

DoD's Fledgling "Anti-Doomsday" Agency Takes Wing

By Elizabeth Aylott

Executive Summary

The Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) was created to bring together the scattered counterproliferation efforts of the Department of Defense. It is in the right place — within the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Its mission — to counter the threats of weapons of mass destruction — comes at the right time. But for the new agency to be effective it will have to exert sufficient influence in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill to shape overall counterproliferation efforts.

A newborn Department of Defense agency is now responsible for the arduous task of countering the threat of weapons of mass destruction. This includes assuring the safety of U.S. troops in a chemical/biological/nuclear-tainted environment; designing the technology to detect, deter and destroy these weapons; carrying out inspections under the nonproliferation regimes, and overseeing the destruction of nuclear weapons in the Soviet Union.

Created on October 1, 1998 as part of the Defense Reform Initiative, the new Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) was designed to pull together Department of Defense (DOD) counterproliferation elements into a single focal point, creating synergy between the programs and providing one-stop shopping for information. DTRA brings together several DOD entities dedicated to arms control verification, acquisition and development of counterproliferation technology, and implementation of the Cooperative Threat Reduction program. It has already prompted imitation, the sincerest form of flattery: Ukraine announced recently its intentions to create a threat-reduction agency modeled on DTRA.

As DTRA takes shape, however, it remains to be seen if it will improve counterproliferation efforts or merely streamline and consolidate operations as the result of a budget-cutting exercise. Several concerns arise from the circumstances of DTRA's birth. First, can the agency successfully establish itself in a secure location and with appropriate staff? DTRA must also assure that its component elements are enhanced, not diminished; that the mission receives sufficient high-level attention and funding; and that the leadership of DTRA and the Policy secretariat provide a strong voice for counterproliferation both in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill.

It will take time for the new agency to come of age and prove that it is up to meeting its responsibilities. DTRA's leadership should act now to ensure that weaknesses do not become impediments to fulfilling its potential.

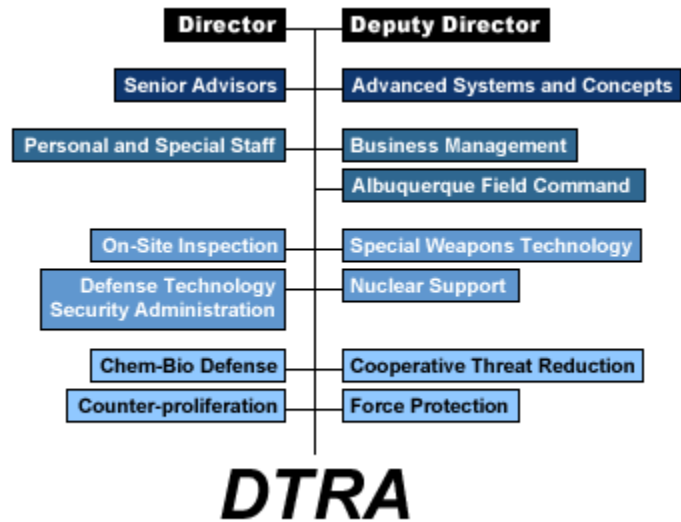
The New Kid on the Block

DTRA is a composite entity made up of three Cold War agencies: the On-Site Inspection Agency, the Defense Special Weapons Agency, and the Defense Technical Security Administration, as well as the various counterproliferation program elements from the now-vacant Acquisition and Technology office of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical and Biological weapons. DTRA is the result of two of the thrusts of the November 1997 Defense Reform Initiative (DRI): to consolidate and streamline organizations to achieve synergy of efforts and eliminate redundancy, and to move program management out of the Pentagon and into the agencies in the field.

While DTRA may have begun within the framework of defense reform, it nevertheless provided an opportunity to reshape the Pentagon in order to respond to new threats. DTRA is organized into eight directorates, plus offices for acquisition and administration as well as theoretical and advisory support (see Fig. 1). It has three primary missions: to maintain the U.S. nuclear deterrent capability, to reduce

the threat of weapons of mass destruction, and to counter the threats posed by these weapons. The work of DTRA ranges over a broad spectrum of efforts, from developing counterforce and defensive technology to verifying treaty compliance, maintaining nuclear expertise, and implementing the Cooperative Threat Reduction program (Nunn-Lugar). The expected benefit of DTRA is the opportunity to coordinate counterproliferation efforts across the full spectrum of deterrence, detection, destruction and defense against weapons of mass destruction.

