

**Interview with Lieutenant General Ronald Burgess, Jr.
With J.J. Green, WTOP**

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MR. GREEN: General Burgess, thank you again for the opportunity to talk with you. I want to start by saying we spoke a couple of years ago, and I'd like to pick up where we left off, but also go back and ask about a couple of things we covered during that time frame to see how those scenarios are faring right now because a lot has changed since we last spoke.

So the first thing I'd like to ask you is, what's your current mission and have there been any changes in your mission in the last couple years?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: Our mission remains to be first in all-source intelligence to prevent strategic surprise, and we do that for defense policymakers, we do that for military folks, and we do that for the rest of the community. It's our mission to ensure we are not strategically surprised as a nation and to do that, we deploy our people alongside warfighters and other folks around the globe to ensure we can provide needed information dominance. For all intents and purposes, no, our mission really has not changed in the two years since we've talked.

MR. GREEN: Have there been any modifications or tweaks to it because of the evolution in the war against insurgents and adversaries of the U.S.? Since we've talked, I know the Russians took a pretty big hit last year when some people they had deployed here in the States were rounded up essentially and sent away. There have been some other developments too – Libya, Egypt. So have there been any modifications or tweaks of note you've had to take place, just based on what's happening in the world?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: I wouldn't say there've been any tweaks to what we have done. Clearly what we have seen happening around the world has shown, as we have been saying for a while, that we are going to see an accelerated pace continue from what we saw in our first 50 years of our history to what we're going to see in the future, and that's going to continue worldwide in terms of how things go. So we, as an organization and intelligence community, are going to need to adapt to that increasing pace of change that is going to continue to be going on. And as you well know and your listeners well know, we are going to have to do that in a more fiscally constrained environment.

MR. GREEN: What's driving that accelerated pace?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: I think different things are driving the accelerated pace. First of all, as you know because of the business you're in, the world's more interconnected now. Not only does information flow faster around the globe in terms of things that are going on, but the world is now more connected in terms of markets, how people interact, how demography is changing and people are moving around the world. And so, while in the past we might have been able to focus, if you will, on a common threat during the Cold War, now we see that proliferating more globally and you no longer have the luxury, as I would have said in the past, to focus on just one target. We now have multiple ones out there we have to be cognizant of.

MR. GREEN: And the fiscal constraints obviously have to do with just the sort of austere times we live in budget-wise? Is that correct?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: Well, that – that’s quite a bit of it. I mean, what you see happening around the globe in terms of other countries having to deal with some of the fiscal realities that are going on, Greece has made the news and some others. But those types of events are going on around the globe as I talk to some of my counterparts. Others that we have worked with in the past are finding themselves more challenged in terms of their ability to do the work they have to do because of the fiscal environment they find themselves in and that has now manifested itself in the United States and currently what we are dealing with. And so we, as part of the intel community, are working with the Director of National Intelligence and the rest of the IC to ensure that we can continue to do the mission we’ve been given under those current situations.

MR. GREEN: What are the biggest challenges for DIA today?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: I think we’ve got some challenges out there in terms of what the mission set is, whether that be transnational terrorism, whether that be cyberwarfare, or some nation-states that we continue to follow, such as Iran and North Korea. But if I look at challenges to my ability to do the job we have to do, I normally lead that discussion off with talking about the need of information sharing in terms of how we do that and how we continue to pass information and share all of that. How are we going to do the job we’ve got to do with the current fiscal environment? How are we going to find the right people to put into the workforce we need that have not only the requisite skill sets we’re talking about in terms of their ability to work some of the systems we’ve got, but even something as simple as, do I have the people that speak the right languages in terms of things? I saw from your bio, I think you speak Spanish, you speak some French, and now you’ve gotten started on a little bit of Korean. You are an oddity in our society a little bit –

MR. GREEN: (Chuckles.)

LT. GEN. BURGESS: – because of your ability to do that.

MR. GREEN: Yeah, I’ve been told a few things. Your choice of words is kind – (laughter) –

LT. GEN. BURGESS: (Inaudible.)

