PDB-2016/03/17

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
FALK AUDITORIUM

THE BOOK OF SECRETS:
THE HISTORY OF THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

Washington, D.C.
Thursday, March 17, 2016

PARTICIPANTS:

Featured Speaker:

DAVID PRIESS
Author, "The President's Book of Secrets"; Former U.S. Intelligence Officer

Moderator:

BRUCE RIEDEL
Senior Fellow and Director, The Intelligence Project, The Brookings Institution

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. RIEDEL: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to The Brookings Institution and to another in our series of programs in the Brookings Intelligence Project. Today we're talking about one of the most interesting books that I have ever read about the U.S. intelligence community. I'll tell you why in a minute, but first let me ask you if you would mute all of these things, so we don't have those cute little interludes where your phone goes off.

And second, let me introduce you to David Priess. He's the author of this book. David served in the CIA in a variety of tasks, including in his last incarnation as a PDB briefer. We'll be talking about that a lot this afternoon. He's a graduate of Duke University. And this is your first book?

MR. PRIESS: Yes.

MR. RIEDEL: This was his first book. You're off to a great start.

"The President's Book of Secrets" is a book about how the President's Daily Brief has been developed over the years since the Kennedy administration. It is a book about the most exclusive newspaper in the entire world and the most highly classified newspaper in the entire world. But it's more than just a book about the PDB itself. It's really a book about what the American intelligence community and the CIA in particular does all day long.

If you go to any library or any bookstore, you'll find there are a lot of books about the CIA, but almost all of them concentrate on covert actions, from the Bay of Pigs to drones, from successes to failures. Actually more failures than successes, but it's all about covert actions. It's not even really all about operations and about the collection of information. It's all about operations.

But most of what the CIA and most of what most people at the CIA and, more broadly, in the intelligence community do all day is not covert action and not covert operations. It's about the collection of intelligence information, the synthesis of intelligence information, the assessment of intelligence information, and all, crucially, the actual presentation of that information in a way that's going to be helpful to policymakers and especially consumer number one, the President of the United States of America. And that's what this book, in my view, tries to talk about and tells you about.

It also has the very exciting formula that we now see all of those presidents, from Kennedy on up, from the perspective of the analysts and managers who were trying to prepare him to do

his duty. And it's a different way of looking at every President of the United States since John F. Kennedy.

So I highly recommend it. I congratulate you on really quite a book. And let me begin by asking you a really simple question.

Describe for me what a PDB would look like on an average morning. I don't mean the font, but how do you tell the president of the United States everything he needs to know about the world and not take up four hours of his morning just reading?

MR. PRIESS: Right. Thank you and I appreciate you inviting me here to Brookings.

It's in the name itself, the President's Daily Brief, it's brief. And that makes sense when you think about it. The president of the United States has a schedule that is measured to the minute. Having anything extraneous in there will not work. It might just turn the PDB, the president's Daily Brief, into a very expensive paperweight. So there is a premium on concise writing and precise writing.

As such, the analysis in the President's Daily Brief is not everything that can be said about a topic. It's the distillation of what the President needs to know. It is the President's book and the people producing the president's Daily Brief. And before that I tell the story of the President's Intelligence Checklist, the predecessor that was made for John F. Kennedy, personally for John F. Kennedy, based on his needs and his reading style.

It has to be concise. That puts a premium not only on fine analysis of world events, but it puts a premium on precision of language. And the amount of wordsmithing that goes into the sentence of two that the President might read on any topic on a given day is completely awesome if you're into wordsmithing and completely horrifying if you're not.

MR. RIEDEL: Okay, if the New York Times is 30 pages long?

MR. PRIESS: Right.

MR. RIEDEL: What's an average PDB look like?

MR. PRIESS: Yeah, it's varied by president. Some presidents have had very small ones. In the research I did for the book some of the declassified PDBs from the 1960s, they would clock in at one or two pages. And there would be items about perhaps a half-dozen different crises around the world, developments that the president might be interested in. And then at times there have been ones

that have been 30 or 40 pages. Now some of that is supplementary material, that is some of the raw intelligence reporting that went into the pieces or some longer papers that might be attached to explain some of the items in there in more depth.

A lot of it does depend on the delivery mechanism. If it's a briefing and that is the only time the president's going to look at it, which has been true of some administrations, then the book usually is fairly short and it tees up a conversation that the President would have with the briefer or with senior aides in the room. If it's something that the President is going to read, perhaps take with him throughout the day or set aside a set time to read, there could be a little more in there because there isn't as much interruption during the process itself.

I did not find any evidence of any PDB that went longer than 30 or 40 pages, even when there was a crisis going on. Usually that kind of supplementary intelligence information would be delivered to the president separately outside of the channel of the PDB. The shortest one I found was one page and it was just a couple of quick summaries on world events. They probably realized there was nothing else that deserved the President's attention that day.

MR. RIEDEL: Now, this is a book classified Top Secret, code word blank-blank-blank-no foreign, all kinds of things. As you tell in the book every book is retrieved and brought back to the CIA at some point. So how do you research a topic that's classified like that? And more importantly, how do you get it through the review process at the CIA, which as a CIA employee you have to go through?

MR. PRIESS: Right. It was relatively easy, in part because within the intelligence community and within the CIA, which has owned the PDB for much of its history, the President's Daily Brief is treated as the holiest of holies. It is the premier intelligence document. It is a direct channel of communication with the President of the United States on a daily basis, which few other government agencies can have.

To the presidents themselves and to the others who worked with presidents I found overwhelmingly they treated it as one of many inputs, maybe a special one, one that had pride of place, but it was one of perhaps hundreds of documents that the president would see in a given day. They were perfectly comfortable talking about it. They were perfectly comfortable sharing insights about how the president used the PDB. That's different than the content of the PDB.

The book tells dozens of stories covering all the presidents about some of the quirks, their personalities, how this book was a window on the history in some cases that has never been told before. But it doesn't give a lot of information about what's in the book. If you want to know what President Obama read before Benghazi, we're not finding it. That's still classified and no one's talking about that. And that goes back decades. What I was surprised at is there were some windows into that, that there were some windows that have been declassified about the content of the book itself, not just how the presidents used it.

When it came to reviewing the book I was not looking to expose secrets. That wasn't my goal, so that made it much easier to have the CIA review the material as they do for anyone who has worked for the agency. I found that it went through remarkably clearly because I sourced everything. If you see the book you'll find there are many, many endnotes. That made the review process easier, but it also made it easier for future historians to look back and say why is it that you say Bill Clinton approached it this way? And you can look at the back and say it's because Bill Clinton told me. That's in the endnotes.

The PRB, the Publication Review Board, for the CIA takes their job very seriously and they should. Secrets should not be leaked out in that way. They had a mind towards getting the story that could be told out there and they helped me to do that without revealing any state secrets in the process.

MR. RIEDEL: I'm going to walk you through the presidency from 35 to 44. John F. Kennedy, as you already mentioned, is the first recipient of a daily book, the PICL. I've always wondered if that was the origin of the notion of "the pickle factory," goes back to that.

MR. PRIESS: Yeah.

MR. RIEDEL: Kennedy is the first president who asked for it. What did the CIA do? What was John F. Kennedy looking for when he began this process?

MR. PRIESS: Yeah. One preamble, there had been daily intelligence going to the president before this. It really started with Harry Truman, a little bit of wartime work with FDR, but it started with Harry Truman. The difference was the daily document that went to Harry Truman was not written and edited in a way to match his personality. It was a compilation of intelligence presented to the

President, that part was the same.

For John F. Kennedy, his advisors found when he came into office he had a different personality than his predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower. He was unable to sit still for meetings. They could not keep him pinned down for more than a few minutes at a time. He would literally get up and walk out of a meeting if he was not interested. So what did they default to? They decided they would just take every intelligence document they got from CIA, from the State Department, from the Defense Department, and they would just stack it up on his desk and hope that he would read it because he was a voracious reader. But what they found is that stack essentially sat there unread. It was bureaucratically written with classification markings, all the stuff that someone who worked as a journalist, like John Kennedy did, found abhorrent about the U.S. Government.

So they sat down with two CIA officers and said, look, here's what we really want. We want one document that we can take into him every morning that tells him just what he needs to know, but does it without all that gobbledygook, that does it in a fashion that meets his style, conversational language clearly stated. And we want it to be small enough that he can just fold it, put it into his suit pocket, carry it around with him during the day because he'll just take it out and read it for one minute, something else will come up, he'll tuck it away.