Figure 1: DTRA Organization



The fledgling agency faces many challenges, such as finding an adequate location and continuing to attract appropriately qualified personnel. DTRA also must confront larger issues as it develops, including whether each of its component parts will be diminished rather than strengthened by the merger, whether DTRA itself will have influence and receive sufficient funding, and whether the agency will find its voice in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill.

The most immediate challenge concerns real estate. DTRA's 1200-person U.S.-based staff is currently located in an insecure, inadequate facility near Dulles airport. The location was chosen because it previously held one of DTRA's component agencies. The building is a potential "soft" target for a terrorist strike: a truck bomb could be driven into the building, and the airport is practically next door. DTRA's leadership is planning to relocate; it considered leasing and modifying a standard office park to meet DTRA's security requirements, but the bureaucratic system in place means that it will take less time to build a new building on a federal reservation with military construction. It will be a minimum of three years before DTRA can move to a more secure location.

DTRA will also need to retain and recruit highly qualified technical personnel. The average civil/military pay grade represented at DTRA is quite high: GS12-15 and Major respectively. However, this is by no means competitive with average pay rates found in industry, academia, or the national labs. The agency will need to carefully target and recruit prospective staff.

This recruiting challenge makes DTRA's Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (ASCO) a particularly intriguing element of the new agency. As DTRA's in-house think tank, ASCO will analyze emerging proliferation threats, technology and concepts, forecast requirements and integrate the results of this analysis into DTRA planning. The office will be made up of a core of military and civil service personnel, augmented by rotating experts from other government agencies as well as industry and academia. By uniting private advisors with in-house expertise, ASCO will hopefully connect DTRA with intellectual capital and expertise from outside the Department of Defense.

DTRA has to Maintaing the Strength of its Component Missions

DTRA has a diverse range of activities encompassed in its eight directorates: on-site inspections, technology security, special weapons technology, nuclear support, chem-bio defense, cooperative threat reduction, counterforce and force protection. Since the announcement of the formation of the agency, supporters of several of the individual programs have criticized the consolidation plan on the grounds that DTRA might downgrade the importance each of these missions held independently. Two particular areas of concern are defense against chemical and biological weapons (chem-bio defense) and technology security.

Chem-Bio Defense

The lines of responsibility for chem-bio defense are muddled. As it now stands, DTRA serves as the "focal point," (not the controlling authority), for the Joint Department of Defense/Chem-Bio Defense program, which develops chemical, biological and dual-use protection for the military services. DTRA does not have program management or budget authority over chem-bio defense, but shares it with the Army.

DTRA's Director, Dr. Jay Davis, sought to have the chem-bio budget moved under the control of DTRA, but Congress prohibited the transfer. This move was motivated by critics' concern that the core competencies of key DTRA agencies were focused on nuclear issues. Critics thus feared that DTRA might divert chem-bio funds and priorities to support existing nuclear missions. The resulting struggle between DTRA and Congress established a delicate balance which leaves the agency with influence, but not control, over chem-bio defense programs and their \$700 million budget. The Army will continue to act as the Executive Agent of the program, with budget and program control. As Executive Agent, the Army chairs the joint groups for procurement and Research and Development, which passes the program's plans and budget through a board to a steering committee. DTRA holds two out of four votes on this committee.

Under the current arrangement, DTRA is in the position of having responsibility over a mission without fully corresponding authority. However, direct military control assures continuity of efforts and should assuage fears that the chem-bio mission will be downgraded. The relationship between the agency and the Army has been described by DTRA's chem-bio director as "proactive" and "influential." DTRA must exercise that influence to coordinate and direct chem-bio work within the larger counterproliferation effort through its presence on the board.

Technology Security

Technology security has been the second arena for conflict. The Defense Technology Security Administration (DTSA) is responsible for formulating the Department of Defense's position on export control policy decisions. It was folded into DTRA as the directorate for defense technology security, and this move was the center of a maelstrom of controversy during DTRA's creation.

DTSA was formerly located in the Policy element of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and reported up through the policy chain of command. The movement of DTSA to the Acquisition and Technology Secretariat, a section of the DOD generally focused on the development and purchase of technology, led to a battle on Capitol Hill. Debate over the potential downgrading of U.S. export controls as a result of this move came just as the controversy over the alleged technology leaks by U.S. companies to China was emerging. One DTSA official testified at a Senate hearing that the move into DTRA was "the final death knell...for DOD's role in the export control process" and "a national security disaster in the making."

