DNI Clapper: Our Expectations of Senior National Intelligence Service Officers

Remarks as delivered by
The Honorable James R. Clapper
Director of National Intelligence

"Our Expectations of Senior National Intelligence Service Officers"

SNIS Promotion Ceremony
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Thank you Camille [Wider, ODNI HR Director], for that kind introduction.

It's good to have the new Senior National Intelligence Service [SNIS] officers and your families here.

Today is the 68th anniversary of D-Day, when 155,000 Allied troops landed on the beaches of Normandy, establishing a foothold in France and starting the push toward Berlin.

Apparently, the new SNISes wanted to project a large American flag on the four big screens behind me, and then have me reenact General Patton's famous D-Day speech, like George C. Scott.

I'm not going to do that.

But if you're afraid you won't be able to handle the duties of being a SNIS, I'll offer you some advice from Patton:

"Some of you, I know, are wondering whether or not you will chicken out under fire. Don't worry about it. I can assure you that you will all do your duty. When you put your hand into a bunch of goo that a moment before was your office budget – you'll know what to do."

Okay, Patton didn't really say that.

I'm particularly confident in the 11 people we're promoting to senior service today, because you're the first to get here through the rigorous ODNI CAB process. For the first time, we held Career Advisory Boards, during which senior SNISes reviewed and provided career advice to all of our GS-15 cadre, several hundred people.

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These 11 people distinguished themselves as already working at the level of a senior executive, regardless of what billet they held. Congratulations. You've earned your position as a SNIS, and you will continue to earn it.

I want to talk a little bit today about what we expect from Senior National Intelligence Service officers.

The promotion from GS-15 to SNIS is more than a step up in pay grade. In many ways, and I've always thought of it this way, it's like the step up to becoming a General or Flag Officer in the military. Your entire scope shifts.

Marshall Goldsmith wrote a 2007 bestseller titled: *What Got You Here Won't Get You There.* He wrote that people pick up habits on their way from senior management to executive management. Some of those habits can eventually hold them back and hurt their organizations.

The book is filled with wisdom, like: Don't try to put your two cents into every discussion. And don't try to win at all costs and in every situation; sometimes winning doesn't matter.

That's good advice, but you don't need a book to learn those two things. Believe me, you'll learn that when you go to the [Capitol] Hill.

So instead of telling you things you need to *stop* doing, like Goldsmith's book, I want to talk about new things you need to think about and *start* doing.

The first distinction that comes to mind is that now, we expect you to think beyond your organization.

Be a visionary. Build strong partnerships across the IC [Intelligence Community] and government. And we need you to understand and lead integration.

But don't confuse integration across agencies as an attempt to make every agency and organization into the same bland oatmeal. Integrate across organizational lines to take advantage of diversity and the strength of different organizations, including yours.

Remember that you answer to the needs of Mission across the IC. So we expect you to think and act corporately for the entire Intelligence Community.

That means that while you're advocating for your organization and people, sometimes you must make painful short-term choices for the good of the community.

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As a GS, we asked you to make decisions which may not benefit you personally. As a SNIS, sometimes you'll have to make tough decisions for the good of the IC Mission, IC workforce, policy-makers, and warfighters, even if those decisions won't benefit your office.

Those choices will take courage. But we wouldn't have selected you if we didn't think you were capable of making courageous choices.

The second distinction of being a SNIS is that we expect you to lead and develop the next generation of intelligence officers.

Don't just manage them. Lead by your example, and mentor them. More importantly, let them expand their reach and grow. That means sending them to training, even to that year-long course or that class that falls right when your office is most busy.

Consider the long term benefits of developing your employees, and balance that with the need to manage their workflow. That also means holding them accountable for completing their work in a timely and thorough manner.

At the SNIS 1 level, it's particularly hard to obey this one, but don't do your subordinates work for them because you can do it faster, or because it's easier to do it than to get them to do it to your standards.

That's hard, at least in part because you got to where you are because you're experts and are very good your job. You have high standards for quality and timeliness of work. But we need you to provide your workforce with opportunity and responsibility, and then build them up to meet your standards.

As General Patton said, "Never tell people *how* to do things. Tell them *what* to do, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

I have found that to be true throughout my career.

And then, and this is the most painful thing I'm going to ask you to do for our workforce, when they have mastered your expectations and can do their work with almost no supervision, you have to let them go. The best indication that you did your job well is if your subordinates leave your organization and go on to excel somewhere else.

The final distinction I'll make is more personal to you and how you think about yourself.

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I've talked about how anyone reaching the Senior Executive or Senior Intelligence level of service needs to think and act corporately for the larger good. For you, this distinction is even more prominent. You are Senior *National* Intelligence Service officers.

ODNI cadre are the only officers with the designation of SNIS. We used this designation deliberately. You're a *national* intelligence leader. You are a corporate asset for the *entire IC*, not just the ODNI.

That means we need you to add an understanding of the broad IC enterprise to the expertise and precise skill set that got you here. Partly, that will help you make decisions to benefit the entire intelligence enterprise. But also, we expect you to be ready to serve where you're needed, anywhere in the community.

Most people stay in government another 10 or 15 years after making senior, well … most. You'll probably have half-a-dozen assignments at SNIS level.

I can all but promise, at some point, you'll end up doing something critical for our nation that's far flung from your career plan and that requires knowledge and skills you don't have right now. Be ready.

So, I outlined 3 things for you to focus on, now that you're a SNIS:

- Think beyond your organization and do what's best for the entire IC,

- Lead and develop the next generation of intelligence officers,

- And make and keep yourself ready to be a corporate resource for the entire IC.

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But while you're doing those things, we need and expect you to keep doing the things that got you here.

- Demonstrate the highest ethical standards.
- Serve with integrity and speak truth to power.
- Don't gloss over problems. Meet them head-on.
- Drive positive change.
- Listen to your people.
- Remain calm under pressure.
- Be kind. It goes a long way – much further than you realize.
- And finally, take care of yourself, too. Don't forget your own work/life balance.

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Family and friends helped get you here. You want them to still be here through the rest of your career and even when you retire. And take care of yourself physically & mentally – a strong body and clear head are essential to decision making.

So I expect to see you all in the gym tomorrow morning. Just kidding – maybe.

I want to leave you with one more quote from, my favorite, General Patton. Most of the advice he's remembered for was directed at the enlisted soldiers who were following orders, and was, well, quite colorful. But he offered this advice to the soldiers who would do the leading.

He said, "The time to take counsel of your fears is before you make an important battle decision. That's the time to listen to every fear you can imagine. When you have collected all the facts and fears and made your decision, turn off all your fears and go ahead."

He certainly followed that premise when he led. When he committed to an action, he committed fully, and didn't second guess his decision. I think that's a good model, and one I've tried to follow throughout my career.

I hope that idea also speaks to you today. We only gave you a couple of weeks notice to think about this. But today, I want you to turn off any fears you have and commit to the expectations we hold for those in Senior National Intelligence Service.

Congratulations to all of you. Now we've got to keep pressing.

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