

WHITE HOUSE WON'T TELL DNI IT SHOULD BE MORE POWERFUL

Now for your latest installment of DOD's expanding intelligence authorities, DNI's increasing irrelevance, and the White House's efforts to make sure those trends continue.

As you'll recall, back in March, the Senate Intelligence Committee sent a scathing report on the many failures to stop the Undie Bomber. The report was most critical of the head of the National Counterterrorism Center, Michael Leiter. But instead of replacing Leiter right away, the Administration sat on the report for two months until it became public, and then used the report as its excuse to fire Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair as the scapegoat for the Christmas Day attack. The White House reportedly tried to get either Leon Panetta or Chuck Hagel to take over, but after they refused, Obama nominated James Clapper, over the objections of both the Democrats and Republicans who need to confirm the position on SSCI. Two things make this worse: in the face of the need to scale back DOD's intelligence portfolio to better balance our intelligence community as a whole, DOD has instead been expanding it. And Clapper signed an April memo arguing against a range of controls Congress was trying to put on DOD's intelligence activities.

It turns out that in addition to SSCI's March report finding NCTC most responsible for the Christmas Day attack, and Clapper's April report calling for DOD to keep its expansive intelligence powers, the President's Intelligence Advisory Board was issuing its own report, finished in March and sent to Congress on April 1. The report calls for a stronger DNI—precisely what Congress is trying to do but DOD and the White House are trying to prevent.

But the White House has not shared the report

with the DNI's office.

The White House has withheld a key report, which maps out a strategy for fixing the troubled Director of National Intelligence, from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The classified report, "Study of the Mission, Size, and Function of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence," was completed by the Presidential Intelligence Advisory Board (PIAB) at least as early as March, several weeks before President Obama asked DNI Dennis Blair to resign. The report came at an inopportune time for the White House, which has pursued a policy course counter to the report's advice.

Multiple sources within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence tell The Atlantic that the office, which employs about 1,500 people including the director himself, never received the report. The White House would not comment on how it was distributed, but Assistant Press Secretary Tommy Vietor said, "The study you reference was shared with DNI Blair, who provided us comments on the findings." However, the findings are only a brief summary of the report's unclassified sections; they are also freely available on Politico's website. The full report, which is classified, has not been shared.

Of particular import here is the White House's organized blow-off of Congress. Congress commissioned the PIAB report last year as part of the 2010 Defense Authorization.

Congress commissioned the PIAB report late last year as part of the 2010 Department of Defense Appropriations Act, requiring the board to evaluate the DNI and offer proposals for improving

it.

At the same time, Congress included some provisions in the 2010 Intelligence Authorization—things like controls on expenditures and expanding budgets, review of the use of contractors, and an Inspector General for the entire intelligence community—that would strengthen the DNI and rein in DOD. SSCI sent a report to the White House in March that the White House used to start planning the ouster of Dennis Blair, who was sympathetic to the goal of a stronger DNI. And at the same time, the White House was refusing to share the PIAB report which would have strengthened Blair's hand. Against the background of the report showing that the President's advisory board thinks Congress, not DOD, is right about how the Intelligence Community is organized, the White House sends the Clapper nomination—which is designed to do just the opposite.

As a side note, I'm particularly interested in the role of Chuck Hagel here, who was one of the few sane Republicans on SSCI until Obama became President, would have overseen the PIAB report, but who refused to take the DNI role.

In any case, this all provides one more explanation for why DiFi is digging in her heels on this fight with the White House.