One of the CIA officers there just laughed to himself because it had been exactly what he had been talking about back at the agency when he saw Kennedy come into office, thinking we're going to have to work differently for this president. They had a prototype ready the next day. The military assistant approved it. The very next day, on a Saturday morning, they gave it to John Kennedy on the diving board of the swimming pool out at their rented estate in Middleburg, Virginia. Kennedy loved it right away and it became the foundation for presidentially focused daily intelligence from that point forward.

MR. RIEDEL: Of course Kennedy is assassinated and we have an unplanned-for transition. And this is a recurring theme, I think, in the book is how do transitions work and we'll come to that later on today because we're getting close to one. Tell us how Johnson now wants his book. He doesn't want Kennedy's book.

MR. PRIESS: Right. The oddity there is he didn't even know Kennedy had a book.

(Laughter) Kennedy and Johnson, no love lost between the two. John F. Kennedy gets this President's Intelligence Checklist focused on him personally. He decides at first it will only come to him, the National Security Advisor, and a couple of others at the White House.

Eventually he decides that doesn't work so well because I go into a meeting with the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense and I'm bringing up things, they haven't seen what I've seen. So he allows them to see it six months after its creation.

When the CIA officer who is responsible for producing this document goes back to the National Security Council officers and says this creates a little conundrum here. You've got three of the four statutory members of the National Security Council, the President, the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of Defense all seeing this document. There's this one other guy, the Vice President. Shouldn't we be delivering it to him? And they gave him three words back: Under no circumstances. (Laughter)

Therefore, after that day in Dallas, Vice President Johnson becomes President Johnson. He comes in, he gets a briefing from the director of Central Intelligence, who presents him for the very first time with the President's Intelligence Checklist, which he said it was very clear Johnson did not know existed.

Perhaps it's because of that, perhaps it's because Johnson, who was no idiot, realized he'd been shut out, he never really took to the checklist. He didn't seem to like it. So it wasn't that long, it was December 1964, when the CIA decided we're going to reformat it, we're going to give it a different title, we're going to change a lot about the way it looks, so that his advisors can give him his daily intelligence book and tell him it is truly something that is his own. And that's when the name President's Daily Brief first came about.

MR. RIEDEL: How much did Kennedy and Johnson have briefers? Or when did the notion of briefer going with it begin to emerge?

MR. PRIESS: Yeah, they took intelligence briefings, but not as part of the daily intelligence process. For a while, the director of Central Intelligence, John McCone, did get to see Lyndon Johnson after the assassination. He actually did it with a dash of deception. The very first day of his presidency he got to see Johnson. How did that happen? He had not been regularly seeing John Kennedy. But after the assassination he had his assistant call the White House and say would the new

President like his regular intelligence briefing tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.?

Ignorant of what had been happening, Johnson, of course, approved it and said why yes. So McCone got on his calendar right away. But he briefed the checklist as part of the briefing. It wasn't the center of the briefing alone. There certainly was not a working-level CIA officer doing it, which then developed in later administrations. It really wasn't until Gerald Ford, which we'll get to, that we saw a daily briefer focus solely on making sure that this daily document got to the president and had questions answered.

MR. RIEDEL: The Johnson administration, of course, is fighting a huge war at the same time. The CIA is collecting enormous amounts of intelligence about the war, much of which is much less of the strategic level of the PDB and to a more tactical level. How do you still get the President what he needs for his global vision and help him with what he thinks he needs or may want to wallow in the details of what's going on in some obscure provincial capital in South Vietnam?

MR. PRIESS: Yeah, it appeared that there was an iterative process going on there. You produce something for the President, you print it out, the President reads it, but you as the CIA in this case, you are not seeing the president every day. So you'd have to talk to the National Security Advisor who was or the others in the White House who were there when he was reading it and reacting to it and say what worked?

Now, just responding to what worked may not always be good. The president decides one day he's really interested in Mozambique and he's going to get nothing but that for the rest of the week. So they also had to calibrate it and say what are the things that might be slipping through the cracks? He's so focused on Vietnam, let's say, that we want to make sure that this emerging issue that's happening in Saudi Arabia is also going to get his attention if it merits it.

So, traditionally, the PDB has done both things. The PDB has reacted primarily to the things that are top on the president's agenda. It is the president's book, the things he needs to decide that day, the people he'll be meeting with coming up that week are addressed. But then there also has, traditionally, if you look back at the ones that have been declassified, there's been coverage of the whole world so that the president won't be surprised. If this small thing that's happening today suddenly becomes big later in the week, he might have already set the machinery in motion to do something about

it.

MR. RIEDEL: Then, of course, we transition to an unusual presidency with Richard Nixon. Unusual because he has an extraordinarily powerful National Security Advisor in Henry Kissinger.

MR. PRIESS: Right.

MR. RIEDEL: I was shocked when I read the book to hear that Kissinger tells the PDB all we want is two subjects. It's your story, so I'll let you pick it up from there.

MR. PRIESS: He was absolutely surprised when he saw the drafts of the PDB coming into office, Kissinger, and he saw that there was some attention to a Central American country or Africa perhaps. And he said why are you focused on that? Do you have quota where you have to get pieces in from certain parts of the world? And the analytic leaders sitting with him were shocked and said, no, it's because there's an important development there that affects U.S. interests and the President needs to know.

And Kissinger just looked at them and said, but if something happens there an assistant secretary of state will handle it. The president and I are going to be focused on the Soviet Union and on NATO. We don't care about Africa and Latin America.

And the analysts remember thinking, oh, we've got a challenge ahead of us because you don't understand yet, not having been in office, you don't understand how a crisis anywhere in the world suddenly demands the President's attention. And if we haven't warned you of that in the chief analytic product going to you, we're not doing our job and we would rightfully be criticized for not doing that.

It didn't really work, though. Nixon and Kissinger did not become fans of the product. Kissinger told me it's because they both felt they were not foreign policy novices. They felt like they did not need a tutorial in a daily intelligence book, perhaps a misrepresentation of what the book is intended to be. It's not supposed to be a primer on countries around the world. It's supposed to tell them what is likely to happen, what is going on, and why does it matter. What are the threats and opportunities that are presented overseas for the United States?

But the seemed to dismiss the book, so much, in fact, that Kissinger insisted on receiving the next morning's President's Daily Brief the afternoon before. At 5:30, it would be delivered to the White House. His aide pointed out to him as the administration started you do realize, sir, this will introduce a

17-hour delay in the information and analysis in the book by the time the president sees it in the morning. Kissinger said fine, you know, we can supplement it with other pieces. I can add my wisdom to it. I want to see what's going to the president so I have enough time to do something about it before he sees it. A fundamentally different approach than other administrations have used.

MR. RIEDEL: You also have an administration, the Nixon era, and we're going to see this in others, that have a very strong opinion about the politics, not just of the CIA as an organization, but of the workforce at the CIA. Kissinger, a Harvard professor, disdains all those Ivy League graduates. Nixon is much more rich in his description. Disdain would be the nicest thing he would say about them. Is this a kind of perverse politicization of the process where you condemn the institution up front and, in a way, send a not-so-subtle signal about what you want to get from them?

MR. PRIESS: It seems to help explain the lack of attention he gave to the President's Daily Brief. To this day, and I've researched this more thoroughly than anyone I know of, we still can't say definitively if President Nixon read the President's Daily Brief during his administration.

Henry Kissinger initially said, no, he frequently ignored it. And then when I chatted with him about it he said, no, I'm pretty sure he read it and here's why. And others gave indications that he probably did read it, but did not appear to engage it deeply and fully.

The politicization side is a different one. Politicization is changing the analytic assessment going to a customer based on the customer's wishes, usually to please the customer, although politicization can work the other way, which is you just relish the fact of telling somebody something you know they're not going to want to hear and you rub their face in it. Less common, but it has happened. There's no indication that the people writing for the president in the Nixon era did change their analytic lines because of Nixon's hatred of them.

In fact, there's a story in the book about exactly the opposite. Even as Watergate is brewing up, even as he's being ordered to release the tapes of Watergate, analysts cheering at the Supreme Court decision, saying this is great, and then getting right back down to preparing something to go to the man they were just cheering to be kicked out.

