

Self-Reflection on  
MST 664 – Denial and Deception

by

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This **Unclassified** paper was submitted to the faculty of the National Intelligence University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science and Technology Intelligence Portfolio.

November 2024

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or the US Government

## **Introduction**

The concepts introduced in this course were fascinating, largely because they were so unique, and I had not really encountered anything like studying concepts from magicians while working in intelligence. This course provided an in-depth understanding of how various adversaries employ D&D strategies to manipulate perceptions, obscure intentions, and gain operational advantages against their targets. It also explored how emerging technologies influence both the effectiveness of D&D activities and the countermeasures designed to disrupt them. Reflecting on this course, I will highlight key takeaways, including my enhanced understanding of adversarial organizations, the influence of technology on D&D operations, and the importance of developing strategic counter-D&D efforts. The artifact I chose to represent my work in this course is the midterm short answer assignment. The culminating project was a classified group project that explored doctrinal uses D&D from adversary perspectives which also helped provide context by allowing me to leverage an adversary's point of view.

### **Understanding Adversarial Threat Organizations and Their D&D Activities**

One of the most valuable aspects of the course was the detailed exploration of how different threat organizations use D&D to achieve their goals. Through case studies, I learned how D&D is used as a tactical tool and an integral component of strategic operations. For example, we analyzed how nation-states employ denial techniques to hide the development of nuclear programs or to mask military buildups, creating ambiguity to buy time and reduce international pressure. Terrorist organizations, on the other hand, often use deception to disguise operational plans, such as disguising communications to evade counterterrorism efforts.

This analysis deepened my understanding of the motivations and objectives behind these practices. D&D is about misleading adversaries and shaping perceptions to create desired

outcomes, such as deterring intervention or fostering complacency. The nuanced approach presented in the course enabled me to appreciate how adversaries tailor their D&D practices to exploit the specific vulnerabilities of their targets—whether technical, cognitive, or operational. I truly enjoyed the examination of simulation and dissimulation from the perspective of illusionists and now see greater value in studying creative arts for their potential application in intelligence theory.

### **Impact of Technology on D&D Operations**

Another key takeaway from the course was technology's role in enhancing and countering D&D activities. We examined how advanced collection technologies, such as satellite imagery, signals intelligence (SIGINT), and artificial intelligence (AI), can influence adversarial behavior. While these tools provide greater visibility into adversary operations, they also compel threat organizations to adapt their D&D strategies to remain undetected.

One example that stood out to me was how some state actors use camouflage, decoys, and cyber deception to manipulate intelligence collection systems. This demonstrated how even the most advanced surveillance technologies can be rendered ineffective by well-planned D&D operations. Additionally, the course highlighted the growing use of disinformation and deepfake technologies to manipulate information environments, creating challenges for intelligence analysts and decision-makers alike. I found it fascinating how effective decoys can be against modern militaries examples from both the current conflict in Ukraine and US involvement in Kosovo. I think both low and high-fidelity decoys are capabilities that the US should invest in because they spread the adversary's focus, deplete an adversary's munition cache, and increase blue force survivability.

These discussions underscored the importance of staying ahead of technological trends and understanding how emerging technologies can both enhance and complicate D&D practices. I now have a clearer understanding of the need for intelligence professionals to continuously adapt counter-D&D strategies in response to technological advancements.

### **Developing Counter-D&D Strategies**

The practical exercises and group projects were particularly valuable in reinforcing my understanding of counter-D&D efforts. Working collaboratively, we assessed real-world scenarios where foreign actors employed D&D practices. These projects required us to develop strategic recommendations for detecting and mitigating D&D activities, fostering critical thinking and teamwork. I enjoyed working in my group because my team consisted of a public affairs officer in the Pentagon and a counterintelligence officer, both of whom provided excellent insights and perspectives into D&D campaigns. As an intelligence officer, I think there's more work that we can be doing to provide support to public affairs and the information operations communities. The Air Force tends to keep these functions separate, and I think a more holistic and integrated approach would likely provide better effects.

Through these exercises, I learned the importance of a multi-layered approach to counter-D&D efforts. Effective countermeasures require a combination of technical, analytical, and behavioral strategies, as well as close collaboration between intelligence agencies, policymakers, and operational units. The course also emphasized the importance of understanding adversary psychology and intent, as these insights are crucial for anticipating and countering D&D efforts effectively.

### **Conclusion**

This course has greatly enhanced my understanding of the complexities surrounding D&D activities and the importance of countering foreign manipulation efforts. It provided me with practical skills to analyze and respond to adversarial D&D operations. The integration of technology into the discussions and exercises reinforced the need to remain agile and adaptive in developing counter-D&D strategies. Moving forward, the insights and analytical skills I gained will enable me to contribute meaningfully to efforts aimed at detecting, disrupting, and mitigating foreign manipulation in the evolving threat landscape.