MR. GREEN : – but you’re right – so obviously you have to do – you’re going to be challenged to do that. What’s your plan for meeting the challenge?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: In the current world we find ourselves, we have very much focused on how we are going about our hiring actions for one, in terms of looking at having that agile workforce we need so we can in fact deploy to do things in the 21st century. But it’s not just about the people. While I do consider people to be my most important resource, I have to ensure that I and the Defense Intelligence Agency provide them with the requisite technology not only to do their job here, but wherever it may be abroad. And as I mentioned to you when I talked to you previously, for every time I come up with a capability or a technology that helps

me do some of that, somebody else is working on something that is a counter technology. So it's an ever-adapting world we live in.

MR. GREEN: OK, what are, General, the top five, in your mind, threats to the U.S. and how is DIA helping to deal with and mitigate those threats?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: When I think about the top threats to the United States DIA deals with in our all-source environment, I put transnational terrorism at the top of the list because, J.J., you have followed for a long time and have a show on Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida and, as you know, we've made great progress against al-Qaida. But the threat of transnational terrorism still exists, and so we, as an agency, have to remain focused on that not only for the Department of Defense but for the nation.

The second one I would mention would be the cyber domain and cyberwarfare in terms of protecting our systems here in the Department of Defense, in the United States, but thinking even more broadly, taking that discussion to a higher level for the nation in terms of how we, as a nation, are going to protect our cyber domain and our ability to interact in that from a global perspective.

And after you get past those, I would again mention Iran. Iran continues to try and decide what it's going to do in terms of becoming a nuclear power, and how it's going to engage with some of its adjacent countries in the region. And so what is it doing in regards to what it considers its national security interests and where does that bounce up against ours out there?

And then, of course, you've got North Korea, which is a nuclear power out there, and they continue to work on developing a capability to deliver that nuclear capability, and they still are messing around with proliferation, which makes people nervous.

After you look at those, I would agree with the secretary of defense who most recently talked about, as we look in the Pacific, you've got China. China is attempting to establish itself in the world as a global trading partner and assume what it perceives to be its place in the world order, and that is going to cause them to come into markets that others have had for a while. It's also going to cause them to continue to improve their military, which is always going to cause a possible miscalculation on somebody's part out there.

And then, of course, I wouldn't take Russia off the list. I mean, when you're sitting there with as many nuclear missiles as that country has, it's somebody I have to keep an eye on as an intelligence person.

MR. GREEN: General, a couple follow-ups on some of these things you mentioned: The first one I'd like to ask about is bin Laden – the death of bin Laden; how has that impacted your mission?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: While I certainly would agree with the things that have been said, it was a good day for the nation, it was a good day for the defense and the intelligence community with the demise of bin Laden. But just because bin Laden is dead does not change

the threat that al-Qaida poses and what al-Qaida would like to do. So while al-Qaida has been hurt by the death of bin Laden, it is still an organization that has aims that put it in confrontation with the Western world, specifically the United States, and then there's always the subsidiaries of the al-Qaida piece, whether it be al-Qaida in the Maghreb in Africa, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, al-Qaida in Iraq. There is still work to be done against the al-Qaida, even with the demise of bin Laden.

MR. GREEN: And Awlaki and AQAP and AQIM and I think there's another one that's popping up now in Egypt. What's your approach to figuring out how to handle these kinds of threats? Do you have a matrix for helping you determine how to deal with these threats or do you kind of look at each one and just kind of let the facts speak for itself?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: I would say as the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency that we, as an intelligence community, work corporately and by the collaboration we do as an intelligence community and the integration we have going on not only across the intelligence community but our integration with the policy world and with the folks on the ground – the warfighters – we all come to a common understanding and we have discussions on how to best approach the different problem sets you just went through in your question. And by doing that integration and collaboration, we are able to ensure we are providing commanders or policymakers the picture they need as they look holistically at the different problem sets we're dealing with.