That kind of professional ethos comes out in various stories in the book. The President's Daily Brief is about the personality of the president in terms of its style, in terms of its approach, in terms

of its length, and it has varied across each presidency. But it's more about the presidency. It's more about writing for the position of the president rather than the political figure who happens to occupy the chair in the Oval Office.

MR. RIEDEL: Gerald Ford doesn't get a lot of attention, but he is an innovator in the PDB in the sense, as you said earlier, that he begins to bring in the role of briefer. The role of the briefer becomes more and more important in this book. And I know from my own experience the role of the briefer becomes more and more important in the history of the CIA. So can you describe how the briefer starts and where that begins with Ford?

MR. PRIESS: That's one of my favorite stories and it does involve President Nixon. President Nixon restricted the PDB, whether he read it or not himself. He restricted access to it to a very small handful of people, such that when he became vice president, Gerald Ford was not included on the list, repeating history of the Kennedy-Johnson relationship.

Gerald Ford came out to the CIA for a tour in 1974, and the director at the time, Bill Colby, walked him around, had a series of meetings and briefings, but walked him around the current intelligence production office, where material like the President's Daily Brief and other daily intelligence publications were produced. And just sitting on a table, just happening to be there, was something that said "The President's Daily Brief." And sure enough, Ford noticed it, said, well, what's that sitting there?

Oh, well, that's the President's Daily Brief. We deliver that every day to President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger and it contains this information. And Ford says, oh, I'd sure like to see that.

And Colby says, well, we can arrange that. In fact, we can have this officer, a working-level officer, we can have this officer deliver it to you each morning. He can come to your home, he can meet you at your office, whatever you'd like.

And they set up an arrangement whereby Dave Peterson goes to see Gerald Ford every day at his house in Alexandria. Sometimes they talk about the President's Daily Brief at his old kitchen table, sometimes he gets in the limo with him and heads downtown, but Gerald Ford starts getting daily personal briefings. And frankly, as vice president, you've got time for that because you have very few other pressing responsibilities. (Laughter)

Ford likes it so much that when he inherits the Oval Office, the real estate improves for

Dave Peterson. He starts briefing the president of the United States in the Oval Office every day, the first president to take an in-person PDB briefing from a working-level officer. He seems to enjoy the briefings immensely.

One of my other favorite stories in the book also relates to Gerald Ford. During the briefings usually it would be the CIA briefer, President Ford, and the National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft. Even before he was formally National Security Advisor and was still Henry Kissinger's deputy, he still would often sit in.

Someone else often came into those briefings, one of the few recipients of the PDB sessions on a regular basis who had four legs and was naked. This was Liberty, Ford's prize golden retriever. You see lots of pictures of Liberty from the Ford White House. Liberty was not a small dog. Liberty would pace back and forth between the participants. Everybody would reach out, pet the dog. Dave Peterson recalls that once he reached out to scratch Liberty behind the ears to try to stop the pacing because it was getting a little distracting for the briefing and he said that Liberty appreciated the attention so much he started wagging the tail vigorously. So much so, in fact, she rattled the president's prized pipe rack and it almost fell down. Ford in one of his few fits of anger in a PDB briefing banishes Liberty from all future PDB sessions. (Laughter)

MR. RIEDEL: Once you start having a briefer the book goes from being a book to being an oral communications system. It still is a book, but there's going to be oral communications. And as your book tells, that begins to transform the way the book is seen back in the CIA and the importance the book has now not just for the Office of Current Intelligence, but the director of Central Intelligence who now sees this is how my boss is reading our stuff. Can you talk a little bit about the role of the briefer and as it then evolves over time?

MR. PRIESS: Yeah, having a briefer in the room has several distinct advantages. Ford seemed to appreciate it at least for the first year of his presidency and he stopped at that point. His Chief of Staff and the Deputy Chief of Staff, two guys named Don Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney, they decided that the President probably didn't need this, campaign season was heating up, he was going to be spending a lot of time away from Washington anyway. So they started just getting the book and having the briefer sit outside to answer questions if need be.

But the briefer offered several advantages. One, the briefer can explain something that even the most finely crafted words don't make exceptionally clear. So if there's something the President might stumble on, instead of scratching his head and thinking, oh, I'll get to it later and probably forgetting, there's somebody right there to say, sir, this is exactly what we mean.

Secondly, there's an opportunity to add things on. You can walk something into the Oval Office. Here's the book, here's the analysis in it, but we just got this breaking news and this changes the story or it moves the ball forward in some other way.

Third, you have the opportunity to explore alternatives in a way that the text might not always do. Here are the limited pieces of intelligence we're seeing that explain what the Russians might be doing. The book might explain this is our best analysis on it, but there might not be room to explore all the alternatives. Having a briefer in the room you can have that discussion with the President, here's what else it could mean and here are the indicators that would point us to this direction or this direction instead of to this direction.

All of that has -- there are backup plans to that if you don't have a briefer in the room. In theory, the President talks to the National Security Advisor about some of these same things, gets answers from the bureaucracy from it, but that's not the same as having it in real time to take advantage of the material in the book and the briefer's presence.

MR. RIEDEL: Of course, Ford was succeeded by Carter and I'd be happy to hear what you have to say about Carter. But then comes kind of the golden age of the PDB with Bush 41, who has actually written the very nice Foreword for this book. And Bush 41 does have a briefer every day. Can you talk a little bit about Carter and 41 and how that process worked then?

MR. PRIESS: Sure. We'll get to 41 because he has some of the best stories involving the PDB and we'll save most -- if you have questions about Carter or Reagan we'll get back to it. Carter did not take a daily briefer, but he did discuss the PDB every single morning with Zbigniew Brzezinski, his National Security Advisor. The reason for that was a little bit of bureaucratic subterfuge by Dr. Brzezinski, as well.

When Stan Turner became director of Central Intelligence for Jimmy Carter, he was surprised to find that there was not a daily intelligence briefing. He was the president's primary

intelligence advisor. So he went to the White House and said, look, I'm the intelligence advisor. I should be the one presenting him the daily intelligence. He looked at the president's schedule and it said intelligence briefing, that's mine.

Dr. Brzezinski looked at him, looked at the schedule, looked at him, got out his pen, scratched out "intelligence briefing," and wrote "national security briefing." (Laughter) And then as National Security Advisor, he just incorporated the intelligence into that briefing. It was done.

In the Reagan years, there was an interesting dynamic that went on that feeds directly into the way Bush 41 approached it when he was president. Ronald Reagan appears to have read the book carefully, contrary to much conventional wisdom about his reading. But he allowed the PDB to be passed around the White House more freely than most other presidents had, such that copies of it were being made. In one case, there was even a senior officer who allowed copies of the PDB to be stored in his garage at home. Keep in mind, this is Top Secret intelligence, the most exclusive document in the world being produced every morning. The National Security Advisor found out about that, had them returned and destroyed. But that was the kind of lax handling of the book that was going on in times of the Reagan White House.

One person more than any other was horribly disturbed by this and that was Vice President George H.W. Bush. He had been director of Central Intelligence. He knew the kinds of things that could be at risk if this material were exposed. So it's no surprise that when he became president he decided that he would take a personal briefing every day through his whole term in office, the first president to do so, but he also would not even keep the book himself.

Traditionally, customers of the PDB have read it and returned it, but that doesn't apply to the president because he's the president. He can do whatever he would like to do. Under Bush 41, he said, no, it's not even going to sit in this office. The briefer's going to brief it to me, we're going to talk about it, we're going to devote attention to it, and then I'm going to give it back to the briefer who takes it back to CIA Headquarters, therefore preserving some of the security in the book.

The briefers, some great stories come out in the book about the briefers and their interaction with the President, both in terms of how serious the discussions got, how it helped President Bush make decisions like to go forward with the ground war in Kuwait, but also some lighthearted

moments when he would joke with the briefers, when there would be some humor put into the PDB, even some personal wagers with the briefers about the quality of the analysis in the book itself.

MR. RIEDEL: One last point to dwell on Reagan, of course, which is how the agency begins to use video in the Reagan administration. After all, if you want to appeal to a movie star, what better way than to put it not on paper, but on video? There's a lot of lore about this in the CIA. How much of this actually, in your opinion, happened? And how much did he get a President's Daily -- not a President's Daily, but a president's video system?

