



James Clapper, on top of the secret empire

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By [David Ignatius](#)

James Clapper, the [director of national intelligence](#) (DNI), is not your sleek, button-down spy chief. The 72-year-old retired Air Force general has a beatnik goatee, a tendency to speak in malapropisms and a cranky attitude that he sometimes sums up with the phrase “I’m too old for this [expletive]!”

The structure of Clapper’s position overseeing the nation’s 16 intelligence agencies has itself been a kind of bureaucratic nightmare. The post was [created in 2004](#) to reduce the turf wars within the intelligence community that had prevented “[connecting the dots](#)” before Sept. 11, 2001. But although the legislation promised to empower a real intelligence chief, it kept key budget and management powers within the Pentagon — with the result that the DNI initially added more layering and second-guessing than efficiency.

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