

**Defense Innovation Board  
Summer Board Meeting Minutes  
Pentagon, Washington, DC  
July 17, 2024**

The Defense Innovation Board (DIB) is a federal advisory committee in the Department of Defense (DoD) operating pursuant to the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972, the Government in the Sunshine Act of 1976, and other related federal regulations.

The DIB held its fourth fiscal year 2024 (FY24) quarterly board meeting, which was partially closed, on Thursday, July 17th in the Pentagon. The public meeting was livestreamed and recorded by the Defense Media Agency and made accessible via the Defense Visual Information Distribution Service ([DVIDS](#)). The livestream garnered 1,130 online engagements. The meeting recording was posted on the DIB website at [innovation.defense.gov](http://innovation.defense.gov).

**DIB Members Attending (9):**

1. Mr. Michael Bloomberg, Chair
2. Dr. Gilda Barabino
3. Ms. Sue Gordon (virtual)
4. Ms. Mary Meeker
5. ADM (Ret.) Michael Mullen, U.S. Navy
6. Mr. Charles Phillips
7. Dr. Will Roper (virtual)
8. Mr. Ryan Swann
9. Mr. William “Mac” Thornberry

**DIB Members Not Present (1):**

1. Mr. Reid Hoffman

**Guest Speakers (4):**

1. Alexis Bonnell, CIO and Director of Digital Capabilities Directorate, Air Force Research Laboratory
2. MAJ Michael Kanaan, Military Deputy Chief Information Officer, DoD Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office
3. James Appathurai, NATO Acting Assistant Secretary General, Innovation, Hybrid, and Cyber
4. CAPT Colin Kane, Chief of Staff, Military Deputy, Joint Rapid Acquisition Cell

**DIB Staff Team (11):**

Dr. Marina Theodotou, Executive Director & Designated Federal Officer (DFO)

Staff: Carrie Shideler, Jason Lapadula (ADFOS); Khalia Alexander, Zackariah Crahen, Logan Hatfield, Melanie Heinlein, Kimberly Hidalgo, Christina Hilf, Abigail Linman, Dr. Juan Merizalde, Jacob Sharpe. On leave: Elliot Silverberg.

**Public Meeting:**

The Defense Innovation Board (DIB) held a public meeting on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at 10:30 am ET.

Dr. Marina Theodotou, DIB Executive Director and Designated Federal Officer (DFO), called the public meeting to order at 10:32 am, expressing gratitude for the Board members, staff, and key supporting stakeholders. She outlined the Board's operating authority and notified attendees of no significant changes to the agenda. The DFO acknowledged receipt of public citizen comments provided to the Board and posted to the DIB website, before turning the floor to the DIB Chair to kick off the discussion.

Michael Bloomberg, the DIB Chair, took the floor at 10:34 am, acknowledging the impact of the recent assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump, and offered condolences to the attendee killed. He referenced President Joe Biden's remarks that "...violence absolutely cannot and must not be a part of America's political life. The peaceful resolution of our differences is what our democracy is all about."

Mr. Bloomberg highlighted the ongoing mission of the Defense Innovation Board (DIB), which has been active for nearly two years. The board conducts independent research and interviews, to offer recommendations for change to senior leaders of the Department of Defense. This work has led to six independent studies initiated by Secretary Austin to address specific challenges facing the Defense Department. He highlighted that by the end of the year, the Department would have implemented 40% of the Board's recommendations. These actions are aimed at improving working relationships with the private sector, accelerating the adoption of technologies throughout the military, securing data rights, and, most importantly, fostering and maintaining a culture of innovation.

Mr. Bloomberg introduced the two studies to be presented and voted on, before turning the floor to DIB Board Member ADM (Ret.) Michael Mullen to discuss the report on Aligning Incentives to Drive Faster Tech Adoption, and DIB Board Member Charles Phillips to discuss the report on Optimizing How We Innovate with Allies and Partners.

ADM Mullen took the floor at 10:37 am, remarking the strong language in the report's findings and recommendations, with phrases like "...clear and present danger," "...risk to winning," and "...if we don't do this [or that], China will overtake us." From an overall approach perspective, there are two fundamentally different cultures both within the Department and outside in the commercial sector, particularly with start-ups. ADM Mullen noted the Department should move beyond the status quo and better understand how to run a business, as there has been historically little success at delivering capability at speed.

He briefly touched on specific findings from the study to include: the DoD's aversion to risk, lack of top cover for innovators, mismanagement of talent, and under-leveraging the frozen middle. ADM Mullen then outlined the DIB's recommendations to include: embracing risk to move at a faster pace; providing top cover for innovators; ending the practice of rewarding mediocrity; accelerating the speed of capability delivery, establishing career paths for innovators; tracking individual readiness for innovation where he highlighted the work done by the Defense Acquisition University (DAU) ; aligning missions to drive innovation; learning from the best; and fostering mutual trust to effectively address global national security requirements. ADM Mullen returned the floor to Mr. Bloomberg at 11:42 am for remarks from the Board, and introduction of the first guest speaker, Alexis Bonnell.

Ms. Bonnell took floor at 10:43 am and spoke about her time in Iraq and Afghanistan with troops in the Defense Mission, her experience creating an innovation lab at the U.S. Agency for International Development, and her time at Google. She noted that returning to the Department; in working to socialize Artificial Intelligence, she found a tremendous amount of fear, "...which is the #1 thing our adversary wants." Our adversaries want us to be afraid of our own technology. This ignited a commitment to reducing fear and lowering barriers for people to innovate. In Ms. Bonnell's observations and hopes for a pliable solution, she provided the following propositions:

1. Technology must be seen as an ally that people navigate a relationship with.
2. In an effort to process risk, outline a premortem – meaning if and when *this* ends, why will that be?
3. Providing top cover as mission critical – not only to ensure access to leaders, but most importantly for leaders to engage as partners and innovators.