MR. PRIESS: Right. There's a little mythology that's developed around that. I was surprised to find that at least the briefings with video components at least started back with Jimmy Carter, that he was getting videos about world leaders. And think about it, that makes sense. If you're the president of the United States and you're meeting a foreign leader for the first time, you could read a paragraph about him that might give you some interesting insight about his education, his background, his world view, or you can watch a video of the way he interacts with people. You can see him giving a speech. You can see him lead a meeting. For somebody who is attuned to social skills, that's a really valuable thing to get that does not come across as well with ink on paper. So it's no surprise that Jimmy Carter got some video supplements to the PDB. Certainly no surprise that Ronald Reagan, who was very involved in the person-to-person side of governance, that he would want that, as well.

It appeared that there were a number of topics where he would receive them and Reagan did not write a lot about the President's Daily Brief in his diaries, although if you dig through every page of them, which I did, you will find enough references to let you know that he was reading the PDBs seriously. He makes reference fairly frequently to the video supplements, talking about how he felt like he really got to know the Indian prime minister because he watched this film about him produced by the CIA using video clips of the prime minister himself.

It wasn't just that, though. Sometimes it was to prep him for travel. They would show him the place he was going, so when he stepped off the plane he could make the actor's entrance and look like he'd been there before because after seeing it, he felt like he'd been there before.

MR. RIEDEL: I can't help but interrupt here, if you don't mind, and tell a little vignette. One of the first videos that the agency did for Ronald Reagan was about the Israeli prime minister,

Menachem Begin. And it began with pictures of Auschwitz and then you heard Menachem Begin's voice start, very softly and then stronger and stronger, "Never again. Never again." And it told the history of Menachem Begin.

I was, unfortunately, the Saudi analyst. And after the Begin video was this big hit, they said let's do one on Saudi Arabia. Okay.

First of all, there's lots of video of Israeli prime ministers because they have a free press. There's almost no video of Saudi kings.

Secondly, they speak in Arabic. They don't say good things, like "Never again," in a rising voice. (Laughter)

Third, most of the time they're just sitting around, you know, kind of rotund. (Laughter) There's not much of an image. You can't make much of a movie out of something like that.

But it got worse. Later on I went to the NSC and we were having the Bangladeshi prime minister come. And President Bush 41 wanted a video, a video of the Bangladeshi -- it was a minute and 30 seconds long. That's as much video as we could find. (Laughter)

Enough video stories.

MR. PRIESS: Actually let me close that with one other video story. One of the issues that comes up with the videos is not necessarily do you have footage to do it, but if you have footage, there's an editorial decision about what message that footage conveys. And one of the stories in the book is an analyst who was asked to produce something I think on China and it had to do with land reform. Well, land reform in China, not an area I ever worked on, but, fundamentally, the way I understand it is you're taking land away from somebody and you're giving it to somebody else.

Now, you can show a video image of these farmers out there working the land, on the land that they now own or have a piece of in this collective system, and how it's producing crops for the whole country. That's an image that does relate to land reform. Or you can use the image of the old landholder being pulled out his home, shot in the back of the head. Two very different messages come from the choice. The words can be the same. The voiceover can be exactly the same, but the image itself introduces a new issue that people have to address when they're reviewing this product going to the President, saying are we influencing the President in a way by introducing bias just by the very footage

we use?

MR. RIEDEL: We have the golden era, George H.W. Bush daily briefing interaction, lots of dialogue back and forth. And then we have William Jefferson Clinton and he doesn't have a daily briefing for most of his administration. I would describe it as there's kind of a funk at the CIA for the next eight years. They become addicted to having this interaction and then you get a president who doesn't love you that much anymore. Can you talk a little bit about the Clinton administration and how the mood or the challenge that the agency now has of getting the attention of a President who doesn't really want to do this on such a rigorous basis when, frankly, he can't usually get up that early in the morning?

MR. PRIESS: Right. The dynamic you describe is a funny one, that, of course, you want that daily interaction with the president if you can get it. As an intelligence analyst writing about your country, to know that the President is not only reading your analysis, but the president is also interacting with somebody and then going to make decisions based on it, perhaps in that very session, that is rewarding. And for every manager who reviews the product and for every editor who works on it and the people who print it there is that element of what we do really matters, almost at an emotional level.

And then when that goes away because a new president decides I can just get it by reading it alone, I don't need to have a briefer in the room, there is almost this perverse sense of what have we done wrong? Why aren't we good enough? Why doesn't he love us? And that's definitely a sense that is there, but it's necessarily based in reality. Nobody gets to be president of the United States without having work habits that work well for him.

Maybe if you realize you're better off reading than you are by having a bunch of people talking because you can't control the meeting, maybe that it is better for your personality, but it doesn't make people feel any better who are producing it. They feel like they've lost something. They have a different reference point now, the daily briefings.

In the Clinton era we found evidence of both. We found evidence of the president of the United States using the PDB well, using it to help avert catastrophes, always engaging with it by passing feedback through his National Security Advisor, but this deep sense at the CIA of if we could just do better, if we could just find what that missing element is, then he would bring us in and he would make time for us and he would keep time for us. It is funny so much attention was being focused on that

instead of solely on let's just make sure the analysis is right.

That was happening, but to then worry so much about, well, why don't we have the love of our first customer, it led to a process by which they actually formally used that term, "the first customer." They created a new advertising and marketing campaign to incentivize analysts who write for the PDB by giving them stickers that had "First Customer" and the picture of the White House on it. They even went back to President Clinton and told him, oh, by the way, this is what we're now doing to make sure that you get the best input possible, and he just laughed. He thought it was one of the funniest things in the world. How could you not be producing your best for me anyway? He didn't say those words, but that's probably what's going through the mind of any president of the United States who hears about a marketing campaign to get people to better produce material for his daily book. (Laughter)

MR. RIEDEL: Especially since he's theoretically paying all of them for their salary.

MR. PRIESS: There's that.

MR. RIEDEL: And then we have kind of a return to the golden era, Bush 43, whose father, former director, former President tells him in no uncertain terms you really need to do this. And the briefer is -- there's not just a briefer, there's often the director there. And especially after 9-11 it becomes almost a decision-making meeting with the President.

The question I have to ask that will betray my political leanings, I think, so you now have a lot of access and you're getting the best intelligence to the president, but I think most Americans in retrospect would say the foreign policy didn't seem to show the intelligence was helping him that much. You understand the discrepancy I'm getting at between --

MR. PRIESS: Of course. (Laughter) You're not subtle. (Laughter)

MR. RIEDEL: -- what Langley's input is and what the output is. Is there also a problem here of telling the boss what he wants to hear or giving him what he wants to hear? Is it too addictive to be that in close with the -- these are all questions that you address at the end of the book, is this how close should intelligence and policy be?

MR. PRIESS: Yeah, I didn't see much evidence of the dynamic you just mentioned, of telling the President what he wanted to hear. In fact, perhaps there was more of the opposite of almost relishing in the fact of, hey, things are going badly. Let's tell you about that again. (Laughter)

But there is an interesting dynamic there that there's the perception that if the President takes intelligence seriously, that foreign policy will be better. All things equal, hopefully that's true. I don't know that it necessarily is. I think the opposite is true, that a President who does not take intelligence seriously is more likely to have missed opportunities in foreign policy and national security threats that go unaddressed until they're more serious.

In the George W. Bush years, you can't say he wasn't deeply engaged with the intelligence, and this is probably the greatest myth that this book busts, that George W. Bush wasn't a very serious guy and he didn't really care about intelligence and he probably didn't understand it even if he cared about it. Quite the opposite comes out from every single person who worked with him, including people who are politically quite opposed to him, but were good civil servants and supported him anyway. To a person, they said we've never seen anybody take intelligence more seriously. He engaged it, he asked questions about it.

And his words to me, he said I am a fan of the Socratic method. I wanted to question the briefers, dig apart their argumentation, their logic. What other evidence is there to get at what the intelligence says?

What he does with it is, of course, a separate issue. Whether the policy that emerges from that process and from the inputs of all the advisors leads to what you objectively think is the best policy does not necessarily reflect on the relationship with the intelligence.

What the intelligence at its best does is present objective, timely, and accurate information to the president about unknowns in the international sphere. When the President's Daily Brief has worked well that's what it has done. There are many cases throughout history we can get to where it appears to have done that.

