

DISA on Track Despite Leadership and BRAC Challenges

Posted At : June 25, 2008 7:56 AM | Posted By : Deniece Peterson

Related Categories: Federal, Business Development Tools

The upcoming retirement of DISA Director Lt. General Charles Croom brings with it many issues that have been bandied about industry since his announcement. He has been a staunch component of conservative and conscious innovation and efficiency, but the most recent talk is actually about his potential successor.

A [recent GovWin blog post](#) discussed the recently blocked nomination of Navy Rear Admiral Hight to follow Croom as DISA Director. The Senate rationale centered on a conflict of interest due to her marriage to a Northrop Grumman VP – a conflict that did not seem to bar her from her current Vice Director position or other career achievements.

I recently spoke with a senior level DISA official about this and other leadership changes, as well as how DISA is positioned to navigate upcoming organizational changes. Our conversation is summarized below:

On Navy Rear Admiral Hight

She echoed the sentiment expressed in the GovWin blog, and characterized the problem as a "perceived" conflict of interest. The same conflict of interest existed when RADM Hight became Vice Director, so the current focus on it now is puzzling. In the wake of some very public acquisition and management missteps (e.g. the recent Northrop Grumman/Boeing/Air Force protest ruling and the forced resignations of former Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley and Secretary Michael W. Wynne), she thinks that decision makers may be somewhat gun shy about any potential impropriety. She confirmed that RADM Hight plans to stay on at DISA as Vice Director until the end of her term to provide continuity.

While she could not name names, she confirmed that DISA is continuing the search for a new Director. The challenge will be in meeting the criteria: someone who is suitable for the position, a 2-star General seeking a 3rd star; and available. A review of each military branch has a limited number of Generals from which to choose, especially during wartime.

On Stability and Continuity

Our contact emphasized DISA's conscious efforts to provide stability as the organization navigates the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process and its move to Ft. Meade, MD; changes among its leadership; and the upcoming change in administration. In addition to Lt. General Croom's retirement, there are other notable comings and goings among DISA leadership:

- Evelyn DePalma, former Director for Procurement and Logistics, retired this year
- Rebecca Cowan-Hirsch, Director of SATCOM, Program Executive Office, Satellite Transmission Systems is leaving in July
- Dr. Edward Siomacco, Vice Program Director for GIG Enterprise Services, is moving to the Army 9th Signal Command
- New SES Henry Sienkowicz is now in the role of Technical Director of Computing Services
- New SES Mark Orndorff will take on the role of Director, Program Executive Office, Information Assurance/NetOps

DISA's military leadership comes and goes every 2 to 3 years, but the agency maintains a corps of civilian SES members who have been with the agency for at least 10 years. This team, which includes CIO John Garing, Component Acquisition Executive Tony Montemarano, and CTO Dave Mihelcic, provides a solid foundation for the many changes occurring within the next couple of years. Our source also highlighted the importance of the GS-15 professionals within DISA. While executives (fewer than 40) set the strategy and vision, these individuals provide the expertise for the day-to-day operations that keep DISA on target.

On BRAC Transition Planning

Under the leadership of Lt. General Croom, DISA's planning for the future has been detailed and thorough. Because of the critical nature of DISA's mission – keeping DoD's networks on at all times – BRAC and leadership transitions must be well-developed.

She recounted a meeting of senior DISA officials to discuss executive leadership succession planning. Lt. General Croom gave everyone a piece of paper and asked them to note, anonymously, whether they intended

to stay at DISA after the move to Ft. Meade. If the outcome of that exercise is any indication, most of the turnover as a result of BRAC will not be among the leadership. It will likely be among DISA's engineers and other professionals for whom the challenges of the move outweigh the benefits.

On the Future

She is confident that DISA's progress in enterprise services, acquisition agility, and innovation will continue with the cooperation of industry. Lt. General Croom's strategy is deeply ingrained in the culture of the organization, and she does not foresee changes to that vision.