," a poke at former DNI Mike McConnell, who wants to pull all intelligence agencies under a single department. This represents a change of position for Clapper, as he admits:

I (then serving as Director of NGA) suggested that another paradigm should be considered: moving the agencies who's first letter is "N" (as in national) out of the Department of Defense, and under the operational control of a DNI, might have merit. Putatively, although not expressed that way at the time, this would mean a "Department of Intelligence." I have since come to believe that this arrangement would not be workable, since it could pose profound civil liberties challenges, and the "donor" Department (DOD) would, over time, regenerate the capabilities lost to the "Department of Intelligence," since the support rendered by these agencies is so integral to warfighting.

He wants to use other agencies to serve as executive agents for specific functions delegated to the DNI, thereby keeping his headquarters staff small and nimble. He writes:

For example, the DIA could serve as the DNI's Executive Agent for IC Document and Media Exploitation; the NSA could serve as the DNI's Executive Agent for IC Foreign Language Machine Translation; the CIA could serve as the DNI's Executive Agent on Climate Change.

He believes that climate change is a viable topic for the intelligence community's attention:

Global climate change could have wide-ranging implications for US national security interests over the next 20 years because it would aggravate existing world problems, such as poverty, social tensions, environmental degradation, ineffectual leadership and weak political institutions, that threaten state stability.

He revealed that the "ODNI Office of General Counsel is also leading an inter-agency effort to assess, refine, and clarify U.S. Person rules and procedures for handling information obtained under FISA to improve IC information sharing, including with respect to SIGINT."

He opposes “required FISA-like minimization procedures for NSLs,” which are the exigent letters that the FBI uses to obtain information without warrants.

He plans a “detailed survey of the ODNI organization, and numbers of people and how they are allocated, to determine if there is bloat, or whether the ODNI is perhaps only plagued with urban legend. In general, if confirmed, I would look to see if any functions could be moved to an executive agent somewhere else in the IC. For example, a DNI could use the staffs of other Agencies and Departments to discharge specific functions and activities on behalf of the DNI.”

He defers to the president about notifying Congress of covert action programs, but states:

Any decision to employ covert action as a tool of national security strategy will, by law, be made by the President. The flow of information to the DNI on covert action programs should be driven by the DNI’s role in overseeing and providing advice to the President and the NSC on covert action programs. As a result, the DNI must be kept informed of existing CA programs.

In other words, he agrees with former DNI Dennis Blair that the DNI needs a seat at the table when covert action is being planned. Integrating “CA” into the broader intelligence strategy is not mentioned.

He has no problems with current intelligence community moonlighting policies, he doesn’t think the DNI needs more situational awareness of major strategic contracts, and he promises to keep Congress “informed of all intelligence activities concerning domestic cybersecurity, including NSA’s support of DHS.”

*Marc Ambinder is the politics editor of The Atlantic. He has covered Washington for ABC News and the Hotline, and he is chief political consultant to CBS News. Follow him on Twitter [@marcambinder](#)*

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