In the George W. Bush years, one of the problems was fundamentally, let's say, the Iraq decision with WMD. The analysis was clearly wrong. All the indications seemed to be that there was WMD in Iraq. All of the historical precedents, all the things Saddam was doing to hide activities as if there were WMD. All of that led analysts to see what they expected to see, which was WMD in Iraq.

When that fell apart, that led to a lot of soul-searching. It led to a lot of implications for the PDB itself in terms of the CIA after that time no longer owned the PDB. It's now a product of the

Office of the Director of National Intelligence to which CIA analysts contribute immensely. But it led to a whole-scale change in the way we look at the book to the extent we use alternative analysis, to the extent that structured analytic techniques are used to make sure that we're not seeing what we expect to see.

Because of that intelligence, even with somebody who took it seriously, even with somebody who took it up a notch from his father by not only seeing a daily intelligence briefer every day, but by taking daily intelligence briefers with him when he traveled, and then later in his term by adding deep-dive briefings where intelligence analysts would come in and dig on particular topics in great depth, even in that case the intelligence doesn't always lead to the foreign policy outcomes that work best.

MR. RIEDEL: The Obama administration's the hardest one to write about because it's still there and how the President interacts with the intelligence community is rightfully a subject that both the White House and the CIA wants to protect off. But there is a technological development in the Obama White House, which I think you report for the first time.

MR. PRIESS: Yeah. The thing you have to remember about presidential daily intelligence is it is presidential. If the president decides that he wants a President's Daily Brief printed on yellow paper, they'll find a way to print it on yellow paper. If the president of the United States decides he wants the PDB in the form of interpretive dance, there's going to be a whole lot of dance lessons going on in the intelligence services. (Laughter) We haven't seen that one yet.

MR. RIEDEL: Thank god.

MR. PRIESS: I'm waiting on that one. President Obama gets his President's Daily Brief on an iPad. It's no longer ink on a paper, it's electrons on a screen. What difference does that make? Relatively little in terms of the content. It is still analysis on breaking world events. It's just presented on a screen instead of in a book. But it does open up some opportunities for multimedia graphics, for interactives, for videos to be incorporated in the product itself rather than as a supplement after reading a book.

What's odd about that is digging in the deep files of some of the presidential libraries I found a memo back from 1970, some 40 years before this started, where a contractor at the National Security Council proposed to Dr. Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor at the time, a keyboard and monitor form of presidential daily intelligence, where they could put a short little paragraph

about some breaking developing on a computer screen. The National Security Advisor and then, hopefully, eventually the President, if it worked, could just press a button on the screen to get the full story, maybe press another button to get a related article, and then type in a question which would go directly back to people to get an answer to him. And this is 1970.

There was no action taken on the memo. Kissinger essentially gave it a pocket veto. But I asked him about it, showed him the memo, and said do you remember this? Was this something you would have considered? And he just chuckled and said I wouldn't have even known what a computer was at that point. (Laughter) He was so technologically illiterate, he said this just would not have worked for us at all.

But the idea didn't go away and during successive administrations there was the idea of how can we change the format of this to take advantage of new technology, to make sure we get the President what he needs in the format in which he needs it? But it was only in about 2012 when the iPad became the standard method of delivery for the president.

What I find interesting is what's going to happen with the next president because you get somebody in office who decides, no, I like reading or I like briefing, maybe the iPad goes away. It does depend on the needs of the president and what he or she wants for the daily intelligence.

MR. RIEDEL: In just a couple minutes I'm going to open this up and ask for you to ask your own questions. Let me just ask -- just raise a couple last points.

Another thing that I had never heard in here is that Bush 43 actually provided PDBs to foreign leaders, sort of. That's an extraordinary thing to do. Could you give us a little background on why he did it?

MR. PRIESS: It is. And the thing -- you may not have heard Bruce say under his breath, but the key phrase was "sort of." The most striking example, there were PDBs shared with people like Prime Minister Tony Blair. One of our closest allies is the United Kingdom, so it's no surprise perhaps there.

But one of the funny stories in the book is a PDB session held at the President's ranch in Crawford, Texas, with President Vladimir Putin attending. And when you think top secret intelligence for the American president, you don't often think that's where you want Vladimir Putin to be. By all people

involved they said it was a very special PDB that day, that great care was taken into what was put into the book. But it was a way of showing select foreign leaders the amount of trust that you want to have with them or the fact that you include them in something that is considered so private and personal.

In Putin's case, they said that they did not allow him to keep the PDB, as special as it was. He did sign it and have it on display for them. But also, as he walked out, he could not resist getting one little remark in. George Tenet, the director, did attend that day. And as they're walking out of the room Putin walks by Tenet and whispers under his breath, you know, we have one of these, too. (Laughter) And Tenet, of course, says, well, I'd sure like to see it. Did not work. (Laughter)

MR. RIEDEL: Looking at the transition process, you've alluded to this a little bit, this is one of the trickiest parts for the CIA. How do you go from a book that you've tailored for four years or eight years for the personality of one person and tailor it to someone else? You've got to really take advantage of that period between November and January.

MR. PRIESS: Right.

MR. RIEDEL: And get in on the ground. How well do you think the CIA has done that? And from looking at the history of it, are there tips in here for not just the CIA, but other organizations who are going to want to make this transition?

I say this because one of the things we flagellate ourselves with every four years at The Brookings Institution is how are we going to get our message through to the new administration? In many ways, there are only two organizations in the world that I think spends so much time studying their own input to try to figure out why don't they love me more: one is think tanks and the other is the intelligence community. So are there any lessons that you could offer from that?

MR. PRIESS: I'll tell you, the President's Daily Brief process has a huge advantage over what you do here in that regard, and that is once a president is elected, traditionally the sitting president has said they can start getting the President's Daily Brief. What it's led to traditionally is a frustration because the new President coming in looks at it and says, eh, doesn't really appeal to me. And they say I'm sorry, you're not the president yet. That's the PDB we are going to keep producing and you're going to get it that way.

What they learned pretty quickly decades ago is that's an opportunity for dialogue. That's

an opportunity to have a learning process before January 20th comes along. And what almost always has happened, and there are various stories from different presidents about how this worked, but what has almost always happened is the President has received supplements. So they get here is the book. In this case, here is President Obama's book to whomever is the next president. But here's some supplementary information. And in some cases, they've even started producing a second book, saying, 'oh, you said you would like it with more room in the margins to write comments. Well, here's our prototype. We'll give you that along with the old book to try to get that process started.'

Some presidents this has worked exceedingly well. President George W. Bush had a very extensive relationship with his briefers during the months before inauguration. President Obama had some meetings that did not go as well. That story's in there, as well, about how it didn't connect quite as well.

One that went horribly was Richard Nixon. He was the first peaceful transition, the first regular transition after the President's Daily Brief came into existence. The CIA set up a secret office in New York just down the street from the hotel where Nixon had his transition headquarters and they would get information up to Nixon's office every day and be meeting with his advisors. And they would deliver the President's Daily Brief and some supplements every day to Nixon's desk. Never heard a word back.

And then finally, at the end of the transition, they get this huge delivery back to their office of all of those envelopes full of President's Daily Briefs apparently unopened. No resonance at all because of that lack of personal contact.

I would expect that that does not happen again. I think it's a poor presidential choice to completely shut out the intelligence services during that time in transition when there's that getting to know you period to figure out how am I going to make best use of this huge bureaucracy that is only there to serve me?

The application to the think tank side is the contacts that you have within that budding administration just to get the basic facts of does he like to read or does he like to get briefed? Does she like graphics or does she like the printed word? Those kinds of questions, just getting that much will allow you to tailor the product even before the administration starts.

MR. RIEDEL: I'm, of course, tempted to say something about Trump here, but better

angels will keep me from doing that.

Please, I invite you, if you have a question or a comment, please identify yourself, right here.

MR. B. SMITH: Bruce Smith, retired from Brookings. I'm engaged right now in writing a biography of Thomas L. Hughes, who was director of the I&R for almost a decade. And I'm in the Kennedy, in the Vietnam and LBJ period right now. And among many questions, and I look forward very much to reading the book, are two.

One, Kennedy, because he had a close buddy in Roger Hilsman, whom I knew later as my colleague at Columbia, was very close to the President and he gave him a lot of intelligence. Roger didn't much respect any distinction between policy and intelligence, but Kennedy was so angry, my research shows me, at the CIA that he threatened drastic reorganization. And Roger, I think, overplayed his hand, although I haven't quite figured out what happened there, but he wanted to reabsorb some of the analytic functions of the CIA and it looked for a time like he might be able to do that. So I wonder, first, if you could have any reflections on that.