Ms. Bonnell then highlighted that "toil eats purpose faster than mission can replace it – meaning, when we aren't aware of the toil, we aren't actually cognizant of the true risk and the level of effort exerted." She recognized that when we have a low relationship with risk, we disincentivize innovation. Lastly, she outlined three things she believes an organization must do well to thrive and create decisive advantage:

1. Must be good at *starting* things.
2. Must be able to *maintain* things.
3. Must be brave enough to *stop* things.

Mr. Bloomberg took the floor, thanking Alexis, and introduced MAJ Michael Kanaan who joined the meeting virtually.

MAJ Kanaan began at 10:49 am by acknowledging the enduring topic of aligning incentives to drive faster digital tech adoption which resonates across all mission capabilities warfighter needs. He noted that the real challenge is that technology, no matter the type, is a human endeavor. He highlighted subsequent takeaways to help address these issues:

1. Reconsider *what* is measured regarding technical talent by reassessing current roles/talent instead of building a new hiring strategy, valuing re-skilling and up-skilling with a focus on process improvement, and including technical adoption as the job measurement.
2. Prioritize and fund education, “You can’t hack the bureaucracy unless you understand the bureaucracy...”. This can only be achieved through an educated workforce that builds an environment supporting the adoption of technology.
3. Require clear recognition that AI encompasses both Operation and Maintenance (O&M) and Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation (RDT&E)
4. Rigorously re-assess all rationale behind opting for traditional procurement methods over those encouraging commercial solutions.
5. AI will mostly impact what is seemingly least compelling from the “click bait – headline perspective”.

As MAJ Kanaan closed his brief, he stated that the question is not about whether we are risk averse, rather risk blind – not by what may be lost by the “trade-off” of accelerating the adoption of digital technology, instead what is lost because we haven’t made the trade-off.

The DIB Chair, Mr. Bloomberg took the floor at 10:58 am for questions from the panel, then called the Board to vote. Each member, with the exception of Mr. Hoffman who was absent, replied with “yea.” The DIB Chair concluded the study and turned the floor to DIB Board Member, Charles Phillips to discuss the study on Allies and Partners.

Mr. Phillips took the floor at 11:00 am. He noted that the Allies and partners study was an effort to recalibrate how we look at and work alongside other countries. This effort was achieved by meeting with different organizations and stakeholders within and outside of the DoD in order to baseline how partnerships are operating today. The key issue identified was that there is no clear pathway for international organizations to work with the DoD (i.e. too fragmented; too many certifications/requirements, etc.).

He went on to highlight some barriers encountered such as culture, arduous regulatory frameworks, and classification markings, before providing highlights of the study’s recommendations:

1. The creation of a new Undersecretary for International Industrial Cooperation or reintegration of the offices of Acquisition & Sustainment, with Research & Engineering for integrated designs and manufacturing
2. Require justification for non-exportability
3. Overhaul regulatory and compliance frameworks
4. Create an international defense community to enhance collaboration
5. Default information to YESFORN

Mr. Bloomberg then turned the floor to the Board for remarks. DIB Board Member, Mac Thornberry added that the study on Allies and Partners highlighted an area of innovation that is underutilized. As an integral part in the split of the Offices of Acquisition & Sustainment from

Research & Engineering, Mr. Thornberry expressed qualms about that recommendation. Mr. Bloomberg took the floor and introduced guest speaker Mr. James Appathurai.

At 11:08 am, Mr. Appathurai provided an overview of approach, which consisted of fostering a pipeline of innovation to aid start-ups through the valley of death, resulting in The Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA), a patient capital deep tech innovation fund. Additionally, a tasker coming out of the recent NATO Summit (July 9-11) directed the development of a rapid adoption strategy. This challenge is comprised of three elements:

1. To ensure the Emerging and Disruptive Technology (EDTs) fielded in innovative initiatives [like DIANA], actually make it into the hands of operators when they need them and before they are obsolete
2. To ensure start-ups, and small to medium sized enterprises developing battlefield decisive EDTs are actually included in procurement mechanisms
3. Create the linkages between capability shortfalls identified, and EDT solutions that may fill requirements to potentially bridge solutions at speed

Mr. Appathurai went on to highlight mission objectives – focusing on two main elements:

1. Provide to Heads of State and Government clear messaging for what needs to be accomplished, about what is the speed of relevance and requirements for adoption across NATO enterprise, and allies alike.
2. Establish Adoption Pathways for NATO and allies to address novel solutions at the speed of relevance.

Following Mr. Appathurai's brief, Mr. Bloomberg introduced CAPT Colin Kane who started at 11:17 am by discussing challenges of managing joint-urgent operational needs to address immediate battlefield problems. CAPT Kane noted that information sharing may not be relevant to immediate targeting needs, with regard to fielding capabilities to Ukraine. CAPT Kane also highlighted that program managers uneducated about AI are also uninformed of how it can accelerate their program development. However, if AI adoption were a requirement for coding data, systems are fielded much faster and efforts may be prioritized elsewhere.

At 11:27 am, Mr. Bloomberg took the floor for final remarks and called the Board to vote. Each member, with the exception of Mr. Hoffman who was absent, replied with "yea." The Chair voted "yea" last and concluded the study. Dr. Marina Theodotou, DIB Designated Federal Officer, shifted to public comments received. Mr. Bloomberg then provided a preview of proposed future studies and thanked the Members, staff and speakers for their attendance and participation. Dr. Theodotou adjourned the open session at 11:32 am.

I hereby certify, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Bloomberg", written in a cursive style.

Michael Bloomberg  
Chair, Defense Innovation Board