MR. GREEN: OK. Iran – I have a question that doesn't so much necessarily deal with Iran as a threat, but it is, I think, a part of the threat picture. One of the things that a source of mine, who is a retired CIA and – retired CIA analyst – said to me is that he actually noted that even though you have countries who are adversaries politically, there is always usually some kind of gateway between security and intelligence where they have opportunities to work together. Does the U.S. have that kind of – does DIA have that kind of relationship or opportunity with Iran?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: I think, one, I would agree with what your friend told you because it is one of the things you try and establish at an intelligence level with countries around the world because while countries politically may be having issues, you always want to have a line of communication, as we say, where you can talk – and so you do try and work that. I would tell you, strictly speaking for the Defense Intelligence Agency, and no one else, that I do not have a line of communication on the Iranian side at this time.

MR. GREEN: I don't know what the follow-up to that would be, and the obvious answer is going to be, yes, you would like to have one. What's necessary to do that, to get one?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: Well, in my case, it would be going down the path of the United States and Iran ultimately agreeing to have some sort of an embassy/consulate-type situation because my normal conduit to at least getting an avenue like that established is through the defense attaché office, which is working for a chief of mission in a given country and it is through that conduit I get that sort of conversation started.

MR. GREEN: All right, well, I will move on from there. I will come back on the North Korea/Russia piece in a few minutes but –

LT. GEN. BURGESS: OK.

MR. GREEN: – want to just ask you, has your vision changed at all since you've been in the job and since any of the developments that have taken place – the death of bin Laden; the death of Awlaki; the Arab Spring, which is now the Arab Awakening; the Iraq war coming to an end; the Afghanistan war where it is? Has your vision changed at all for the DIA mission and for your people?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: Actually no, our vision involves having an agile, highly skilled workforce that has the advantage of having the most recent technology available to it spread out over the globe that allow them to, as we've said before, collaborate and integrate and ensure that we present a defense view to policymakers and to others. And so our vision has actually been pretty consistent since day one, since we last talked. So while those events that you just laid out are changes in the environment we operate in, it hasn't changed our vision in terms of how we operate as an agency.

MR. GREEN: OK. How has DIA been affected by the Pentagon's budget cuts and talk of more cuts?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: From a budget perspective, we corporately have sat down and talked. To most of us that have been around a while, the budget cuts are not a surprise. As I have said publicly in other fora many times, I started talking about the upcoming budget situation almost two and a half years ago when I was in the directorate – Director of National Intelligence, and so, now coming forward into DIA, it's upon us. And so far the intelligence community, led by Jim Clapper, and working with Undersecretary of Defense Mike Vickers inside the Pentagon, we have sat down, corporately taking a look at what we need to do and how we as an entity, as an intelligence community, will address the requirements that we have to do in the current budget environment. And so far those discussions have been very open; everybody's had an opportunity to state their case; and we think, at the present time, we have come up with a very corporate way ahead that will allow us to continue to do the mission we've been given within the resource constraints that have been put upon us.

MR. GREEN: So give me your personal view –

LT. GEN. BURGESS: OK.

MR. GREEN: – on how these budgets cuts are affecting your ability to get your work done.

LT. GEN. BURGESS: At the end of day, what it has forced me to do, as an agency head – because I tell folks jokingly that I'm a little slower than most and so I have to step back and go back to the basics – and so what I did inside the Defense Intelligence Agency is I stepped back and I said, OK, folks, take a look at not only law, take a look at my charter, take a look at the

executive orders, take a look at any piece of paper you can find out there and let's ascertain, what are my core missions I am required to do?

Because as with any organization over time, we, along with others, had some things grow and happen that probably weren't in our core competencies. And if we're going to go down a path where we're going to be required to look at budget constraints or resource constraints, then I'm going to take it back to what is my core mission.

And so what I have determined for my core mission is, I've narrowed it down to about six functions right now. First, I am an all-source analytical agency for the intelligence community. So all-source becomes important. My HUMINT operations – my human intelligence operations, my attaches and all, is a core competency for me. My counterintelligence work I do to protect the secrets we have inside the Department of Defense are key for me.

By decree, I am the MASINT or measurements and signatures intelligence functional manager for the intelligence community. So I need to focus on that. I provide the information technology at the highest classifications levels for the intelligence community and the U.S. government. And so my IT infrastructure is a core competency. And last, I am designated as the lead for the National Intelligence University for the United States intelligence community.

So what I am doing is bringing all of mine back to those six core competencies I have to do.

MR. GREEN: Can you comfortably get them done?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: We think, at the present time, given what we know right now and what we have been told to look at, I have said publicly – and it's not just because I'm trying to be one hand clapping for folks – I have the resources to do the mission that I've been given right now, and I'm comfortable with that.

MR. GREEN: OK. 2009, you told me, for every time we developed a technology that may or may not allow us and the intelligence community to do something, there is somebody developing a countertechnology – there is somebody working just as hard on the other side. I want to ask how you would assess the IC's ability to stay ahead of these threats now and, I suppose, at the same time, if it's not a sources and methods question, what is your best asset to stay ahead of those threats?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: And to be fair, you know, I think your question in terms of the IC piece of that, you would be better served to ask the DNI that question for the IC. But from a DIA perspective – with our partnerships we have across the intelligence community, across industry and with a lot of the national laboratories, I feel very comfortable that with those partnerships we have established and with the cross talk that is going on, that we at least are standing a fighting chance of keeping ourselves one step ahead.

But as always in our business, it's what you don't know that is going to come back to bite you. And so that's the reason collaboration and integration are so important.

MR. GREEN: Would those partnerships be your best asset to stay ahead of the threats that are DIA's business? Or do you want to answer that question separately?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: No, I would say you hit the nail on the head. I mean, those partnerships we have, not only inside the Department of Defense but with the rest of the intelligence community and with private industry out there, those are the advantage of the United States. That is what has made us what we are today. And so we, as the DIA and, I would say, others inside the IC, it is through those partnerships that we have the intelligence community we do today. And it is a strength.

MR. GREEN: OK. You said sharing intelligence – recently, at a college event – you were speaking at Hillsdale College, I believe it was –

LT. GEN. BURGESS: Mmm hmm. (Affirmative.)

MR. GREEN: We're sharing intelligence to a degree with partners that I'd never would have thought possible in earlier years.

Why do you say that?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: One, because it's true. I've been doing this now for right at 38 years. And so it's pretty easy for me to look back in my past. And as we, as a military and as an intelligence community, have moved from what I would call the U.S. perspective into where we finally, in 1986, went into the joint world with the passage of Goldwater-Nichols – that we've moved from now the joint war fight in terms of now into the combined coalition.

And so now, you find yourself depending quite a bit on friends around the world because you can't be everywhere all the time. I use an old Chinese proverb, because military guys can always quote somebody. And there is an old Chinese proverb that says, he who tries to be strong everywhere is strong nowhere.

And there is some truth to that. If someone else has a capability, whether that'd be a language or an access that I don't have, why shouldn't I take advantage of that instead of trying to create it? And so we find ourselves doing more of that around the world in terms of doing that collaboration and integration and sharing with folks.

But, you know, that work is a two-edged sword – as was shown by some of the revelations in the WikiLeaks. So while I'm going to push on information sharing and doing more collaboration with folks not only inside our own tribe, if you will, from a U.S. perspective, but with other nations, the dual-edged sword of that is, there's always going to be the opportunity where something gets out you're not real happy that it got out.

But to me, while I always take that into account, I think the fact of what you're trying to accomplish trumps that, and as long as you put the right security safeguards in place, you'll be OK.

MR. GREEN: OK. Just a few more things. General, as always, the question "what keeps you at night?" has to be asked. And I want to do that now, but I want to do it with a caveat. What you don't know is, everyone that I speak to, without fail, across the intelligence community, the law enforcement community, the federal law enforcement community, that is their main concern – "what I don't know." But I'd like to hear what your thought is on what it is that keeps you up at night with reference to your job, your work and, you know – just trying to – trying to see this picture that is so foggy, which is the future.

LT. GEN. BURGESS: What your other friends have told you would be where my head is. But to put a little more fidelity on it from my foxhole, as I say, the number of things that are going on around the world from a transnational threat standpoint, if I had to say what keeps me up at night, it would be in that arena. And that's not only looking at what we in the intelligence world would say is foreign intelligence, but what's going on right here in our own nation.

So we corporately – not my foxhole because I do foreign intelligence as the Defense Intelligence Agency, but I have a responsibility to ensure that the force protection information is available for all the military bases that are out there in CONUS. And so trying to stay abreast and work with our domestic partners in that area – when I put all of that together in taking a look at those transnational terrorist threats, that's the area, when I look holistically, there is so much going on that while I will sit here and tell you – and, as I say in public, we have made great strides in this country in terms of integrating that information over the years. There is still work to be done and there are a lot of people working very hard at it, but as I always say, they only have to get it right once; I have to get it right every time.

MR. GREEN: OK. Back to the – China – China, Russia, North Korea, and cyber question. A lot of people are worried about this cyber thing, because we see all the time China stamped all over a lot of the things that are going wrong in terms of U.S. companies, U.S. information, the government, sometimes the military. Give me a sense of what it is that's being done. I know you can't really talk about sources and methods, but for those people who really are worried that maybe the Chinese have a leg up, what would you say?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: Well, what I would say is that in this nation, we are attempting to address this cyber question. From a Department of Defense standpoint, we work corporately with the other partners inside the department that are charged to protect those IT systems we need to protect to ensure that information is, in fact, protected.

We live in an open society. You and I were joking earlier that I don't Facebook; I don't Twitter; I don't get on the Internet a whole lot. But the fact is, we have a lot of information that exists out there in an unclassified area.

Now, some of the stuff you're talking about, people have gone into systems and burrowed through to get classified information. That's part of the problem.

But the bigger part of the problem is, we have a lot of information that's just sitting out in the open that isn't very well protected, that other nations – you've mentioned some of it -- but there are a lot of people that go in and they just vacuum that information up. And then that gives them an advantage, while other industries have put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into developing something, if you don't have to put that blood, sweat and tears into developing it, you can just go in and get it at a certain stage, do you have a leg up? I would submit, yes, you do. And that sort of thing does go on.

MR. GREEN: OK. The Chinese military – growing. And the Chinese national security threat, going into trade markets, disrupting trade markets – does DIA have any responsibility in any of this – for dealing with any of this?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: We do. I mean, and I talk to audiences a little bit – because you've got to think about the scale a little bit. If people would step back and think about the number of jobs the Chinese have to create every year just to sustain the current economy they have, the number of jobs they have to create dwarfs to most Westerners what we think of in terms of numbers. So they're having to create.

And when you're doing that in an economy, you have to find markets. You also have to have access to raw materials. And that's what I mentioned when I said earlier – that's where you will see things coming into possible conflict in the future. And while some of that's inside my purview, an awful lot of that is not, as we look in this global economic world that we live in.

MR. GREEN: But looking at the Russians – still a military threat.

LT. GEN. BURGESS: The Russians, as I mentioned earlier, I still consider a very capable military force. The Russians have undergone some significant downsizing in the last few years as they adjust to the new fiscal realities of their own economy. Having said that, the Russian military should still be considered a very professional military force that has the ability to project itself.

And, as I said, when you're talking the number of nuclear-capable missiles they've got, they clearly are someone we want to stay abreast of, just as they stay abreast of us. And so I chat with my counterpart on a fairly regular basis.

MR. GREEN: Last thing: Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think is important? And I always like to try to get some idea of something that is going on that I would want to know about that you wouldn't tell me if I didn't ask you. (Laughter.) So tell me what it is that I'm missing here, I mean, because I don't know the question to ask. But the bottom line is, is there anything you want to add that I haven't asked about that you think is important?

LT. GEN. BURGESS: The one thing I would leave you with – which won't make the cut line, as I say – is this agency just celebrated in October its 50th anniversary. And as I reflect on what this agency has accomplished in those 50 years, it is absolutely amazing. And you would see that reflected across the entire United States intelligence community.

And so as I like to tell people, the good news is that the next 50 are going to be be very interesting. I think it's going to be a lot of fun, but our best is yet to come in terms of what we, as an agency, have to do.

MR. GREEN: General, thank you. I appreciate the time. You've always been a very courteous and informative and productive interview. And it's always a pleasure to sit with you and talk with you and to hear what you have to say. And I appreciate it again.

LT. GEN. BURGESS: Thank you, J.J., and thanks for coming by today. It's always a pleasure to talk with you.

(END)