Second, Tom Hughes commissioned a self-study much like the Pentagon Papers in 1968. And he didn't interfere with the study himself at all, but that came out with a very interesting project, which showed how the I&R was really consistently better than the military and most of the CIA, although they later became closer to the CIA. But the lessons that they finally declassified this in 2004, and the lessons that Tom Blanton, who was the director of the National Security Archive at George Washington, drew was this: that the reforms that seem to be happening now of centralizing intelligence is exactly the wrong approach; that what you needed was more decentralized intelligence, more things like the I&R, competitive or smaller services that would offer their own intelligence projects. Do you think there's anything to that analysis compared to sort of now this big director of national intelligence and an effort to centralize?

MR. PRIESS: Right. Thank you. There are two main areas, I think, that are of interest around that question. The first is about John F. Kennedy himself and his interaction with intelligence and then one about the competing intelligence inputs that can get to the President. Let me address each of those.

First on Kennedy, Kennedy seems to have had this back-and-forth relationship with the CIA and, frankly, with State. Early on in his administration he found that he was getting just these huge tomes from the State Department and they took forever to turn around. And he made a comment to one of his advisors I can't go to the State Department for anything. It just takes too long. I have to go to CIA because they were relatively nimble and agile as a bureaucracy.

But then, of course, with Bay of Pigs, he said wait a minute, what's been happening? Agile and quick, sure, but look at what happens. So then there appears to have been a swing back. And I'm not sure that that pendulum ever really settled in on one.

It was unclear in the research I did how that affected his daily intelligence. I did not see any evidence that he was discounting his President's Intelligence Checklist in favor of State Department publications. It would surprise me, even though he was getting this one document that supposedly contained everything he needed to know from the various national security and intelligence bureaucracies, if he also did not read the cables coming in.

One case that came out on Laos in particular, they were surprised at how in-depth Kennedy was going with the reporting coming out of the State Department. They, in fact, said -- I think it was the ambassador in Laos made the comment your job is so much easier when the President of the United States is your desk officer. (Laughter)

In the larger issue about the President's Daily Brief from CIA and documents from others, the State Department for decades has produced the Secretary's Morning Summary, the highest level document designed for not the President, but in the title itself, for the Secretary of State. However, it covers the world, covers the globe, has a slightly different format than the President's Daily Brief, and so several presidents have said I want to read that, too. I want to see what different bureaucracies are saying.

Some presidents, like Bill Clinton, have said I actually liked reading the Secretary's Morning Summary more. I liked its style of delivery more. But they still read the PDB. And I think that's the key and it gets to your second point.

Having different inputs is good for many people until it's not. Ideally, the President of the United States would read everything from every bureaucracy and every think tank around Washington

except for the ones we don't like. (Laughter) And that would help make the best policy, but that would also take something like 26 hours a day, and that's not going to happen. So there's that yin-yang. There's always going to be that balance that needs to be struck between what does the President need to know and how much can we possibly get to the president to help him or her know it?

The President's Daily Brief was one solution specifically on the intelligence analysis side. When it comes to other State Department products that you're probably looking into in more depth there is value added to getting more of the diplomatic nuance to the president that would normally appear in an intelligence assessment document. So there's room for both. Thank you.

MR. HURWITZ: I'm Elliott Hurwitz. I'm a former State Department, World Bank, and intelligence community person. And I thank you both for a great presentation.

I would like to ask if either of you would like to comment on the potential of the President's Daily Brief for people like Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz.

MR. PRIESS: Let me ask you to clarify. What do you mean by "the potential" of it for them?

MR. HURWITZ: Well, I don't know whether they received it or not.

MR. PRIESS: Okay, got it.

MR. HURWITZ: I know they're difficult people. (Laughter) But I would just ask if you had any comments on how they acted when they received such a brief, if they did.

MR. PRIESS: Sure. I'll be glad to answer that and then turn to you for your reactions, as well, Bruce.

Different personalities are part of the process and the briefers, and I know this from having briefed the PDB as part of my job, the biggest part of that job is relationship management, is knowing the personality well enough to know this is how I can get the message across. By all accounts Dick Cheney as vice president and in his previous stint as a PDB recipient, as Secretary of Defense in the Bush 41 administration, was a voracious reader of the intelligence, absolutely loved it, ate it up, engaged it. That does not necessarily mean he agreed with everything he read. In fact, possibly the opposite. If you engage something that deeply you're going to find the logical flaws, you're going to find the missing things that you remember reading about.

One of the best stories I heard researching the book, I don't even know if I put it in the book, was one of his briefers, when he became Vice President, was absolutely shocked at the recall in that mind because he said something – it was a piece, I can't remember what it was about, something about missile defense or something. And Dick Cheney, having been out of office for many years, said don't I remember a really good paper on that from around, I don't know, April 1990? Can you see if you can look that up?

Wow, okay. So they go back in the files, they look 10 years back, they find a paper from April 1990 about that very topic, and it has the analytic line that he remembered. And he said that was not the only time. So the ability to engage in intelligence at that level is impressive. Again, it's a separate issue and it's up for everybody to decide whether you agree with the foreign policy that comes out of that process. But as a serious customer, on the Cheney side, absolutely. From everybody I talked to that was the case.

The Rumsfeld case similar, but a more adversarial briefing relationship. That is, questioning the briefer more intensely and, in fact, getting at the intelligence through argumentation. But even the briefer who felt, wow, that was a workout having to brief him, would say but he really took that seriously. He really engaged with the material there.

Wolfowitz I don't have any particular insight on, either for those individuals or for the broader point about engaging customers. Bruce?

MR. RIEDEL: I would just add one piece. In the lead-up to Operation Desert Storm, President Bush on three or four occasions asked the CIA to send analysts to the Oval Office to discuss all the issues that were going on. And he would also then, of course, invite the vice president, his national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, and Rumsfeld. I'm not sure Baker ever came because I don't think he was ever in the United States; he was always traveling.

I participated in several of those and what struck me after the fact was part of what the president was doing was forcing his team to hear intelligence that they might want to suppress in the system. In other words, to deliberately put them on the spot defending their arguments by theoretically having a neutral third force come into the room with just pure facts. And I think that's, again, an example of how smart 41 really was in understanding how intelligence can be used to make policy process better.

MR. PRIESS: He also understood that the PDB itself could be corrupted -- not his word, mine -- could be corrupted for those purposes. That is, with several presidents who only interact with the PDB with their national security advisor and we have to hear about it through that cut-through, the national security advisor might be trying to push his agenda to the president through the PDB. So Bush 41 said and his advice for other presidents was don't let anyone tell you what should be in your President's Daily Brief. Ask the president.

MR. RIEDEL: More questions? Over here.

MR. CADDELL: Hi. Joe Caddell, National Intelligence University. I have sort of a two-part question.

In September of last year, as you know, obviously there was a large tranche of PDB documents that were released by the CIA FOIA office, something like 2,500 documents from '61 to '69. So I was wondering how you felt about the timing of that related to your work, your research, and whether you plan to do anything further with that information.

The second part is when those came out I was very excited. I started looking through the ones specifically in October of '62 related to the Cuban Missile Crisis. One of the things I found fascinating was that obviously the missile crisis is so well documented, there's so much information about what the president was being briefed at the time, from October 16th to October 22nd, the time period where he knew about the missiles, but the crisis had not yet gone public, there is no reference to offensive missiles in Cuba in the document. It was so sensitive, it was so code word compartmented that it was actually walled off from the PDB process. Do you know of other dynamics where there have been issues of sensitivity, politicized issues that are so sensitive, so close-hold they're actually outside the realm of the PDB?

MR. PRIESS: Thank you. Let me address the second issue first. Absolutely, there are issues that are so sensitive involving intelligence that they are taken to the president in some cases orally with no paper record. We've been part of some of those. There are some cases where it is a memo just for the president and it might be delivered with the President's Daily Brief, but it is not bound in the document that is called the President's Daily Brief. And then some presidents have largely relied just on the President's Daily Brief. So it has varied. But there's no reason why it has to be the most sensitive

channel of communication. Traditionally it has been for most days, for most things, but it is not the only one.

