Vignette 3 – Making It Hard to Help:
A Self-Denial of Service Attack for the SWAP Study
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DoD makes use of advisory committees consisting of a mixture of government, industry, and academic experts, all trying to help. However, the Department can make it extremely difficult for these groups to function, an example of what we refer to on the Defense Innovation Board (DIB) as a "self-denial of service attack."[12] The DIB SWAP study is itself a case in point.

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The DIB Software Acquisition and Practices (SWAP) study clock started ticking when the 2018 NDAA was signed on 12 December 2017. We had our first SWAP discussion at the Pentagon on 16 January 2018, before we had officially been requested by the Under Secretary for Defense (Acquisition and Sustainment) to start, but knowing this was coming (and using the DIB Science & Technology [S&T] committee to ramp up quickly). We identified potential subcommittee members by 12 February, and we were officially charged to carry out the study on 5 April 2018. The one-year Congressionally-mandated end date was thus set as 5 April 2019. The DIB S&T subcommittee submitted the list of suggested subcommittee members. Then we started waiting…

On 24 May, after a DIB meeting, one of the SWAP co-chairs found out that there had been no movement on these positions. He sent a note to the DIB's Executive Director, expressing disappointment and reiterating the importance of getting these people on board early in the study. The Executive Director tried to use this note to push things along. More waiting…

The first activity in which any new member of the SWAP subgroup participated took place on 1 November 2018— a full 30 weeks after our 52-week countdown started and 9 months after we had identified the people whom we wanted to enlist in to help in our study. Even this took repeated interventions by the DIB staff and, in the end, only two of the four people who we hoped could help were able to participate in the study. The timing was such that we had already visited five of the six programs with which we met, written seven of the eight concept papers that we generated, and held three of the four public meetings that provided input for our report.

Why did things take so long? These people were ready to help, had served in government advisory roles in the past, and provided incredibly valuable input in the end (but only in the end). Maybe we need some sort of "FACA Pre ✓" that allows DoD to make use of people who are willing to help and all we need to do is ask.

Another example: the SWAP study decided to use Google's G Suite as the means for writing our report. It had some nice features for collaboration and several of us were familiar with using it. Setting up a G Suite site is fast and easy, and a member of the study had previously created a site in a matter of minutes and had a fully operational, two-factor authenticated set of accounts

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[12] The DIB first heard this term from one of the military instructors at the Air Force Academy and we now use it all the time.

up and running in less than a week. It turns out that the Department has the authority to create official G Suite sites and so we just needed to get permission to use it.

Our request went in ~10 April 2018. The site was created on 8 August 2018, 17 weeks after our request. As near as we can tell, the only thing that happened during the 4 months that it took to get the site working was that people said "no" and then other people had to spend time figuring out why they said no and either convincing them that this really was useful and a good solution for the study's needs and/or going above their heads.

A major theme from the beginning of the SWAP study, and more generally in the DIB's overall work, has been that DoD technology must move at the speed of (mission) need, faster than our adversaries and, certainly, not that much slower than what has proven possible and effective in the private sector. If the Department wants to take advantage of people who can help it be more effective in development and delivery of technology for improving national security, it should figure out how to *quickly* put together groups of people from inside and outside government, provide them with modern collaboration environments, and let them spend their time providing service to the Department instead of struggling with the bureaucracy.

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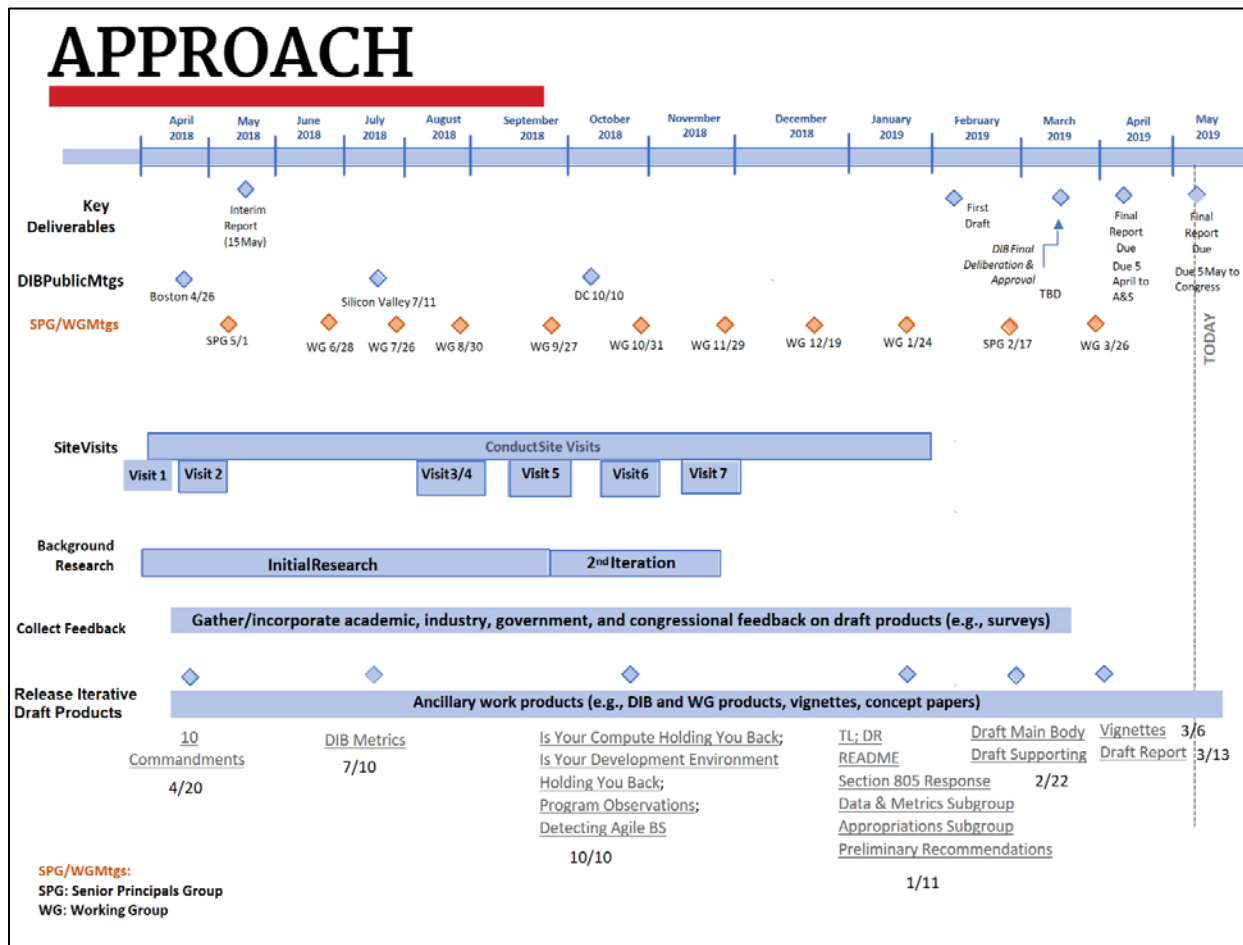
SWAP study schedule (used for briefings).