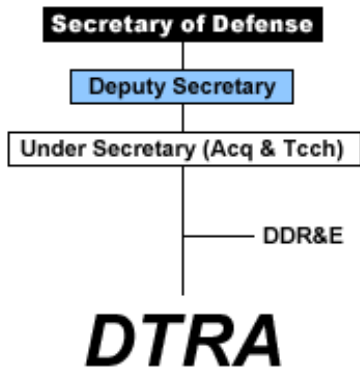
The incorporation of DTSA into DTRA need not herald the end of an effective export control policy. The interagency process of review remains the same. The directorate of technology security maintains a close relationship with and continues to receive oversight from Policy. Dave Tarbell, the former Director of DTSA and now the head of the technology security directorate at DTRA, is also double-hatted under the Policy secretariat and reports to the Undersecretary. Indeed, there are benefits to be found in the merger.

DTSA staffers use intelligence to determine if the end-user of U.S. technology is a proliferation risk, and technical analysis of the technology under consideration to determine the national security significance of a particular export. A study is currently underway to detail the intelligence needs of DTRA, and end-user information to assist the technology security directorate should be included. If DTRA successfully creates a focal point for intelligence on proliferation, DTSA will benefit.

Also, DTSA will have greater access to scientific expertise on key proliferation technologies. For example, the On-Site Inspection Agency's expertise can be utilized to ensure that technology transfers do not take place during U.S. satellite launches in China. The recent report of the House Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China (better known as the Cox Commission) has reportedly supported the use of government personnel for this purpose. A tougher, multi-level launch oversight and inspection process is being devised.

DTRA is not Stranded in a Bureaucratic Backwater

Figure 2:



One of the key motivations underlying the Defense Reform Initiative was to clearly separate policy-making and policy implementation so that program managers could focus on program execution. This sensible management model generated controversy when DTRA was first established. Critics claimed that the elimination of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Counterproliferation policy would reduce high-level interest in elements of counterproliferation policy, such as Cooperative Threat Reduction. This claim was based on organizational flow-charts that placed these offices a bureaucratic layer further away from the Secretary of Defense. Some observers fear that both counterproliferation policy and DTRA have been abandoned in a bureaucratic backwater.

Such fears are largely ungrounded. The situation must be understood as the result of two reorganizations under the Defense Reform Initiative: one in Policy and one in Acquisition. DTRA is located in Acquisition, and reports directly to Undersecretary Jacques Gansler, with day-to-day oversight coming from the Deputy Director of Research and Engineering, Hans Mark. (see Figure 2).

DTRA was located in the Acquisition shop for two reasons. First, this part of the Pentagon has sufficient resources and expertise to manage DTRA's operations. Second, two out of three of the agency's component parts (the On-Site Inspection Agency and the Defense Special Weapons Agency) were already part of the Acquisition and Technology chain of command. Under the Defense Reform Initiative, Acquisition was reorganized, with the end result that DTRA is no further away from the Secretary of Defense than its component agencies were. In fact, a layer of bureaucracy has been eliminated because DTRA reports directly to the Undersecretary rather than through an Assistant Secretary.

Positions on wiring diagrams, however, do not dictate the attention an agency receives. For example, the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO), the agency responsible for developing theater missile defense capabilities and national missile defense options, occupies the same relative position as DTRA. In this case, the placement was expressly intended to signal the importance of BMDO to the Pentagon.

Similarly, while the reorganization of the Policy secretariat resulted in rearrangement, consolidation and new titles, the people and their ranks remained the same. The major change involved the creation of a new Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Threat Reduction, a position now held by Ted Warner.

The new Assistant Secretary is responsible for a wide portfolio of issues, ranging from national security strategy and requirements to arms control negotiations and implementation to relations with the former Soviet Union. While titles and responsibilities have evolved, few other organizational and personnel changes have been put into place. Indeed, the reorganization has been critiqued for its failure to truly change how the policy directorate operates.

However, DTRA Needs to Define its Role as a Leading Counterproliferation Voice

While DTRA's position on organizational charts is unlikely to directly affect the agency's impact and influence, its performance might be hampered by another organizational reform: its uncertain role as a strong voice in promoting nonproliferation/counterproliferation issues in wider government circles. The separation of policy making and implementation under the Defense Reform Initiative split the leadership of counterproliferation between the Policy directorate and DTRA, a situation described by both parties as an area of bureaucratic tension.