On the wider point of the recent declassification and release, the research I'd done for the book was largely complete by then, so I thought the timing was absolutely horrible. (Laughter) But I did look at the documents. I did do a spot check. I read many more of them than I intended to do instead of sleeping, but I also did a spot check of the ones I didn't. And what I found was everything in those documents was consistent with what I had seen from the dozens that had already been declassified from John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson's administrations.

Those general themes were, number one, it was amazing how casual and light the prose is considering the documents that are more recent. Sometimes they were just one or two sentences that came across almost as throwaway and pithy comments. Yeah, we've seen that the Chinese have issued this statement. We doubt it will amount to much. That was the extent of the analysis for the President of the United States.

Also, the use of some language that's very politically incorrect that now would not even get past a first-line editor in terms of some of the comments made about different racial groups, things like that. Maybe a sign of the times, maybe a sign of that more casual effort that was allowed to go into those documents anyway.

There have been some analyses that have started to come out about some specific aspects of those documents. The thing to remember, and this relates back to the Cuban Missile Crisis point you make, the PDB not being the only channel. Most of the Cuban Missile Crisis was handled outside of the PDB. It was simply kept into the EXCOM and it was delivered through briefings that were separate from the President's Daily Brief. As such, there's a point in the book about one of the people working on the President's Daily Brief saying we don't need to put this in the President's Daily Brief. He's getting it elsewhere and the whole point of this is not to duplicate his experience.

In which case you have to know the bureaucracy well. And if you don't have that focal point knowing what's on the president's agenda, you're probably either going to annoy him or, the worst of all possible worlds, leave him uninformed about something because you assume he's getting it in this channel -- he's not -- so you don't put it in this channel. Therefore, something happens that he was

unprepared for.

MR. RIEDEL: Like David, I found the timing to be particularly obnoxious because I just finished my book about JFK's forgotten crisis.

MR. PRIESS: I think that's why they released then to screw you. (Laughter)

MR. RIEDEL: I'm sure it was deliberate. I'm sure it was deliberate. I should have been nicer to John Brennan years ago. (Laughter)

But what I discovered when I went and read them is that actually the thesis of my book was underscored because on those days in October and November of 1962, every single day he was getting something about the war between China and India. So he was very fixated on the war between China and India, even as he was dealing with the Cuban Missile Crisis. So when the Indian edition of my book came out this March, I was able to make reference to all the PICLs, so the next time you go to Mumbai, you can pick up the version that has the PICLs within it.

I would say, also, that for future research, anyone doing research on the Kennedy and Johnson administrations now has a treasure trove of information. You know with very few exceptions exactly what the CIA was telling JFK and LBJ about what was going on, what they didn't tell them. Now, of course, you're right, they were getting other pieces of information, but I have to applaud the CIA for putting all that out there and hope that they'll continue doing it and become a feature of the future.

Garrett.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks very much. I'm Garrett Mitchell and I write The Mitchell Report. And I want to ask two questions: the first is about process and the second comes back to Iraq.

It sounds from listening, and that may be that I'm not listening carefully, that this PDB that takes various forms for various presidents is a sort of here are the facts kind of reporting. In other words, here's what we know, here's what we think you should know about the Chinese building islands in the South China Sea, et cetera, et cetera. I'm curious to know whether in the briefing itself or when the briefer is doing the briefing whether there is any attempt to frame questions and particularly about the here's what we don't know. And that leads me to Iraq.

I have always wondered whether there was any serious focus in the intelligence community not on whether Saddam had or didn't have WMD, per se, but looking at what we knew about

Saddam and understanding that in this particular case there was only one thing he would fear more than having us discover that he had WMD. It's discovering that he didn't because the moment that happens his half-life begins. So I'm curious to know whether there were people at the CIA or elsewhere who were operating on that premise and saying, you know, knowing what we know about Saddam, what can we learn that will support that point of view?

And the second is something that I recall being reported specifically by Ron Suskind in his book about the Vice President and referred to by others at the time, Bart Gellman and Jane Mayer, about Curveball. Curveball being the pseudonym for this Iraqi ostensibly former member of the WMD program. The Germans discover him. He spills the beans, WMD, you know, Saddam's got WMD, so much of it he doesn't know what do with. That's the report that comes to the Brits and to the U.S. The Germans, however, keep working the case and it doesn't take them very long to find out that Curveball is full of certain --

MR. PRIESS: Was a curveball.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah, right, was a curveball. And Suskind reports and others hint at the fact that that information was relayed by the German intelligence community to the bureau chief in Berlin or wherever it is, our guy, who in turn reports it to Cheney, who in turn says that information will stop here and that it did not go ever to George W. Bush, that the Germans had discovered that Curveball was full of manure.

MR. PRIESS: Several issues there. I'll try to hit each of them.

First, on the PDB as a book of facts, yes, part of the job of the PDB is to present information as it is known to the president of the United States. This is what is happening. But so many things are not known, they are assessed. And I would say the PDB is largely a book of interpretation, a book of assessment.

For different presidents it has served different purposes with a balance more on one than the other, but the balance is traditionally on the assessments because, frankly, most of the issues around the world that are of interest to the president of the United States are unknowns. What does Vladimir Putin want to do tomorrow? Maybe Putin himself doesn't know, which makes it exceptionally hard to collect, but that's what the president of the United States needs to know. That's not going to be a fact.

That's going to be an assessment based on facts and, if well done, based on what is unknown as well as what is known. What would we be seeing if this were happening and we're not seeing it? Therefore, that helps us determine what's happening. That's the kind of analysis that you can even look back to those documents in the 1960s and see some of that between the lines, even if the language is frustratingly vague and casual.

In terms of Iraq, others have looked at the Iraq intelligence much more deeply than I have, so I will defer largely to them, only to say here that the President's Daily Brief fell prey to the intelligence biases that everything else did. I don't think it was an absence of information, although that was a part of it. One of the underestimated aspects of the Iraq situation in the race to determine how the conclusions could have come out so embarrassingly wrong was how bad the collection was, the fact that we did not have a lot of raw intelligence collection on Iraq on the very questions we needed to answer. So I think that is an issue that is fair to talk about.

In terms of information about a source being debriefed by a foreign government service getting on the desk of the vice president of the United States, and specifically being ruled out getting to the president, that assumes a whole lot of time on the part of the Vice President, a whole lot of authoritarianism perhaps on the part of the vice president determining what will stop here, that I just didn't see in the rest of the research. Even if the vice president, who doesn't have that much else to do, decides to spend an extraordinary amount of time of his working day on intelligence -- and several vice presidents have. Al Gore spent a lot of time on intelligence; Dick Cheney spent a lot of time on intelligence. By "a lot of time" we're talking maybe a couple of hours a day. And a couple hours a day, even then you don't have time to get updates on specific sources on specific issues around the world. I'm not saying that fact's true or not, but it does seem like it focuses a whole lot of attention, in retrospect, on something that sounds truthy rather than perhaps truthful.

On your latter point about Curveball, information from Curveball was getting into the President's Daily Brief. That's been documented, along with many, many other sources. In retrospect, that's one of the things people said, yes, more questions should have been asked about the sourcing. There should have been better things within the CIA as well as within the briefing process about it.

It points to a larger issue about the PDB. If you have 10 minutes with the president of the

United States, do you decide that you're going to brief 10 stories about 10 different things around the world or are you going to spend all 10 minutes really digging down into the source information on one particular story? There's no perfect answer to that and there is a downside to both.

If you do the former, you're never going to get to Curveball. You're never going to talk about the details of a particular source because all you're going to have time for is we doubt that's going to happen, on to the next piece.

If you go the latter, if you're only giving the president one story a day, there's a whole lot of fires around the world that are going to blow up that he is going to feel unprepared for.

MR. RIEDEL: More questions? Yes.

MS. CLAUHSEN: Thank you. Elizabeth Clauhsen with Savoy Partners. I wondered if either of you saw Don Rumsfeld interviewed by Stephen Colbert recently on his late-night show.

MR. PRIESS: Is this the one where they discussed his new Churchill solitaire game?

MS. CLAUHSEN: Right. So Rumsfeld was in very good spirits, his absolute most charming. But then Colbert went back to his other self and he said I want to ask you a question about WMD in Iraq, and you could see Rumsfeld just stiffen. But he said essentially why was that such a mess? And Rumsfeld kept giving very diplomatic answers. And finally, Colbert went in for the kill, so he said the facts were wrong. That was true, no? And Rumsfeld said, no, we were reporting intelligence. Intelligence is not facts. If they were facts, we would have said so. I just wonder what you --

MR. PRIESS: Yeah, several people intimately involved with intelligence have made that point, most recently Mike Hayden. That's one of his best talking points. If it's a fact, it's not intelligence.

We get very quickly into wordsmithing here. If it's a fact, but it is unknown and it is being hidden by somebody, then it could be intelligence to discover that fact. However, if it's a fact of how many tanks are present and that is something that is not being hidden, I can understand somebody interpreting that as not core intelligence.

I think what they mean is assessment instead of intelligence. If it is a fact and it is known and it is something that is quantifiable, then maybe an assessment is not involved. What are you going to do with those tanks becomes an assessment.

I saw the clip of that interview and I think the main point there was missed. It's not

necessarily arguing about the facts versus the assessments. It's what did you learn from this? Everybody makes mistakes. And if anybody doesn't, please, come up and introduce yourself because I want to work with you. Everybody makes mistakes. If it's a mistake of interpretation, if it's a mistake because I saw what I wanted to see, okay, admit it, and then say what am I going to do different next time so I don't make the same mistake? I want to make all new mistakes. I don't want to repeat the same ones. I think that's the kind of question that would have been more illuminating in that interview.

MR. RIEDEL: There's also an interesting question of priorities here. As several of the people who were involved in this issue back in 2002 and 2003, including George Tenet, have written about, there were two questions that the White House was pushing the intelligence community on a lot. One was WMD and the other was, is there a link between al-Qaida and Iraq?

Right or wrong, the CIA fell on its sword on that question and said we've looked at this and we are absolutely certain, there is no link between al Qaeda and Iraq. And they got a lot of pressure and pushback on that question, including from Vice President Cheney.

They were less determined to fall on their sword about the other question, which was a much more nuanced and complex question, and which, as you rightly say, they had a really lousy day to work from.

Here's another case where the intelligence community rightly does its job. It's got to figure out where do we have the value added? What do we have real confidence that we know the answer to and where are we less confident? And, of course, that's where it gets to what Garrett was talking about, how much of the ambiguity about what you know do you reflect in your book or in your oral briefings?

Now, there's a human inclination here. Very few people are going to, in their premier publication for their top consumer, say, you know, we really don't know because why are you going to be invited back tomorrow if that's your answer to everything? You're going to prioritize what you're talking about.

All the way in the back.

MR. M. SMITH: Hi. Michael Smith, PDB briefer twice. Switch to the iPad. What's your view of what it's going to do to future research and archiving what actually happens in the briefing?

MR. PRIESS: I'll let you know what I think because I don't know. See, I'm willing to admit it even if the PDB isn't. (Laughter) It would surprise me if any President of the United States allowed any means of delivery of the PDB, such as the iPad, to use and take full advantage of the metrics and measurements now available. If I'm President of the United States, I am not going to allow anyone to track how many seconds I linger on a particular screen and how many times I scroll that screen and how long it takes before I flip to the next piece. Because if a crisis does happen, and if there are hearings and if there's a commission, and they find that the one piece of intelligence was put before me and I flipped it, I'm not going to say it's impeachable, but some could take it that way.

So I cannot imagine a President or the President's legal advisors, allowing that level of tracking.

Speaking as a former intelligence analyst, I would love that kind of tracking, to know what it is that the customers that I'm spending so much time and effort to try to get objective and timely analysis to, to knowing what I'm doing that turns them off not in terms of the assessment, but in terms of the presentation of that assessment. Am I using words that are too long? And whenever I use those long words, they don't read the piece.

Am I using a headline that is sensationalist and that draws them in or turns them away? Do graphics help or do they take the eye away from the text? All those things I would love as an editor of a product or as an analyst to know. Probably not going to get it even though the iPad would allow some of that data to be collected.

The next best thing is what we've always had, which is somebody in the room who's a trusted conduit of information, whether it's an intelligence briefer or the National Security Advisor, who says here's what the President reacted to, here's why, here's what would be useful to her or to him in the next President's Daily Brief edition. That's gold.

MR. RIEDEL: I think we have time for one more question. All the way in the back.

MR. LUCKETT: Hi. Thanks, Mr. Riedel. Steve Luckett, I work and study here in the city. Thanks for the presentation, sir. I appreciate it.

Could you look at the growing circle of principals in the Oval who likely sit in on the briefing, the growing status of the chief of staff, say? You mentioned the Clintons. Is there any evidence

of Mr. Clinton having been distracted during the period preceding and then during the impeachment proceedings from this daily briefing? And to Mrs. Clinton, is there any indication that she sat in on any of his briefings while president? Thank you.

MR. PRIESS: That's something I did not get. It would surprise me given the fact that the President's Daily Brief comes to the President in the Oval Office if he's in Washington or in the Situation Room perhaps. But when he travels he gets it, as well. Wherever he is, the President's Daily Brief goes. There certainly must have been situations where first ladies sat in.

I know of at least one, not the Clintons, but I know of at least one, which is Lyndon Johnson because there's a picture in the book of Lyndon Johnson sitting in his robe, sitting with his wife and one of their grandchildren, looking at the President's Daily Brief. So at least it can happen. It would surprise me if it did not happen.

In terms of regular access, in terms of sitting in on regular PDB sessions, I found no evidence that she regularly did. However, she's still very aware of the President's Daily Brief as a working document because as Secretary of State she received it every day for four years. So we shouldn't dismiss that regardless of the First Lady experience.

It would surprise me if she did not take the PDB as a serious input were she to become president just based on that experience alone. I don't have insight on how she handled it directly.

Remind me of your first question.

MR. LUCKETT: Chiefs of staff, who's in the room.

MR. PRIESS: Yeah, the ebb and flow of the distribution of the PDB has often included the White House chief of staff because the White House chief of staff is there and has to address everything on the president's agenda. Most modern presidents have included the chief of staff in that circle. If there's a briefing of the book, then it has varied, but most have also included the chief of staff.

President George H.W. Bush had John Sununu in on the briefings. President George W. Bush had Andy Card and then Josh Bolton in on the book. Bill Clinton, the times that he did take briefings, often either had the chief of staff there or the chief of staff was reading it separately. And that's good government to me. If you can't trust the chief of staff with the PDB, as well as with everything else the President is seeing -- but it does depend on the President and how the President uses the Chief of

Staff within the national security decision-making process.

The other issue you mentioned that I think is relevant to this is simply the number of people who see the book. To the extent that you want to keep the PDB secure and maybe use it as the primary channel of information to the President and exclude these side conversations, well, that's good, but you also can't talk to the people you need to talk to about it. If you distribute it more widely -- President Clinton distributed it relatively widely, President Obama now distributes it relatively widely, PDB going to dozens of people rather than just a handful -- the risk there, yeah, perhaps things could get leaked. We haven't seen much of that, but that's a risk. But the risk is that even subconsciously people hold back on putting the best stuff into the book. Then there has to be a separate mechanism for getting that intelligence information to the President and, hopefully, that exists in whatever setup is done.

The final angle on that is, does the size of the National Security Council staff or the size of the president's staff or the relative power of that staff affect this? The answer is yes but. It can affect that, it need not necessarily affect that. If there's a channel of briefing the president that exists it doesn't matter whether the NSC is 5 individuals or 500. To the extent that the president decides to use the White House staff and the extension of the National Security staff to take the place of intelligence briefings, then that creates a fundamental problem for that objective and timely channel through the PDB itself.

MR. RIEDEL: I want to thank all of you for coming. I want to thank you, David, in particular, for coming here and for writing this book.

MR. PRIESS: Thank you, Bruce.

MR. RIEDEL: I think this book offers the American public for the first time a real insight into how "the pickle factory" does what it is really supposed to do every day in serving the President of the United States. It's a story that actually this CIA and the director of National Intelligence should want to have out there and I'm awfully glad you've done it. So thank you for doing it.

MR. PRIESS: Thank you, Bruce. Thank you for having me. (Applause)

MR. RIEDEL: David will be signing books outside there if there are any still to be sold.

MR. PRIESS: Thank you very much, Bruce.

MR. RIEDEL: Pleasure. Enjoyed it.

MR. PRIESS: Me, too.

* * * * *