DTRA's relationship with Congress, especially with the Appropriations committees, has been characterized lukewarmly by DTRA's Deputy Director Frank Moore as "improving." The DOD encountered difficulties in communicating with Congress the rationale for establishing the agency and the selection of its Director. While the dialogue has been active, it has been described as neither "cozy" nor "fully supportive." This is worrying because it jeopardizes the solvency and the influence of the fledgling agency. Yet, DTRA's leadership remains optimistic that sufficient funding and political backing will develop as the agency demonstrates superior performance.

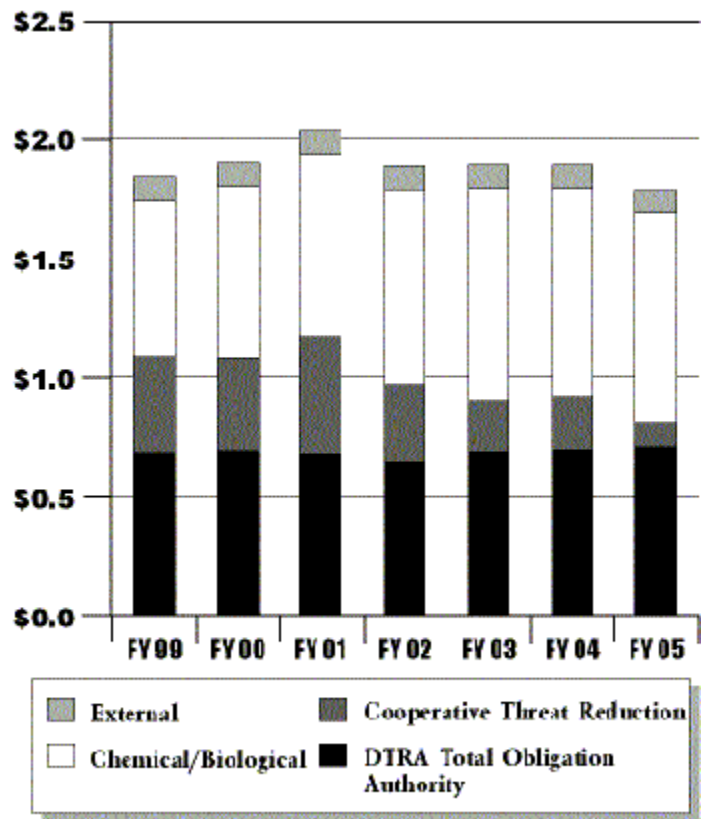
Although the Defense Reform Initiative's aim was both to save money and to improve operational efficiency, creating DTRA will not save money. The agency currently is funded at the level of its component parts, about \$1.8 billion. Budget requests through FY05 are steady after a slight rise from \$1.8 to level off at \$2 billion. The increase is in chem-bio defense funding and Cooperative Threat Reduction funding, neither of which is controlled by DTRA (see Figure 3). Director Davis has publicly stated that he does not see himself "sitting at the table when budget decisions are made" and that DTRA cannot count on new money to complete its mission and will have to reallocate within the \$2 billion to meet changing priorities.

DTRA's challenge, then, is to demonstrably improve operational efficiency and to strengthen DOD's response to the threat of proliferation. Davis has characterized the current approach to this problem as having "solved pieces of the problem, but not having successfully interlaced the pieces. I was brought in because of my collaboration skills, not to be an operational czar but to understand all that needs to be done and tie it together." While Davis' desire to avoid turf battles is wise, counterproliferation needs leadership.

Conclusions

DTRA is in its vulnerable, formative moments now and is facing many challenges as it seeks to build influence and find its voice. There are several important preliminary steps that DTRA needs to take in order to secure its position, funding and support so that it can turn to its most important mission: creating for counterproliferation efforts an effective whole which is more than the sum of its parts.

Figure 3. Components of DTRA Funding



As of FY 99 BENS (Sep 98)

Source: DTRA Charts

- DTRA needs to expeditiously move to a more secure location, and devise a strategy to retain and recruit quality personnel. It must also make full use of private and academic expertise, using the Advanced Systems Concept Office to build intellectual capital, and its Senior Advisor group to stay wired into the interagency process.
- The current balancing act between the Army and DTRA must remain steady in order to both allow the agency sufficient influence to shape counterproliferation efforts and defuse tensions over the potential downgrading of the chem-bio defense mission.
- The Defense Technology Security Administration must be allowed and encouraged to take advantage of the benefits of its incorporation into DTRA while keeping its role in the interagency process and continuing to receive oversight from Policy.
- The counterproliferation office in the Policy directorate and the leadership of DTRA must coordinate their efforts in order to be effective voices for counterproliferation in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill.