

★ THE PDB SERIES: THE EARLY YEARS ★



# The President's Daily Brief

DELIVERING INTELLIGENCE TO  
KENNEDY AND JOHNSON



CENTER FOR THE  
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# VIEW THE DOCUMENT COLLECTION

The collection released on 16 September 2015 consists of the President's Intelligence Checklists (PICLs) and President's Daily Briefs (PDBs) prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. This is the first time CIA has released these documents, which consist of almost 2,500 presidential products. The supporting articles in this booklet highlight the significance of these high-level products in providing the most up-to-the-minute, all-source intelligence on current and future national security issues.

This collection is posted to the CIA Freedom of Information website at: <http://www.foia.cia.gov/collection/PDBs>

View all the CIA Historical Collections at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/historical-collection-publications/index.html>



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This booklet was edited by Celia Mansfield, the senior analyst and program manager with CIA's Historical Review Program. Ms. Mansfield would like to acknowledge and offer her special gratitude to the Intelligence Community officers responsible for reviewing the PICL and PDB documents, so that she could share this collection and the articles presented in this booklet. These dedicated officers share in what credit attaches to this booklet and the release of these documents.

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this booklet are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect official positions or views of the Central Intelligence Agency or any other US Government entity, past or present. Nothing in the contents should be construed as asserting or implying US Government endorsement of an article's factual statements and interpretations.



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# PARTNERS

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The Information Review and Release Group (IRRG) of the CIA's Information Management Services is responsible for executing the Agency's Historical Review Program (HRP). This program seeks to identify and declassify collections of documents that detail the Agency's analysis and activities relating to historically significant topics and events. The HRP's goals include increasing the usability and accessibility of historical collections. To do that, IRRG works with partner organizations to organize release events to highlight each collection and make it available to the broadest audience possible.

The mission of the HRP is to:

- Promote an accurate, objective understanding of the intelligence information that has helped shape major US foreign policy decisions.
- Broaden access to lessons-learned, presenting historical material that gives greater understanding to the scope and context of past actions.
- Improve current decision-making and analysis by facilitating reflection on the impacts and effects arising from past foreign policy decisions.
- Showcase CIA's contributions to national security and provide the American public with valuable insight into the workings of its government.
- Demonstrate the CIA's commitment to the Open Government Initiative and its three core values: Transparency, Participation, and Collaboration.

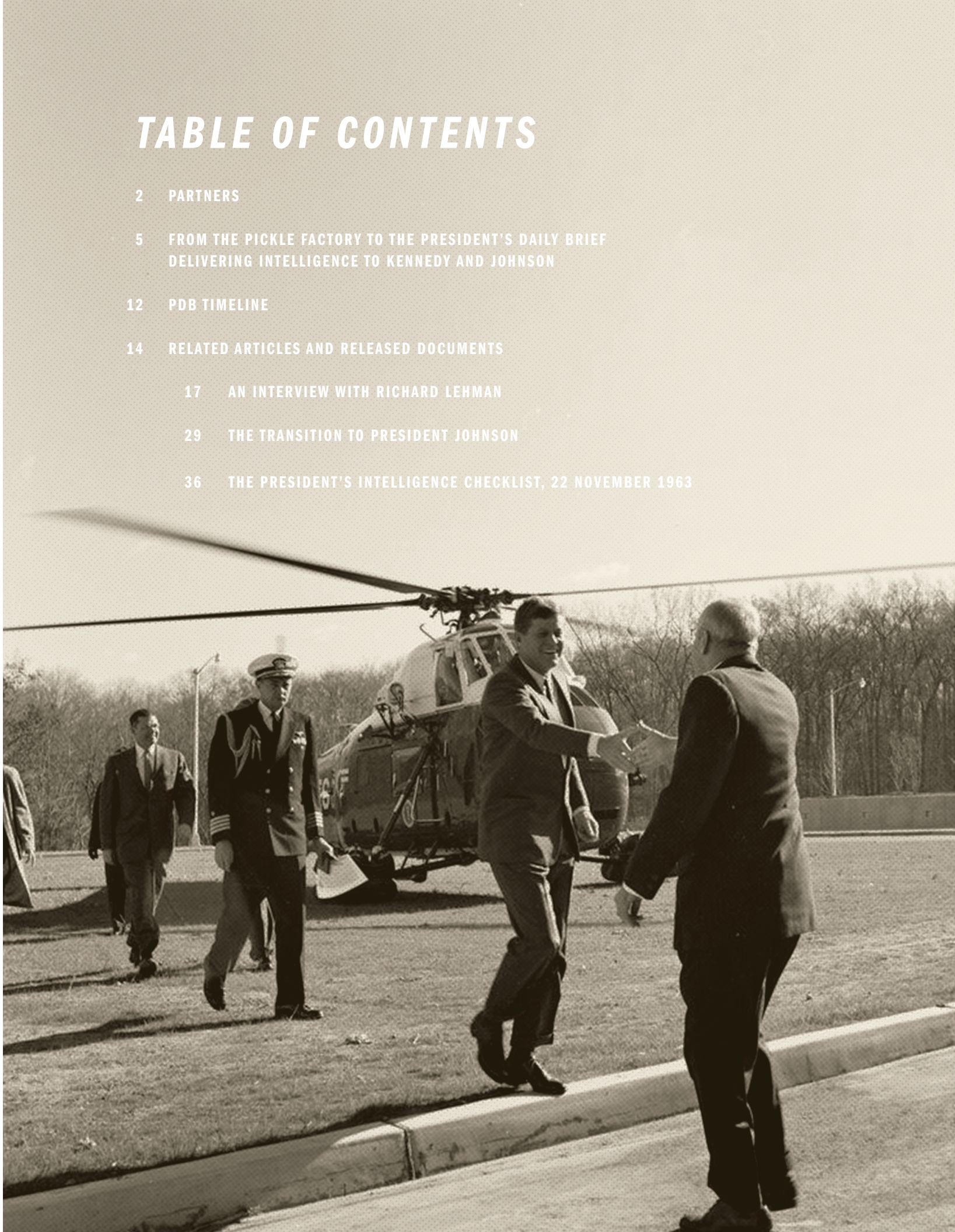
## CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE

The History Staff in the CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence fosters understanding of the Agency's history and its relationship to today's intelligence challenges by communicating instructive historical insights to the CIA workforce, other US Government agencies, and the public. CIA historians research topics on all aspects of Agency activities and disseminate their knowledge through publications, courses, briefings and Web-based products. They also work with other Intelligence Community historians on publication and education projects that highlight interagency approaches to intelligence issues. Lastly, the CIA History Staff conducts an ambitious program of oral history interviews that are invaluable for preserving institutional memories that are not captured in the documentary record.



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A SECOND RELEASE OF THESE DECLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS IN 2016 WILL CONTAIN PDBS FROM THE NIXON AND FORD ADMINISTRATIONS.

# FROM THE PICKLE FACTORY TO THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

**DELIVERING INTELLIGENCE TO KENNEDY, JOHNSON, NIXON, & FORD**  
*The Collection of the President's Briefing Products from 1961 to 1977*

**Celia Mansfield**

This collection of presidential briefing products, spanning the Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford presidential administrations, is the first large-scale release of its kind. *The President's Intelligence Checklists* (PICLs) [an acronym pronounced “pickles”] and *The President's Daily Briefs* (PDBs) in this collection include more than 4,000 documents spanning about 15 years. This is an unprecedented release because of the exclusiveness of the documents in the collection. These documents were, and still are “eyes only,” all-source<sup>1</sup> publications written specifically for the president; they summarize the day-to-day intelligence and analysis on current and future national security issues. In addition to the PDBs and PICLs, the collection includes *The President's Intelligence Review* and its replacement, *Highlights of the Week*, as well as ad hoc supplemental products from other intelligence organizations and annexes that feature topics of presidential interest. Unlike the PICLs and PDBs, which were prepared every day except Sunday, *The President's Intelligence Review* and *Highlights of the Week*, were only produced twice a week (see Figure 1).

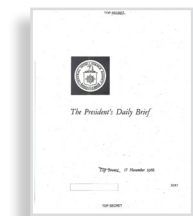
The PDB and its predecessor, the PICL, were tailored to the requirements of each president and reflected what the CIA believed should be brought to his attention. These exclusive products were the Agency's means of communicating its intelligence concerns to the president; in turn, the Agency was made aware of the president's requirements by the written or verbal discussions that followed. The length and format of the PDB and the PICL changed from one presidential administration to another, as well as through the course of a single administration, to accommodate the specific requirements of that president. Those administrations with less intelligence or foreign policy background required more historical context, and the content may have been more detailed. As the PICL and later PDB matured, the text was more often augmented with maps, imagery, and graphics. These documents have been highly valued and continue to have limited distribution – generally the president's executive staff members, including most often the vice president, the secretaries of state and defense, and the national security advisor, and any other government officials the president identified to be recipients. Under President Kennedy, for example, the PICL was not provided to Vice President Johnson under the instruction of Bromley Smith, Kennedy's intelligence assistant. It is important to note that the CIA was not the only intelligence community organization providing daily intelligence input to the president. The State Department, Department

**FIGURE 1: INTELLIGENCE PRODUCTS FOR THE PRESIDENT IN THE COLLECTION**



**17 JUN 1961 - 30 NOV 1964**

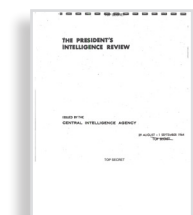
*The President's Intelligence Checklist (PICL)*



**1 DEC 1964 - 20 JAN 1977**

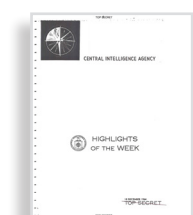
*The President's Daily Brief (PDB)*

The first trial PDB in the records was delivered on 17 Nov 1964 – these were done in tandem with the PICLs until 30 Nov 1964 – with the solo PDB delivered on 1 Dec 1964.



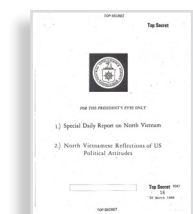
**9 JAN 1964 - 24 NOV 1964**

*The President's Intelligence Review*



**18 DEC 1964 - 26 FEB 1965**

*Highlights of the Week*



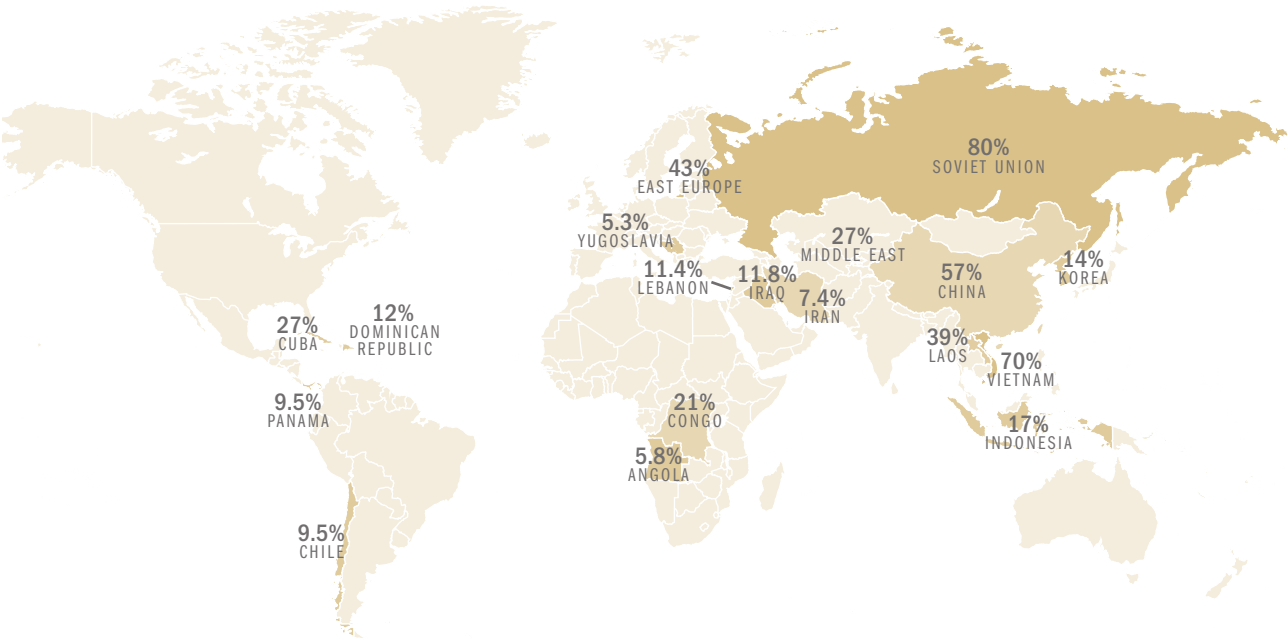
*Supplemental Documents to the PICLs and PDBs*

Ad hoc supplements were added to the presidential briefing material to include “Late Notes,” special topical features, and the North Vietnam supplements, which included the *Special Daily Report on North Vietnam* (7 Sep 1967 - 20 Jan 1969).

<sup>1</sup> The all-source PICL, and later PDB, contained intelligence collected by various means or sources, such as human intelligence (HUMINT), satellite imagery (IMINT), signals intelligence (SIGINT), and open sources (OSINT). All the intelligence information arriving at the CIA was managed by the Operations Center, which was established in June 1963, initially under the Directorate of Intelligence. As technology to deliver information improved, the PDB staff received a heavy dose of cables and other documents to ensure that the president received the latest intelligence on significant issues.



FIGURE 2: FREQUENCY OF REPORTING ON PRIMARY REGIONS AND COUNTRIES IN THE PICLs AND PDBs FROM 1961 TO 1977



of Defense, and other government organizations produced their own daily products for the president’s review, and also provided contributions to the PICLs and PDBs.

With respect to content, the order in which the issues were presented, and ad hoc annexes or supplemental products were included, depended on the policy focus or burning issue of the day. A majority of articles in this collection of PICLs and PDBs informed the president about the situation in the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and China, followed by Laos, Cuba, the Middle East, and East Europe (see Figure 2). Intelligence reporting on events in Vietnam at periods during the Johnson administration was almost daily, peaking in 1965 when the US began extensive bombing of North Vietnam and again in 1968 with the Tet Offensive. During these peak reporting times, Vietnam eclipsed reporting on all other intelligence issues.

During the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations, the CIA did not directly brief the presidents. The daily intelligence briefings to the president were normally done by the senior members of his National Security Council (NSC), which in most instances was the National Security Advisor, who headed the NSC staff. It was not until the Ford administration that the CIA would directly brief the president on the topics presented in the PDB. Vice President Ford had a CIA briefer who stayed with him when he became president; however, it ended in November 1975 when Brent Scowcroft replaced Henry Kissinger as the national security

advisor. President Ford, as other later presidents who maintained a PDB briefer, depended on this working relationship to convey his interests and areas of concern to the Agency.

BIRTH OF THE PRESIDENT’S DAILY BRIEF

Although the CIA was established by President Truman in 1947, the *President’s Daily Brief* as it exists today was initiated under the Kennedy administration with the production of the *President’s Intelligence Checklist*. After the Bay of Pigs in April 1961, President Kennedy saw the need for a single, concise intelligence product that would highlight key issues of national security interest. Major General Chester Clifton, Kennedy’s senior military aide, made a request to Huntington D. Sheldon, the second director of CIA’s Office of Current Intelligence (OCI),<sup>2</sup> to produce a product with everything that required the President’s attention. Sheldon took one of his more seasoned officers, Richard Lehman, to meet with Clifton in June 1961. At the meeting, Clifton stated, “it would be nice to be able to fit it into a breast pocket so that the president could carry it around with him and read it at his convenience.” And so was born the *President’s Intelligence Checklist*, or PICL, the predecessor to the PDB. Lehman developed the first PICL and on Saturday, 17 June 1961, the seven-page 8 ½- by 8-inch booklet was delivered to the President at his country home near Middleburg, Virginia. The first PICL contained 14 topical intelligence synopses, followed by more condensed notes and accompanying maps. By all accounts President

Kennedy was pleased with the PICL, which over time grew in length – more information from multiple intelligence sources and analysis was added on the more complex issues. Although the PICL was replaced by the PDB in three and one-half years, CIA officers quipped that they worked for “the pickle factory” during this time frame.

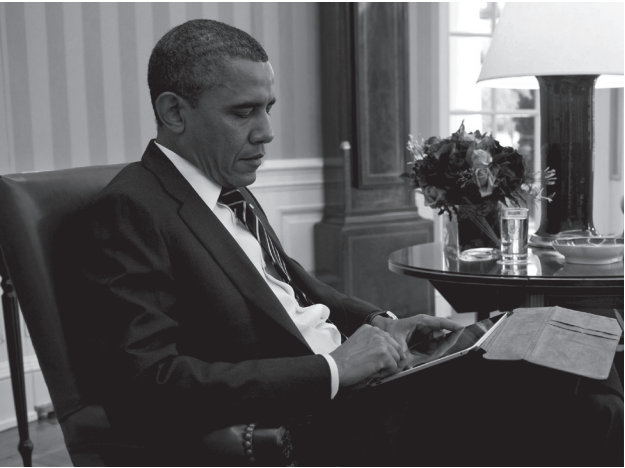
After President Kennedy was assassinated on 22 November 1963, the PICL continued to be published; however, the Agency discovered early in the transitioning administration that President Johnson was relying less on the PICL and more on *The President’s Intelligence Review*, which was first delivered to the President on 9 January 1964 and was produced twice a week. *The Review* condensed intelligence issues into no more than three sentences and was printed in an 8 ½- by 8-inch booklet, much like the earlier PICLs. *The President’s Intelligence Review* was replaced on 18 December 1964 by the *Highlights of the Week*, which was only published for six weeks. Just as the weeklies were in transition, the CIA made the decision to revamp the PICL and delivered the first trial PDB on 17 November 1964. The trial PDBs were done in tandem with the PICLs until the final PICL was delivered on the last day in November. The first solo PDB was delivered on 1 December 1964. What was striking about the new PDB was that the level of content resembled the earlier PICLs, with terse comments on current intelligence issues; however, these were followed by annexes of one or two longer one-page articles on specific topics or ongoing events with greater analytic detail and discussion of future outcomes.

By September 1967, the *Special Daily Report on North Vietnam* was added as a separate product to the PDB. During the Nixon presidency, from January to April 1969, the CIA delivered a morning and afternoon PDB to accommodate National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, who requested the most current intelligence as fast-breaking events were unfolding. By the close of 1969, the PDB had become quite lengthy – generally 10 pages or more – and its format changed to include a table of contents to manage the increasing breadth of intelligence issues. The PDB remained lengthy under the Nixon and Ford<sup>3</sup> administrations and was printed on legal size paper, which was Nixon’s preference as a once practicing attorney.

Although the PICL and later the PDB were the primary vehicles for summarizing sensitive or late-breaking reports for the White House, these were not the only daily intelligence products the Agency provided to the policy community. The executive branch, as well as the intelligence oversight



President and Mrs. Lyndon Johnson pose with grandchild and a copy of the *President’s Daily Brief*.



President Barack Obama receives the PDB in tablet form.

committees in Congress, received the lengthier intelligence products (on occasion less timely than the PDBs) called the *Central Intelligence Bulletins* (CIBs), and later, the *National Intelligence Dailies* (NIDs). In addition to CIA’s daily products, other intelligence organizations, including the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (*Secretary’s Morning Summary*) and the Department of Defense’s Defense Intelligence Agency (*Military Intelligence Digest*) produce their own daily reports.

The current PDB is managed by the staff located under the Director of National Intelligence (DNI). The process is similar; however, other intelligence community organizations also have the responsibility to take the lead on writing articles, and the PDB is now delivered using a secure mobile

<sup>2</sup> CIA’s Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) was the Agency’s analytic shop tasked with providing assessments to policymakers. OCI was created in 1951 and began publishing the Current Intelligence Bulletin, which at that time was an all-source product for a select audience, including the president. Huntington Sheldon replaced Kingman Douglass as head of OCI in July 1952. Richard Lehman was the director of OCI from 1970 to 1975.

<sup>3</sup> During the Ford administration, some PDBs ran about 20 pages in length.



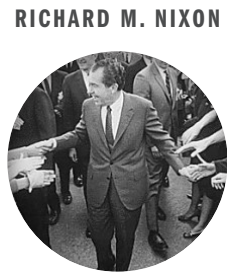
FIGURE 3: GETTING THE PICLS AND PDBS TO EACH PRESIDENT



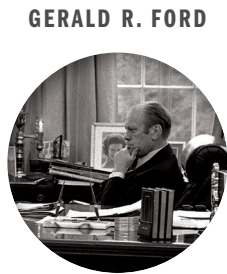
DCI: **DULLES | MCCONE**  
RECEIVED PICL:  
**MCGEORGE BUNDY, NSA**  
The CIA received feedback from Chester Clifton, President Kennedy's senior military aide.



DCI: **MCCONE | RABORN | HELMS**  
RECEIVED PICL/PDB:  
**BROMLEY SMITH, NSC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**  
The PDB, which replaced the PICL, was initially delivered in the afternoon; later, the PDB was delivered at 6:30 AM.



DCI: **HELMS | SCHLESINGER | COLBY**  
RECEIVED PDB:  
**HENRY KISSINGER, NSA**  
The DCIs had access to President Nixon through the NSC meetings that they attended; Nixon read the PDB during the day with other products when time permitted.



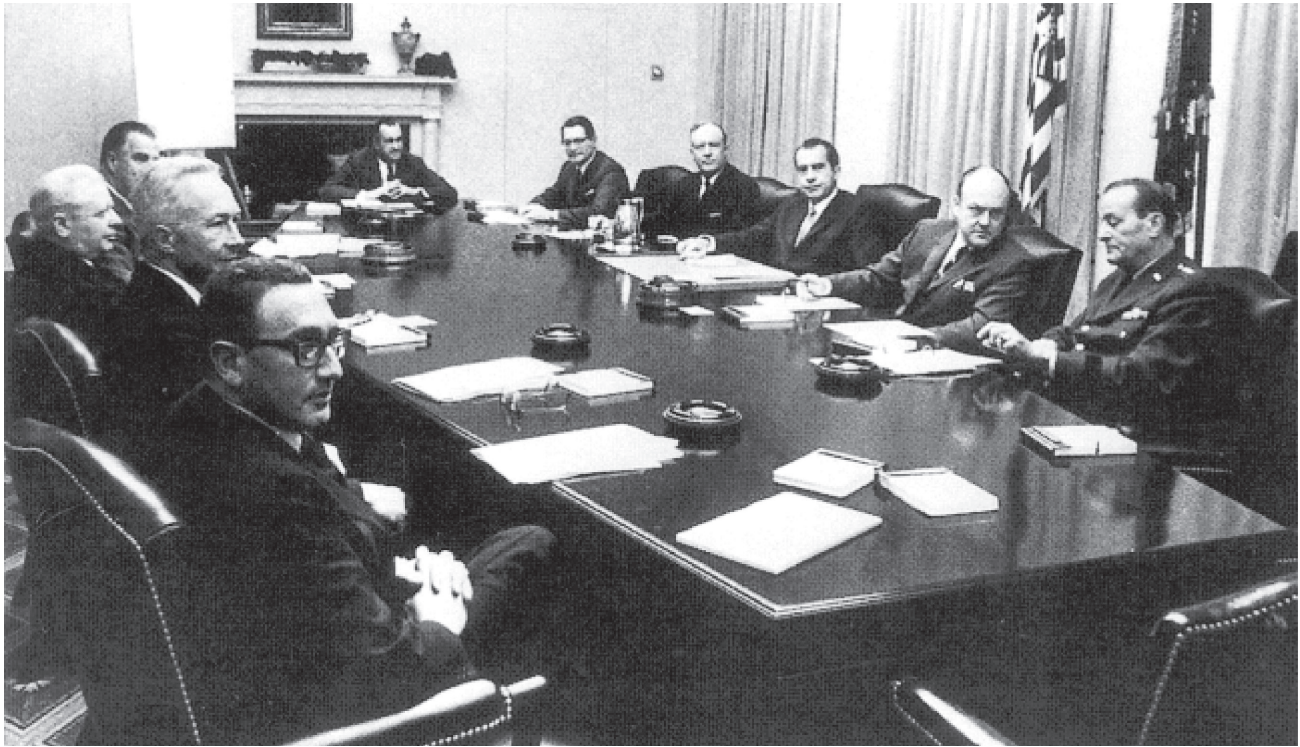
DCI: **COLBY | BUSH**  
RECEIVED PDB:  
**BRENT SCOWCROFT, NSA**  
Ford was the first president to receive verbal briefings, which were discontinued when Scowcroft replaced Kissinger as the national security advisor in November 1975.

device. With the use of mobile devices, the PDB includes interactive links to in-depth information and features video and other sophisticated visual and multimedia techniques to quickly tell the story or amplify the message without adding excessive content that might overtake the intended intelligence reporting. President Barack Obama, on his request, has been receiving the PDB in a tablet format since February 2014. Producing the PDB each day is still a 24-hour process.

THE PICL AND PDB AS WRITTEN BRIEFINGS TO THE PRESIDENTS

The PDB, preceded by the PICL, became the standard for exchange of comments between the president and CIA's intelligence producers of these daily products. The term "brief" in the title might suggest a verbal briefing; however, except for President Ford, only written PDBs were delivered to the presidents, and there were no regular formal verbal briefings by CIA staff. Under Kennedy, the Agency delivered the PICL to his administrative staff. DCI John McCone gained entry to directly brief President Johnson using the PICL but lost access because of differences over Vietnam.

In the initial months of the Nixon administration from 21 January to 28 April 1969, a preliminary PDB was delivered in the afternoon to National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger in anticipation of the PDB that would be delivered to President Nixon the following morning. These afternoon PDBs for Kissinger were referred to as "Late Notes." With Kissinger as Nixon's gatekeeper, each CIA director – Richard M. Helms, James R. Schlesinger, and William E. Colby – was distanced from President Nixon, with the NSC taking the lead in providing the daily intelligence briefing to the president. Under the direction of Kissinger, a significantly lengthened PDB was delivered on 21 January 1969 to provide enough background and included three sections: "Major Problems," "Other Important Developments," and an "Annex," which captured longer analytic products on specific topics. Richard Lehman commented that "[the CIA was] taking too much for granted, that we sort of grew up with the satellite business and therefore took the things that were known about Soviet weapon systems and so on as given, and went on from there. Kissinger felt that we were assuming things that we shouldn't assume, and there was a great deal of wasted motion as a result of that." On the other hand, President Ford had a CIA briefer until November 1975 – the Agency officer who briefed him when he was vice president. According to Richard Lehman:



Director Helms waits to deliver his intelligence briefing at a meeting of the National Security Council.

When it came to [President] Ford, we had had a briefing officer, Dave Peterson, assigned to Ford when he was Vice President, and we had worked out a comfortable relationship with him through Peterson. When Ford became President, that just continued, and we didn't try to change a thing.

Jumping ahead 15 years, President George H. W. Bush, who had been the DCI under President Gerald Ford, valued the face-to-face interaction with intelligence experts from the CIA; he regularly was briefed, with the briefer answering questions on the spot or taking them back to the Agency for a more detailed response that was delivered the next day. During the George H. W. Bush administration, JCS Chairman General Colin Powell highlighted the value of the PDB briefer:

"[the PDB] was also a way for me to get an information request directly back to the Agency....I just didn't read it, initial it, and throw it in my inbox. I had a human being sitting in front of me who could get anywhere within the Agency for me in the course of a day. So it was as much the PDB briefer that I valued as it was the PDB publication."

THE PDB PROCESS

During the Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford administrations, feedback from the president's national security advisors and others in the executive staffs was reflected in the daily PICLs and PDBs. The feedback process was important to specifically tailoring these products to the president and the senior staff members' needs. Specifically, the PDB differed from other publications in several ways: 1) the sources were of the highest sensitivity; 2) the coordination was not a formal process, although every attempt was made to coordinate the PDB with the rest of the Intelligence Community prior to the stand-up of the DNI; and 3) there was a separate small staff specifically set up to manage the product up to the time of publication (this is still the case under the DNI).

Publishing the PDB each day except Sunday was a 24-hour process, and the PDB staff managed the final product from the time an analyst submitted an article until "it went to bed" or was published in the very early hours the following day. The goal was to have delivery to the White House at a time preferred by each president. According to DCI Richard Helms, "As I recall it....JFK liked to read the PICL on arrival at his desk. President Johnson wanted the PDB in the late afternoon and often read it in bed. Neither Jack Smith<sup>4</sup> nor I were ever sure how often Nixon even glanced at his PDB." By the time Nixon was president, the staff worked in three eight-hour shifts, with the end of the night shift occurring at

<sup>4</sup> Russell Jack Smith was the Deputy Director for Intelligence from 1966 to 1971.



7 AM after the PDB was delivered. Internally, the draft PDB was reviewed by the senior staff, including the DCI.

THE VIETNAM WAR AND SUPPLEMENTAL REPORTING TO THE PRESIDENT

One cannot review the documents in this collection without mention of the PDB’s role in the Vietnam war discussions. President Johnson requested a separate stand-alone daily supplemental document “For the President’s Eyes Only,” *Special Daily Report on North Vietnam*, which was first published on 7 September 1967. An additional section, “North Vietnam Reflections of US Political Attitudes Towards the War” was added one month later on 6 October 1967; however by 13 October 1967, the title of this section was slightly changed to “North Vietnam Reflections of US Political Attitudes on the War” and this section appeared in the daily supplemental only if an issue required the president’s attention. The *Special Daily Report on North Vietnam* included reports on the situation in Hanoi, reflections on any ongoing talks, shipment of munitions and aid to North Vietnam, and any other topics of timely relevance. The section, “North Vietnamese Reflections of US Political Attitudes on the War,” highlighted North Vietnamese anti-American propaganda. Intelligence reporting on South Vietnam remained within the main body of the concurrent PDB. The CIA ended publication of the *Special Daily Report on North Vietnam* on 20 January 1969 with President Nixon’s inauguration.

The requirement for the *Special Daily Report on North Vietnam* followed on the heels of the South Vietnamese election on 3 September 1967, the US increased military activity, specifically US bombings in North Vietnam, and the US initiated negotiations for a ceasefire. The “North Vietnamese Reflections of US Political Attitudes on the War” section of the supplemental highlighted the newspaper and news media broadcasts in Hanoi that described the North’s anti-American sentiments and propaganda on the events occurring in the US to protest the war. During the month of September 1967, the CIA’s analysis in the PDBs and the *Special Daily Report on North Vietnam* supplementals described a government in Hanoi that would not budge with the backing of the Chinese, who discouraged any notion of a negotiated peace settlement for Vietnam. To highlight this assessment, the *Special Daily Report on North Vietnam* on 16 September 1967 described the shortage of food and other commodities in Hanoi; however, the analysis three days later indicated that the shortages had not reached crisis proportions. In his analysis on the war, included in the supplemental on 23 September 1967, General Vo Nguyen Giap, commander-in-chief of the People’s Army of Vietnam, concluded that

North Vietnamese forces would eventually win the war against US forces. And again in the 27 September supplemental, the following was reported:

Using virtually all of the toughest North Vietnamese formulations, *Nhan Dan*<sup>5</sup> said that if the US sincerely respects the Geneva Agreements, it must recognize Hanoi’s Four Points: stop its “aggression,” withdraw its troops from South Vietnam, halt the bombing of the North “definitely and unconditionally,” recognize the Liberation Front as the “sole genuine representative” of the South Vietnamese, and let the Vietnamese settle their own affairs themselves.

Hanoi’s continued anti-American broadcasts – a psychological gambit intended to weaken the US military’s morale and hasten US withdrawal from Vietnam – revealed its unwillingness to begin negotiation talks, despite Western press reporting and others pushing for a negotiated settlement.

THE ROLE OF THE PDB TO SERVE THE FIRST CUSTOMER

The primary role of the PDB is to inform the president, the CIA’s “first customer,” on intelligence matters affecting national security; however, the extent of that intelligence support and direct access rested on the Agency’s working relationship with the president, as well as the particular management style and personal preferences of each president. In the early years of the PICL and PDB, the critical relationship was the one between the DCI and the president. Unfortunately, history shows that the closeness of working relationships fluctuated during each presidency covered in this collection. President Kennedy was disillusioned with intelligence after the Bay of Pigs debacle; President Johnson was not in agreement with the CIA’s assessment of the Vietnam war; President Nixon kept the Agency at arm’s length, having it work directly with his National Security Advisor Kissinger; and President Ford dropped his PDB briefer after he changed national security advisors in November 1975. One might argue that the Agency has had better access to the presidents after 1976, and as a result, its role to inform policy has been more consistent, impactful, and influential.

Regarding the changing format of the PDB during the 15 years covered in this collection, the Agency’s goal was to draft a daily document that flowed, was comprehensive and concise, and carried the updates on an intelligence thread from beginning to end. The extent of the intelligence coverage, with accompanying maps and graphics, included



President Gerald Ford, flanked by Secretary of State Kissinger and Secretary of Defense Schlesinger, convenes an NSC meeting with DCI William Colby (at far end of table) in attendance. Colby’s formal briefings of Ford were limited to such occasions.

in each PDB represented a tailoring of content based on the needs and requests of each president coupled with the perceived knowledge and experience each might have on matters related to foreign affairs. Former DCI Helms wrote:

Whatever Nixon’s view of the Agency, it was my opinion that he was the best prepared to be president of any of those under whom I served – Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson. Each had great strengths, but as I saw it, Nixon had the best grasp of foreign affairs and domestic policies. His years as vice president had served him well.

One major challenge with intelligence support to the president – and one that became increasingly apparent during snapshots in time when significant policy decisions were looming – was and still is, to avoid being drawn into policymaking. Although the CIA provides objective analysis of collected intelligence from numerous sources, the temptation (and sometimes the expectation or elicitation) to cross the fine line between intelligence and policy was more likely during a crisis or when the working relationship between the DCI and the president became too close. In the case of DCI McCone, President Johnson sought his advice on diplomatic assignments, which eventually put McCone at odds with his contemporaries at other government agencies. Eventually debates over US progress in Vietnam caused McCone to lose the confidence of President Johnson. DCI Helms recognized McCone’s mistake and cautiously limited

his role to only providing intelligence. According to Kissinger, Nixon retained Helms because he was perceived as not politically connected.

Former DCI George Tenet has called the PDB the CIA’s “most important product.” It was, and still is, the most tightly held intelligence product and arguably the most influential on a daily basis because the content is derived from the most up-to-the-minute inputs based on highly sensitive sources. The OCI originators of the PICL, and later the PDB, strove to craft a daily current product that was true to sensitive source reporting and yet was easily readable by customers. Those Agency officers, primarily from the DI, who have written for the PDB over a few presidential administrations reflect that the product may have required personalizing with each new administration to adjust to the new customers’ requirements. The PDB was routinely adjusted to focus on issues that mattered to that president, and reformatted in ways that held his attention on issues the CIA believed were vitally important. In most instances, the presidents, the Agency’s first customers, concurred and often expressed their satisfaction and gratitude.

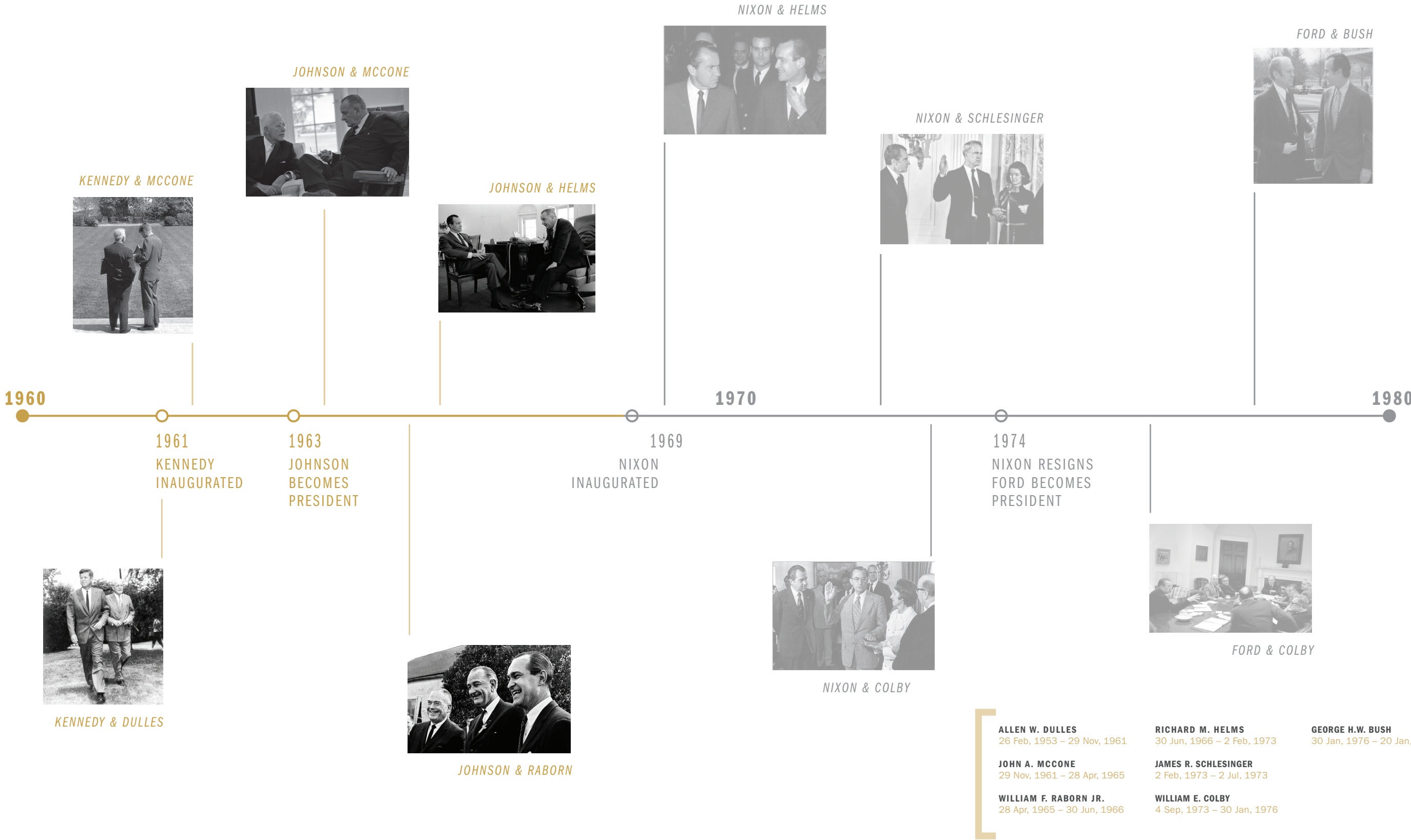
<sup>5</sup> The official North Vietnamese communist party newspaper, *Nhan Dan*, was first published on 11 March 1951. After US Ambassador Arthur Goldberg’s address to the UN in September 1967, *Nhan Dan* published Hanoi’s condemnation of the ambassador’s statement.



# THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

DELIVERING INTELLIGENCE TO KENNEDY AND JOHNSON

NIXON AND FORD  
(THESE PDB DOCUMENTS ARE SCHEDULED FOR RELEASE IN 2016)





RELATED ARTICLES &  
RELEASED DOCUMENTS







Mr. Current Intelligence

## An Interview with Richard Lehman

Richard Kovar

“  
Lehman played a key  
role in supervising the  
Agency’s current  
intelligence support for  
the White House,  
including its briefing of  
Presidential  
candidates.  
”

Richard Kovar served  
in the Directorate of Intelligence.

*Dick Lehman developed the President’s Intelligence Check List, or PICL (pronounced “pickle”) for President Kennedy in June 1961. The Kennedy White House had become overwhelmed with publications from the Intelligence Community, many of which were duplicative in nature, and important pieces of information were beginning to fall between the cracks. The President and his advisers wanted one concise summary of important issues that they could rely on, and Lehman provided that summary in the form of the PICL.*

*Kennedy’s enthusiastic response to the PICL ensured that it became an Agency institution. Former Deputy Director for Intelligence R. Jack Smith writes in his memoir, The Unknown CIA, that the President engaged in an “...exchange of comments with its producers, sometimes praising an account, sometimes criticizing a comment, once objecting to the word ‘boondocks’ as not an accepted word. For current intelligence people, this was heaven on earth!” (The PICL was renamed The President’s Daily Brief [PDB] in the Johnson administration.)*

*For many years thereafter, Lehman played a key role in supervising the Agency’s current intelligence support for the White House, including its briefing of Presidential candidates. Former DDI Ray Cline in his book The CIA Under Reagan, Bush, and Casey, calls him “the longtime genius of the President’s special daily intelligence report.”*

*Dick Lehman joined the Agency in 1949 and served for 33 years before retiring. As a junior analyst, he worked in the General Division of the Office of Reports and Estimates (ORE) using*

*SIGINT to puzzle out the organization and output of various Soviet industrial ministries. He then spent much of his career in the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI), eventually serving as its Director from 1970 to 1975. Lehman also served as Director of the Office of Strategic Research from 1975 to 1976, as Deputy to the DCI for National Intelligence from 1976 to 1977, and as Chairman of the National Intelligence Council from 1979 to 1981.*

*In the interview excerpts that follow, Lehman recalls the challenges associated with briefing DCI Allen Dulles, recounts how the PICL was born, summarizes how the Agency got to know Presidents-elect Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan, and gives his candid assessment of the famous A Team/B Team exercise conducted in 1976 on Soviet intentions and capabilities.*

*This interview was conducted 28 February 1998 as a part of the CIA History Staff’s oral history program.*

I would like to talk a bit about [Huntington D.] “Ting” Sheldon, because he was a great man. He had been in Air Force intelligence in England during the war and then went off into private life again, where he was not a great success. He came back in 1951 or 1952 to be the second D/OCI, and he really was the man who built the place. He built an empire while he was at it, because OCI had its own security, its own courier service, its own print shop, and a lot of other things that were all justified by the fact that communications intelligence needed special handling. And



so he really had a self-contained operation.

This enabled him over the few years after that to build a powerful organization, and he was completely ruthless in how he did it. People he didn't like were brushed aside one way or another, so that he built a core of people who were basically what he wanted for his shop, which were versatile generalists. He didn't mind having people around who were specialists, but his interests were in the generalists, because in his mind they were a core of people who could do anything. Knight McMahan, his deputy, [tried] to sort of cushion him, because he was not the easiest man in the world.

It was a good combination, and the office found its soul during those years. The thing about it was, if anything happened, people always showed up. They were committed to their jobs and could be counted on in the middle of the night to come in and do whatever was required. At the same time, [they] bitched all the time; it was built in. But while bitching, they were there.

Just to finish his [Sheldon's] story, when Ray Cline took over the DI in early 1962, I think—after Dulles left—he wanted OCI to be under his control, and he booted Sheldon aside, or pushed Sheldon aside, I should say. But Ting stayed on for several years as the Agency's SIGINT Officer and also as the Agency's officer for overhead stuff, and Chairman of the Watch Committee. Then, finally, he retired and went downhill fairly fast. Lost his eyesight and all kinds of things. Eventually, he and his wife made a pact; she shot him and then shot herself. That was the end of the story. While he was there, though, he

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In the Eisenhower administration, the Agency's vehicle for keeping the President informed on a regular basis was Dulles's weekly briefing of the NSC.  
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was a force for good to a great extent even though his personnel decisions were a bit difficult. He ran the place very firmly indeed. The OCI promotions board, or whatever it was called at that point, consisted of himself and Knight McMahan. No one else had a say of any kind.

#### Prepping DCI Dulles for the NSC Briefings

I think that I had made my mark with Sheldon by my handling of the NSC briefings under Dulles back in 1957-58, largely by calming them down. In the Eisenhower administration, the Agency's vehicle for keeping the President informed on a regular basis was Dulles's weekly briefing of the NSC. The Council met on schedule at 1000 every Friday morning, with an agenda usually set months in advance, for which policy papers were laboriously churned out and coordinated beforehand. I can remember an occasion when the newspaper headlines were along the lines of, “NSC Meets as War Clouds Loom over Taiwan Strait.” They were right: the NSC did meet, but it discussed a paper on policy toward Italy, which had been in gestation for six months, because that was the agenda, also set months in advance.

Dulles's performances were less structured, however. OCI prepared a series of topics to be covered at a preliminary meeting on Wednesday afternoon at 1700, together with a rough draft of what Dulles might say. He would amend the list and ask for changes that we would incorporate in another draft for a repeat rehearsal on Thursday afternoon at 1700. We would go through the same process again and have finished texts ready by 0830 on Friday, at which time we would assemble in [DDI] Bob Amory's office in South Building for a final review and to listen to the CBS news. And then Amory and I, or whoever was to accompany Dulles, would go down the hall to Dulles's office. The limousine would be waiting at the door and then would take off to the White House. Whoever went with Dulles served as a scene-shifter for his graphics and as a recorder for us, because the only record we had of what Dulles said to the President was what he remembered and reported. The assistant's report was our “publication of record.”

My only direct experience of the NSC briefing was the one time I was told to accompany Dulles to the White House. I therefore took the briefing package down to his office, arriving as he was putting on his coat. We proceeded to the car, at which point he handed me a sheaf of cables and said, “See if there is anything important in these.” That was my first intimation of the Bay of Pigs.

In the Cabinet Room, Dulles took his seat at the end of the table, while I sat in the back row where I could manipulate the briefing boards and point out places on the maps. The *piece de resistance* was the shelling [by Communist China] of the [Nationalist

Chinese] offshore islands. Eisenhower came in, we all rose and then sat, and Dulles proceeded with his briefing. Eisenhower had one question: “What are the calibers of the Communist guns?” Dulles referred this to me, and I said, rightly or wrongly, “Just small stuff, 75-mm or less,” my sole contribution to the session or, in fact, to Eisenhower. Then the briefing ended, and I was shoed out of the room. After the scheduled hour was up, the meeting broke up, Dulles came out, I returned the briefing boards, and we drove back to South Building. End of my first moment in the sun.

Within OCI this circus was managed by John, a bright guy who was very much in the wrong job. His nerves got to him, and he allowed himself to be driven crazy by Dulles's work habits and by meeting deadlines in general. Thus, each succeeding stage in the process was accompanied by a higher stage of hysteria, with the frenzy not subsiding until the limousine pulled away from South Building on Friday morning. Furthermore, it was contagious. Everyone involved was caught up in it willy-nilly.

#### Filling In

John was going on leave sometime in 1957, and Bill Hebert, a steady soul, was tapped to fill in, but Bill for some reason was not available and, as his deputy, I filled in instead. The experience made me, in the eyes of the Office and especially of Sheldon. He had been led to believe from John's demeanor that the task involved a superhuman effort in the face of terrific challenges. And to John they were.

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We were able to turn an operation requiring steel nerves in the face of hysteria into an occasionally difficult, but not insurmountable, bit of intelligence production.  
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My first duty was to sit beside John while he produced one week's briefing. I was impressed at the amount of *sturm und drang* that it generated, but I couldn't see why it was necessary. The analysts dreaded the occasions when they had to produce pieces of the briefing. I thought it could be done more calmly and resolved to try. Just by assuming that this was a routine task, however important, and by maintaining a sense of humor about it, the whole process began to work more smoothly. We were able to turn an operation requiring steel nerves in the face of hysteria into an occasionally difficult, but not insurmountable, bit of intelligence production.

#### Difficulties With Dulles

Not that Dulles made it any easier. I felt a great deal of sympathy for John, who was obviously not geared for this sort of thing. Working for Dulles had gotten to him, and he was past neurotic and into psychotic in his reactions. For AWD could be, and usually was, trying in the extreme. To begin with, a meeting scheduled for 1700 never started then. The group, Sheldon, John, the OCI analysts who had made contributions, and often Sherman Kent and one of his analysts who had prepared an estimate

that was to be presented, usually sat in a waiting room across the hall for at least an hour, and often as much as two and a half. When we did get in, he was rushing to meet a social engagement and not particularly interested anyway. Sherman told a story of trying to brief him on the latest NIE 11-3/8 [Soviet strategic capabilities]. Howie Stoertz, who was the responsible analyst, had just reached the meat of his briefing when Dulles reached around for the telephone and said, “Get me J. C. King,” [chief of the Western Hemisphere Division in the Directorate of Plans] and held a long conversation with him. By the time that was done, it was time to leave for dinner and Howie was left in mid-sentence. God knows what Dulles told the NSC.

When we did have adequate time, there were still phone calls and other interruptions, invariably DDP [Directorate of Plans] business. Or he would be watching the baseball game on TV. He would be in a reclining chair facing the TV, while the hapless briefer would be facing him from the back of the set. As he reached the crux of what he had to say, Dulles would remark, “Good pitcher, can't hit,” or some such, leaving the briefer totally at a loss. He also had a habit of assessing briefings by weight. He would heft them and decide, without reading them, whether or not to accept them.

The truth was that Dulles was not interested in the DDI and looked on it as a tiresome appendage to the real business of the Agency, the DDP. His treatment of us reflected his sense of values. He was wrong, of course, but we had to live with it. I will say that when he took his hand to writing a briefing himself, as he did when Khrushchev kicked out the “anti-



party group” in 1957, he paid attention to what everyone said, then dictated his own briefing, and I have to admit it was brilliant. He didn’t miss a nuance. But the rest of the time, it was made clear that we were second-class citizens. But he was, by that time, a tired, old man.

Nonetheless, I liked the job. It was doing something concrete and challengingly complex, not pretending to be a deputy division chief of an ORR [Office of Research and Reports] organization which Harry Eisenbeiss could (and did) run perfectly well. I would have been delighted to take over John’s job but that was not to be, except occasionally. My ministrations had demonstrated that the exercise did not have to be conducted with nerves drawn out to the breaking point, my contribution was appreciated, and Sheldon had other things in mind for me. John left the Agency, I think probably just in time to save his sanity, and became the editor of *Natural History*, of the New York museum of the same name, about as far from the Dulles briefings as you could get, and was not heard from again.

### Creating the PDB

As I remember, Jack Kennedy was blindsided a couple of times because he hadn’t seen message traffic. He complained to Bobby, and Bobby came down on [Major General Ches-ter] Clifton [President Kennedy’s senior military aide] like a ton of bricks, telling him he had to do something. Clifton called up Shel- don, with whom he had developed a close relationship.

Sheldon had asked me sometime ear-lier to be thinking about what we could do specifically for the Presi- dent that we hadn’t done before. I had developed some ideas when this thing came. When Sheldon took me down to see Clifton, he pulled out of a folder a series of intelligence publi- cations that were daily coming in down there from all over, and he said, “What I need is something that will have everything in it that is worth the President’s attention, everything that is worth his knowing in all these things so I don’t have to fuss with them.” He said it would be nice to be able to fit it into a breast pocket so that the President could carry it around with him and read it at his convenience, written specially for him. What he was doing in effect was laying out what I had been basically thinking about all along, a single publication, no sources barred, cover- ing the whole ground, and written as much as possible in the President’s language rather than in officialese. So what he asked us to do was what we wanted to do.

Now, Sheldon told him we would worry the thing and have something for him in a couple of days; this was, I think, a Wednesday [in June 1961]. So we went back to Q Building, and Sheldon just told me to go on and do it. So I created this thing, and the guys in the back room worked up a format for it that was almost square, that seemed to be something you could fit into a breast pocket. I tried to write it in nonbureaucratic lan- guage and roughed up a copy, which Sheldon thought was okay. So we printed the damn thing and took it down and showed it to Clifton, and he thought it was good. Asked to have a live copy the next day, Satur- day, to show to the President. Now, it so happened that on that weekend,

Dulles was out of town, his deputy [DDCI General Charles Cabell] was out of town, and [DDI Robert] Amory was out of town.

So Sheldon assumed the authority to communicate with the President of the United States. We turned out a live issue Saturday morning, deliv- ered it to Clifton, Clifton took it to the President, the President read it on the diving board at Glen Ora, down in the hunt country, and liked it. It has been in business from then on. So we produced the next one on Mon- day morning, and Sheldon then reported to the authorities what he had done. And we were committed. It started in June 1961.

Then Sheldon decreed that the Director should get a copy. At that point, we were printing only one for the President, one for the Director, and one for the files. To make it pos- sible to print anything that we wanted to, we didn’t go for any inter- nal distribution, either. One of the things Clifton asked for was that it be completely free of gobbledygook, including all the classification stuff. So we just put a “Top Secret” on the pages and let it go at that. It was called the *President’s Intelligence Check List* [PICL]. The next thing that happened was that we agreed that Amory could see the drafts. *After* they went out.

### A Process Evolves

We started out with only two of us taking turns at writing an issue, so we sort of alternated. I think Bill Colli- gan and I were the first two on the thing. We would see each other in the morning, and the guy who was on would stay around until 6 or 7 in

the evening and come back in at 4 or 5 in the morning and write the stuff as up to date as possible, so that actu- ally we could include incoming take up to about 7:30. And then it would be run off, and the guy who was writ- ing it would then carry it down to the White House, so it would get down there at, I think, 9:00, I’m not sure. I may have my times wrong. We would deliver it to Bromley Smith, who was [Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs McGeorge] Bundy’s deputy. Sometimes Clifton would be around and sometimes Bundy would be around, but techni- cally it was delivered to Bromley Smith. He was a great friend to the Agency, too, and that relationship lasted as long as he was in the White House, quite a while. After the ses- sion, we would come back and write a memo on what had gone on down there.

Then Bundy would go up to see the President with the thing if he was there. We didn’t wait. We came back with the comments that were made at the initial sessions. That would sort of wrap up the operation for the day, and we would pass the ball to the incoming guy. We would also get a call from Clifton detailing what had happened in the session [with the President] and write a memo for the record on that. Then we would be finished for the day and go home to bed. Then the next day, start the rou- tine again. It got thin very quickly.

Another unique feature was that we undertook to produce whatever they wanted us to produce, including at different times of the day and so forth, and that we would also be pre- pared to furnish it to him wherever he was. Particularly when he was trav- eling abroad. That was not hard to do at all. But the one thing we were not

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able to do was brief the President directly. Actually that wasn’t achieved until the Ford administration. For a while Dave Peterson [DI analyst] had a relationship with Congressman Ford that carried over into the White House, until Ford’s chief of staff put an end to it.

### From JFK to LBJ

When Kennedy was killed, that same afternoon Ray Cline gathered us in his office to decide how to handle ser- vice to Johnson, because we were really floundering on what to do. We didn’t know how much he knew. So we wrote at greater length in order to fill in some of the background, because the stuff for Kennedy was really very much leaving out any background at all. You assumed that he knew everything that had gone before, so it was just the newest developments that you had to report to him and what they might mean, but not going into the background on why they might happen, because you had a reader that already knew that. We didn’t know if Johnson knew or not. So, we were trying to bridge that gap without having to talk down to him, which was diffi- cult. The first few issues were like that.

Johnson installed his own staff inside Kennedy’s staff, and our contact was with the Kennedy staff, so we didn’t know how the thing was received. I forget all the ins and outs of the thing, but it eventually became clear that the President wasn’t reading. We

went through a series of changes. We realized first off that one of the things that was wrong with it was that it was Kennedy’s format, so we changed the title to the *President’s Daily Brief*, and we changed the format so that, over a week or so, it appeared in different formats each day—different sizes and shapes and what not—in trying to search for common ground there. We never really did achieve it. We [even] did it in the evening because Johnson did his reading in the evening.

Johnson really was not that much of a reader; the thing didn’t appeal to him the way it did to Kennedy. We finally settled by broadening dissemination so that we sent it to Rusk and McNamara and, after Johnson had a Vice President, we gave it to the Vice President. Incidentally, when Kennedy asked us to include Rusk and McNamara in the dissemination after it had been in business for a couple of months, I had innocently asked the question, “What about the Vice President?” and Bromley said, “Under no circumstances!”

When Ray Cline came in as DDI, he brought Jack Smith in as Director of OCI vice Sheldon. And Jack Smith shook the place up. He, I think, was a good Director of the place, too. Then Jack reorganized the front office of OCI, with [Osborn] “Obbie” Webb as his deputy. And then he had a spe- cial assistant, and that was me. I was Assistant for Special Projects, respon- sible for overseeing the PDB and also for doing various kinds of odd jobs, overseeing this prodigious output of one-page memorandums for the White House that we got into the business of doing.



### The Cuban Missile Crisis

I was responsible for rebuilding the office to deal with the thing [the missile crisis]. I was working 12- to 15-hour days. It involved almost everything you could think of. For the first week I couldn’t tell anybody what I was doing because the knowledge wasn’t shared around the office. I was having to get people like Joe Martin, Chief of the Western Area, to release people for other jobs, and he just couldn’t understand why the hell anything like this was happening. He was just completely lost in this, and I finally had to say to him, “Joe, don’t argue. Just do it.”

Once the classification controls were let down so that everybody knew about it, then, really, we didn’t have a task force because—as I remember it—everybody was involved. So we used the regular office apparatus with some shortcuts and so on. The Office, to an extent, would be bypassed on a lot of this stuff, because the readout photography was mostly briefed to the Executive Committee of the NSC by [National Photographic Interpretation Center Director Arthur] Lundahl, with Sid Graybeal from the Ballistic Missiles Division of OSI [Office of Scientific Intelligence]. So that all flowed past us and what we dealt with was sort of everything else, all the fallout from all these things. The PDB didn’t include a word. Why summarize what the President already knew?

I was called in, in the middle of the night, to draft the briefing that the administration’s emissaries were to give to the foreign leaders. It was the evidence, but there also were some policy statements that were involved. So I was involved with that one night, and the next day they left. And

then all this time we were having to get the Ops Center staffed and prepared to do all kinds of things which they fortunately had never had to do. They were ready to do it. I called Diane [Mrs. Lehman] and told her to get some money out of the bank. I told Diane, if I called, to take the kids and light out to Charlottesville and ask no questions.

Toward the end of it, on a Saturday, I was delivering the *Check List*/PDB myself that day and was sitting with Bromley Smith. He was talking about the cables that were coming in from Khrushchev and showed me the text of one of them which hadn’t been received in the Agency. So I read it quickly and then took off to go back out to Langley and made some quick notes on the thing from memory on my way out and reported to the powers that be as to what it was. I think [DCI John] McCone probably knew about it. This was the one where Khrushchev said that, “You and I, Mr. President, hold the ends of the cord that is knotted together, and if we both keep pulling, the knot will tighten and the only way that it will come apart is with the sword,” or words to that effect. And then, in the course of that Saturday, it became clear that the crisis was on its way to a solution.

Also in the course of Saturday, I was called up to Jack Smith’s office and was asked to do a postmortem on the Agency’s performance in this thing. McCone wanted to know how we had got there—what we did right, what we did wrong, and so on—and so I did. McCone pushed the button so that everything was made available to me, and in four days I had close to 100 pages on the course of events, including a couple of longhand annexes that were done for McCone’s

eyes only. In any case, that operation sort of established me.

### Briefing Presidential Candidates

I had had, ever since the PDB days, sort of a charge for dealing with the Presidential apparatus, to the extent that one could. When it came to briefing presidential candidates, I was the resident expert in that, starting really with Nixon, when we ran that satellite office in New York while the Nixon administration was creating itself.

One snowy afternoon [DDI] Jack [Smith] and I, and Vic White from Security, traveled by train up to New York and were met by Security and shouldered through the New York traffic up to the Hotel Pierre, where Nixon headquarters was. We met initially with [Nixon’s chief of staff, H. R. “Bob”] Haldeman and outlined what we could do for him, and told him what we would like to do for them if they could furnish us an establishment where we could set up. And Haldeman said, “Okay. Come back and see me tomorrow,” or something to that effect. So I was left in New York and the others went back.

Then the problem was to get any further than that in the midst of this swirl that surrounds a President-elect, but I finally—after sitting around in the lobby of the outer office of the floor that they had at the Pierre—managed to penetrate to Haldeman again and got some coherent instructions. He gave me a list of people to brief and told me to get in touch with Dick Allen, who was to be the National Security Adviser. I worked it out from there. Got hold of Allen, and he decided that he had to get an

okay from Haldeman, but that we could have an area in the basement of what had been the American Bible Society headquarters, which had been abandoned by the Society and had been rented out to Nixon headquarters for the campaign. They were still occupying it, but this area in the basement, which had been a chapel, was going to be made available to us. I forget the exact workings of all this, but in any case he agreed we could have it. I went back to Headquarters and got an okay to brief these guys, some 15 of them, and got Logistics set up to take care of communications and so on in the area.

### Opening a New York Office

Then I got [Paul] Corscadden, who was going to be our guy up there, and Ken Rosen as his assistant. Got them set to come up, and then a couple of days after that, over a weekend, DDA did the job. They came in there and swept the place, they barricaded everything that needed to be barricaded—it was right under the sidewalk under 57th and Park—and put in the secure communications, put in new furniture and so on; it looked sort of like Langley by the time they were done. So Corscadden and Rosen could take over and be in business.

Meanwhile, I was circulating around briefing these guys. Starting with [Nixon campaign manager and Attorney General-designate John] Mitchell, and Haldeman, and [domestic policy adviser John] Ehrlichman, and all the guys. Just sort of circulating around with a briefcase. I cobbled together a briefing of a sort that would do the trick. And introduced them to technical systems of one kind or another.

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### Kissinger Takes Over

It worked pretty well from a technical point of view. But then Kissinger was brought in and said, “Down, boy” to Allen and pushed him out, and he had his own idiosyncratic way of handling things. So we were dealing with Kissinger rather than anyone else from then on. He was suspicious of the Agency. I don’t know how much of it was Nixon’s suspicion that he was reflecting, or his own sense that there might be a central source of power here if he didn’t put his foot down fairly firmly. We had, at one point, at his request staged a briefing on Soviet strategic forces where we had the JCS on one side and our people on the other. It did not go terribly well. I expected it simply because they disagreed, and Kissinger was in the middle. Well, I finally realized what his problem really was. That is, we were taking too much for granted, that we had sort of grown up with the satellite business and therefore took the things that were known about the Soviet weapon systems and so on as a given, and went on from there. Kissinger felt that we were assuming things that we shouldn’t assume, and there was a great deal of wasted motion as a result of that. It resulted in the strategic estimates being three or four times as long as they were before because everything had to be spelled out.

Corscadden duly delivered the PDB to [Nixon’s secretary] Rosemary

Woods every day in a sealed envelope. At the end of his stay in New York, they were all delivered back to him still sealed. So it was an impressive performance, but to what end?

### Relations With Ford

When it came to [President] Ford, we had had a briefing officer, Dave Peterson, assigned to Ford when he was Vice President, and we had worked out a comfortable relationship with him through Peterson. When Ford became President, that just continued, and we didn’t try to change a thing. Only when the [Congressional] investigations started, Ford evidently felt he had to distance himself from the Agency, so Dave was basically disinvented.

### The Carter Chapter Begins

It became clear that Carter was going to be the Democratic nominee against Ford in the 1976 election. We were instructed by Ford to make the offer to Carter for briefings, and it was accepted. I was tapped to be the honcho for that. Then on the 4th of July in 1976—the bicentennial year—I had been down on the Mall for the fireworks and had a hell of a time getting out. I didn’t get home until three in the morning, at which point I got a call from [DCI George] Bush saying, “I want you to meet me in Bar Harbor tomorrow in the afternoon. We are going down to Hershey,” where some kind of Democratic meeting was being held just prior to the convention. “We are going down to Hershey to brief Carter. Will you pull the stuff together and come on up?” So, about three in the afternoon, I was airborne



in the Agency Gulfstream up to Kennebunkport, met George and Barbara there, showed George what I had—the standard briefing stuff—which at this point included a frame, one swing of the camera on the KH-9, which stretched from the Atlantic across somewhere into Mississippi right across Georgia, showing Plains, such as there is of it.

We got back on the plane and were met by Security at Harrisburg Airport, driven from there to Hershey and ushered into the back entrance of this big hotel where the meeting was. In a minute or so, Bob Strauss came in. He had been Chairman of the Democratic National Committee when Bush was Chairman of the Republican Committee, and the two of them had gotten to riding around together and were great friends, so he dropped in to say hello. Then Carter showed up and George gave the briefing. Carter was terribly interested. Said he wanted some more of this and so on. So I was to get together with “my issues man.” His issues man was Stu[art] Eizenstat, now the Undersecretary of State for Economics, Business, and Agriculture Affairs; he was younger then. We got back on the plane again and flew back to town and got in about one in the morning. I went back to the Agency with the stuff and then home to bed.

I had to meet Eizenstat first at the Democratic Convention. I went up to New York and fought my way into the convention and finally laid my hands on Eizenstat, who was as busy as a one-armed paper hanger. He gave me some rough outlines of what he wanted, and then I had to go to Atlanta a few days later to meet him again, and we finalized what we were to do on this thing. Got an agenda and proceeded to get the requisite

people together to brief on this stuff, half a dozen or so I guess.

I organized the trip [to brief Carter in Plains]. We flew a whole bunch of us on the Agency plane with Bush. Ford had directed that Bush preside over these sessions; he didn’t much want to do it, but Ford made him. Bush didn’t want to appear to be too close to the Democrats because he had his own future to think of, but he was a good soldier and did his job. Then we flew down in the Gulfstream, down to Fort Benning, and at Fort Benning they got a couple of choppers for us.

The Army pilots were told we were to land at Peterson Field, and they couldn’t find Peterson Field on the map, so finally it turned out that it was farmer Peterson’s field. We arrived and the choppers sat down and all the press was there. It was mobbed. The rest of us bailed out one side of the helicopter while Bush bailed out the other and dealt with the press.

Well, he talked to them for a while, and again Security had cars, and we were wafted from there to Carter’s house, which was a sort of standard suburban brick rambler set in the pine woods. We came in, and he greeted us and led us down to his study, which was in the one wing of the place which had an air conditioner—nothing else did—and this was July in Georgia. We all sat around in straight wooden chairs, and it was hotter than hell, and in order to be able to hear you had to shut off the air conditioner. The temperature was unbearable and your clothes stuck to the back of the chairs. We started at one o’clock and were still going at six, during which time Carter sat without getting up and

very intent, totally concentrating and taking it all in.

And there was a second session a week or so later with another group of people covering some more subjects as specified by Eizenstat. He got caught up, as you might suspect he would, in the campaign, and we didn’t do much for him, although we did stay in touch. In the first session, Mondale had been present, the Vice Presidential candidate, and Mondale’s issues man, who was David Aaron, was excluded, although he was present in Plains. We could see him prowling around outside. He was excluded because he didn’t yet have the clearances. I don’t think he ever forgave us for that, if he was well intentioned toward us to begin with, and I doubt if he was.

That’s really the end of the story until after the election, at which point we had to set up a beachhead down in Plains and stationed a guy down there who was a security officer really, but he took the PDB to the Carter house. We set him up in Americus, which was a few miles down the road. But he would drive over every morning, and Carter would read it.

He was there all the time, and then I went down all the time to see how things were going. Saw Carter once or twice. One time I went down and went to the house and walked through the Secret Service cordon that had been thrown around the house. I went into the house, and Carter was alone—he had no help, and the Secret Service was kept back from the house, so he was completely by himself. On a cold, rainy November, December day, having to worry about when Amy came home from school and fixing her up with money to do something or other and send-

ing her off again. Meanwhile, he wanted to talk and, well, I talked. For nigh on two hours. He asked me how various people would be as Director and a number of other things, and, “Has Brezhnev ever lied to us?”

Finally, in the course of this whole business of how we approached the Soviets, I told him that you had to make up your mind whether the Soviets are what we think they are, or whether they are a different kind of animal, that is, whether or not they are out to do us in regardless of what, or whether they are people you can negotiate with. I finally got him to agree that we should do a paper on this subject, and that we would produce it and shuttle it down in a week or so, as a way of thinking about the Soviet Union. Again the question, “Has Brezhnev ever lied to us?” And I had to say I didn’t know that he had, but that didn’t make him any better.

As it turned out, the scales dropped from his eyes only after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Carter felt betrayed by Brezhnev, but Brezhnev never betrayed him; Carter was just too naïve and too stubborn to listen. To finish this story, I went back and reported this extraordinary conversation to Bush and to no one else, and George was sort of shattered that I had gotten involved in a conversation of this kind, but no harm came of it. As far as that paper was concerned, the guys were grinding it out and then Aaron called me in great glee, which he didn’t bother to conceal, delighted to tell me they didn’t want it. By then Aaron was permitted in meetings.

## “ Reagan wanted some briefings in Washington before he was inaugurated.”

### The Reagan Era

When Reagan was nominated, we, of course, offered him briefings. [DCI Stansfield] Turner insisted on giving them. I should mention that Bush, in the course of the campaign, went on a—having been the Ambassador to China—was going out on a trip out there to make contact with Chinese leadership, and he asked us to come up and brief him at Kennebunkport.

He was the Vice Presidential candidate. So we went up and did it. It was old-home week with Bush. We had lunch afterward, during which I renewed my contact with Dick Allen. I offered him a ride back on the Agency plane with the rest of the briefers, which he was happy to accept. He and I talked at some length on the way down, which came in handy shortly afterward.

Reagan wanted some briefings in Washington before he was inaugurated. He was living in one of those little houses on Lafayette Square, because Blair House was under renovation. Again, Turner insisted on being the front man on these things. He also insisted on giving a briefing on [Soviet] strategic forces, which he had been specifically asked not to give. The point was, I think, that we had superiority. But, indeed, he gave the damn thing anyway, not to great applause. It became clear that he expected to continue in the job. It also was clear to everyone else that he didn’t stand a Chinaman’s chance in continuing in the job. This became very embarrassing, because he insisted

on putting himself in front, thereby antagonizing everybody, and preventing us from making the connections that needed to be made. Finally, I called up Dick Allen and said, “Look, put the man out of his misery,” and I don’t know exactly what happened after that, but it was evident that someone had gotten to Turner and told him he was not going to continue to be Director anymore. In fact, that [William] Casey was. At that point, he sort of faded out of the picture.

### The “Morning Meeting”

The D/OCI was a member of the DCI’s Executive Council (the “morning meeting”), which met every weekday morning at 0900 sharp. It consisted of the DCI, the DDCI, the Executive Director-Comptroller, the four Deputies, the General and Legislative Counsels, D/ONE, D/OCI, and others on occasion. The membership varied somewhat with organizational changes. For instance, during investigations, whatever we called the public affairs officer would be added.

I first began attending morning meetings as a stand-in for Drex Godfrey [the Director of OCI from 1966 to 1970], then on my own [as Director of OCI from 1970] until I left OCI in 1975. Then I was back—in late 1975—sitting in the back row as a special assistant to Colby, and then to Bush, until I belonged again when I became [in 1976] the senior NIO [Deputy to the DCI for National Intelligence]. Then I dropped out again when [Robert] Bowie took over [as Deputy to the DCI for National Intelligence], and I did not return as a full member until 1979. Then out again in 1981, except for standing in



for [National Intelligence Council Chairman] Harry Rowen. All together, a span of 16 years and six Directors.

The meeting ordinarily opened with a short briefing by D/OCI, mostly on overnight developments, and then the DCI would go around the table for any matters of interest that people thought appropriate for such a forum. This meant some pressure on the D/OCI first thing in the morning. I was in the office at 0800 and spent the first 20 minutes or so reading the night's take. Then the retiring night duty officer would come, along with the DD/OCI, and we would send for analysts according to the take. Sometimes, some hapless analysts would have to brief me as I rushed down the hall to the DCI conference room. Then the meeting itself would run from a half hour to an hour and a half (the latter during the Congressional investigations). Then I'd have to fill in the OCI boys on what had transpired, and any actions that were required of us, so I was rarely ready for ordinary business before 1100.

[DCI Richard] Helms liked to keep the meetings short. He also liked to have familiar faces around the table and was quite uncomfortable when someone was missing. I had been accustomed to taking all my leave in one batch in the summer, when I went north. He couldn't stand it, and we finally compromised on three weeks. That went as soon as Helms did.

The only time I saw Helms really angry was when the Greek colonels' coup took place in 1967. What happened was that the Greek generals had been planning a coup against the elected government, a plan we knew

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all about and was not yet ripe. But a group of colonels had trumped their ace and acted without warning. Helms had expected to be warned of the generals' coup, and when a coup occurred, he naturally assumed it was this one, and he was furious that he had not been warned. Jim Critchfield, who was C/DDP/NE, was at the Farm giving a lecture. “Get him back here immediately!” I tried to cool Helms off by pointing out that this was a different coup which we had no line on. This was a new thought and seemed to cool him off a bit, but it was a memorable meeting.

[DCI James] Schlesinger didn't like these meetings and tended to de-emphasize them. He preferred to do his business one on one in the brief time he was there.

[DCI William] Colby, however, restored them, and they eventually became his primary instrument for dealing with the [Congressional] investigations. The tactics for coping with each new bit of madness were exhaustively discussed, with the whole table taking part, morning after morning after morning as the whole horrid thing unfolded. It was hard to do one's real job with all the complexities of this other, irrelevant mess getting in the way.

One session I remember that did not concern the investigations came in

1975. It was my first meeting after a European trip, and the first thing that the DO duty officer said when I came into my office was that he had already called the Vietnam analysts up to brief. The dam had broken in Vietnam, and the end [of South Vietnam] was in sight. So I had to tell Colby that we had identified the regular North Vietnamese divisions marching south. And I so reported: “They are coming south in the order 316th, 308th, etc. and could be in position to attack Saigon in about a month, and there is nothing left to stop them with.” Colby, seeing the collapse of all his efforts since the mid-1950s, did not flinch. I suspect I just confirmed what he had been expecting. But I will always remember it.

[DCI George] Bush, with his usual grace, made his meetings a “band of brothers” and, still faced with the investigations, used the meetings as Colby did. [DCI Stansfield] Turner was his usual insufferable self. [DCI William] Casey, like Schlesinger, didn't like big meetings and tried to work around them, and he mumbled. By that time, in any case, the band of brothers that had held the place together through the difficult years had been pretty much disbanded.

### The Team A/Team B Headache

Almost the last thing George Carver told me about as he pulled out of the business [turning the job of Deputy to the DCI for National Intelligence over to Lehman] was the thing with the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, this so-called competitive analysis experiment. He had been negotiating with them on the terms of this thing and had in fact settled the negotiation just before he

left and then handed it to me. This is what terminated in the infamous Team A-Team B experiment that was all over the papers. On the one hand, by a team of professional intelligence officers—who were themselves divided—on the other by a team of howling rightwingers. Not necessarily academics. They were conservative all right. One side went off and produced a coherent inflammatory document on the state of the Soviet forces and so forth. The other side went off and produced a divided document that was sort of reasoned but certainly made no waves. Well, it was, as anticipated, a disaster. And I spent most of my time on that for a while. There was a subcommittee of the Board, the President's Board, headed by Bob Galvin, the CEO of Motorola. I went out to Chicago at least once to deal with Galvin, who was in fact a good soul. He, as well as I, had come to the conclusion that the B Team was out of control.

And they were leaking all over the place, as I say, putting together this inflammatory document. Then one day I got a message from Galvin saying that he would be at the private plane terminal at National Airport at 1200, and would I meet him for lunch. I went down, and there was Leo Cherne, who was on the Board. I think at this point he was Chairman of the Board. Precisely at 1200 the plane sat down. He sent the crew off once they had served lunch, and we climbed on board and ate it. Then we discussed the problem, and at 1300 precisely we departed and the crew came on board and pulled their wheels up and were off to New York. It's a life that I don't believe I want to live, but it was sort of fun. Then, after a great deal of pushing and pulling and milling around, the Board decided they would have a debate in

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The basic question was whether the Agency, really the Agency not the Community, had underestimated the Soviet threat.”

front of them. Between the two teams.

It was painful. The A Team did its stuff in the standard intelligence officer manner with a GS-13 from the Agency upholding his side and a corresponding one from DIA upholding the other side, because they were split. Then the B Team came forward, and the chairman of their group was [Harvard historian] Dick Pipes, who was a very eloquent speaker. He presented their case, all full of things that were nonsense but which sounded good. At that point, as soon as he finished, Admiral Anderson—who was a member of the Board—leapt to his feet and said, “Now, that's what we've been waiting to hear!” It was really embarrassing, and some of the more sensible members of the B Team were embarrassed by it, too. But nonetheless, the right wing had their triumph.

The basic question was whether the Agency, really the Agency not the Community, had underestimated the Soviet threat. It was really a question of a time lag. Indeed, they [the Agency's analysts] had said the Soviets would build up to a certain point and then level off. Unfortunately, the Soviets didn't level off. But it was a couple of years, given the time lag on these things, before it was apparent that they hadn't leveled off. And in that time lag, the estimates were understated. They were underesti-

mated substantially. But by the time that this so-called experiment took place, we had corrected that. The current estimate was pretty much on the money, but nonetheless they had their performance while the Board wagged its tail. Then the whole thing leaked, and, of course, with a strongly pro-B Team slant in the leak. Pipes called me in horror—he was really a decent guy, just out of his depth in this kind of thing—and he was in a state because all this had leaked.

I calmed Pipes down and told him it was something we lived with all the time. And then the thing just went away. It left its scars on the press reporting of the thing, but that was about it. There were actually three different subjects the B Team was concerned about, one was missile accuracy, one was low-altitude air defense, and one was this big amorphous, “What are they up to?” The missile accuracy was the old business about the SS9 being MIRVed and so on. [It] was a sterile debate. The A Team had won its case years before, but it was not accepted by the B Team, so they rehashed the old arguments. Nothing came of it, and nobody paid any attention. On low-altitude air defense, the B Team was rational. It had some points to make about uncertainties that had been underplayed in the estimates, and we adjusted the estimates as the result of their criticism. That was an argument among reasonable men. Worked fairly well. It was just on the Soviet objectives business that all the hurrah occurred [played out in the media].

Now, we did have a series of picking up the pieces. We had to go down and brief the Congressional committees on what this was all about, and [we made] the point that we had not



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changed our estimates [on Soviet strategic objectives] on the basis of what they had done. I went off to Europe to brief various Allies on the subject. While there had been an attempt to politicize the estimates, they hadn’t succeeded.

Bill Casey and Retirement

Just after Christmas [1980] DCI-designate Bill Casey called Bruce [Clarke, the DDI] and me in for a get-to-know-you session. We prepared the standard briefing, but he interrupted us, saying in effect that he already understood all that. And he did. A propos the relationship of the DCI to the President, he said, “You understand, I call him Ron.” In retrospect, I can see that Bruce and I had been decapitated, but we just didn’t know it yet. I think he thought we were insufficiently hard in our view of the USSR.

Casey was never one to communicate directly about matters of this kind, but in the next few months I began to get intimations that Harry Rowen had been given my job. There were several things of that kind where NIOs learned indirectly that they had been replaced. They were never told anything. For some of them, I had to tell them.

It became clear to me that Rowen was going to take my job. At that point, I made up my mind that, after two Directors had removed me from the same job, that it might be time to retire. I sent Casey a note saying that I understood that he might want his own man in my job, and I would step aside without fuss. But I undertook to stay on with Harry for a year.

Working for Casey was a trial for everybody. Partly because of his growing erraticism and partly because of his own right-wing tendencies. Although I will say that, when you argued with him, he listened, and he could change his mind. He was amenable to argument, but it took a hell of a lot of argument. In general, it was an increasingly uncomfortable situation, so I was not sorry to pull out. Which I did in 1982.

Innovative Intelligence Support

The Transition to President Johnson

John Helgerson

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*Editor’s Note: This article is drawn from an historical study prepared by the author entitled Getting To Know the President: CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates, 1952-1992, which is being published by CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence.*

The transition to President Johnson was abrupt for the US Intelligence Community as it was for the rest of the country. In some respects, it was also as uncertain. Johnson had received a number of intelligence briefings as Chairman of the Senate Aeronautical and Space Sciences Committee, and later as Senate Majority leader. He had met on one occasion with Allen Dulles in July 1960 while a vice-presidential candidate, but neither Dulles nor his successor, John McCone, had paid much attention to keeping Johnson informed during the intervening years.

Johnson, in turn, had paid little attention to the products of the Intelligence Community while he was Vice President. Each day his office received the Agency’s *Current Intelligence Bulletin*, a widely distributed product that contained less sensitive and less highly classified information than was included in the *President’s Intelligence Checklist*. Although the *Checklist* at the end of the Kennedy presidency was being sent also to the Secretaries of Defense and State and to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Johnson was unaware of its existence. For reasons undoubtedly growing out of the earlier political rivalry between Kennedy and Johnson, McGeorge Bundy’s deputy, Bromley Smith, early in the Kennedy

presidency had ordered that “under no circumstances should the *Checklist* be given to Johnson.”<sup>1</sup>

On Saturday morning, 23 November 1963, the day following Kennedy’s assassination, DCI John McCone instructed his Executive Assistant, Walter Elder, to telephone Johnson’s secretary and inform her that he would be at the White House at 9:00 a.m. as usual to give the President the regular morning intelligence briefing.<sup>2</sup> In reality, there was nothing usual or regular about the DCI’s involvement in a morning briefing, but McCone obviously believed he needed to take an extraordinary initiative to establish a relationship with the new President.

McCone was waiting in Bundy’s office in the basement of the West Wing when the President entered at approximately 9:15. Johnson had been an infrequent visitor to those quarters, which also include the White House Situation Room, but he was forced to come there for the meeting because Kennedy’s office had not yet been cleared out. R. J. Smith, CIA’s Director of Current Intelligence, was present and talked briefly with Johnson in Bundy’s outer office, writing later that “he looked massive, rumped, and worried.”<sup>3</sup>

A Good Start

Despite the irregular and strained nature of the circumstances, McCone accomplished his mission during that first meeting with President Johnson. The President



expressed his confidence in McCone, who, in turn, reassured the new President that he and the Agency stood ready to support him in every way. McCone introduced the President to the *Checklist* and reviewed with him the unspectacular substantive items in the publication that day. Johnson had few questions during their 15-minute session, but he did agree that McCone should brief him personally each morning, at least for the next several days. The President asked that the Director bring any urgent matters to his attention at any time, day or night.

The *Checklist* shown to Johnson on that first occasion was a bulky publication containing five unusually long items and six additional notes. R. J. Smith explained to Bromley Smith that the Agency tried to provide, as unobtrusively as possible, a bit of extra background for Johnson. Bromley Smith approved the strategy but added that he hoped the Agency would not be too obvious in its tutorials. In his memoirs, Johnson wrote of his relief to discover “on that sad November morning” that the international front was peaceful and that there was nothing in the material McCone brought to him that required an immediate decision.<sup>4</sup>

McCone met with Johnson almost every day for a two- to three-week period, briefing him on virtually all the world’s trouble spots. At these meetings, the President urged the director to ensure that CIA was providing the FBI all information and support appropriate to its investigation of the background of President Kennedy’s assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. McCone in turn provided Johnson information available in CIA files on Oswald.

McCone also used these opportunities to inform the President of a variety of CIA covert action and technical collection programs, including the successful effort to build what became known as the SR-71 reconnaissance aircraft to augment the U-2. McCone brought the President up to date on the status of the program (by that time a number of aircraft had been built) and to brief him on an exchange that McCone had with President Kennedy about the advisability of surfacing the program publicly. Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara had urged Kennedy to make a public announcement of the aircraft’s existence, and Kennedy was inclined to do so. Upon hearing a discussion of the political and security issues involved, however, Johnson decided to postpone any public announcement of the program, at least until the following spring (in fact, the President revealed the existence of the aircraft at a press conference in February 1964). In the meantime, he ordered McCone to get as many aircraft produced and deployed to the operating site as possible.

### Vietnam

The most significant issue Johnson and McCone discussed during this period undoubtedly was Vietnam. McCone was straightforward in providing the Agency’s analysis of the course of war there. Initially, this won him points with the new President, who had not favored certain of the steps taken in Vietnam by his predecessor, but it was to lead ultimately to a falling out between McCone and Johnson.

On 24 November, two days after Kennedy’s assassination, Johnson

met at 3:00 p.m. in the Executive Office Building with Rusk, McNamara, George Ball, Bundy, McCone, and Ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge. According to McCone, Lodge informed the group that the United States had not been involved in the recent coup against President Diem.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Lodge had instructed that South Vietnamese generals be made aware that the US Government had lost confidence in Diem and was kept aware of the events before and during the coup on 1 November. During the course of the military takeover, Diem was captured and then killed.

Lodge maintained that the population of South Vietnam was happy as a result of the coup, showing the group some pictures of crowds in Saigon. Lodge argued that the change in government had been an improvement and that he was hopeful about the course of the war, expecting “marked progress” by February or March 1964. He also stated, without elaboration, that there were indications that North Vietnam might be interested in some unspecified arrangements that would be satisfactory to the United States. McCone wrote in his memorandum for the record that Lodge’s statements were “optimistic, hopeful, and left the President with the impression that we were on the road to victory.”

McCone registered with the group a much more pessimistic CIA assessment. He cited the continuing increase in Viet Cong activity over the previous month, predicting additional sustained guerrilla pressures. The Director pointed out that the South Vietnamese military was having considerable trouble organizing

the government and was receiving little help from civilian leaders, who seemed to be staying on the sidelines. McCone said the Intelligence Community could not give an optimistic appraisal of the future.

Johnson stated that he approached the situation in Vietnam with misgivings and was anxious about voices in the Congress calling on the United States to get out. He was particularly doubtful that the United States had taken the right course in upsetting the Diem regime, although he recognized it was a fait accompli with which he would have to live. The President included in his remarks some harsh criticisms about the divisions within US ranks about the conduct of the war. He made clear that he wanted to replace several key figures in the US country team in Saigon and dictated that he “wanted no more divisions of opinion, no more bickering, and any person that did not conform to policy should be removed.”

### Asking for Advice

When McCone saw the President on the following days for their discussions of the daily *Checklist*, the President regularly raised the question of Vietnam. Despite his comments about differences of opinion, he appeared to appreciate the fact that McCone’s assessment did not correspond to what he was hearing from others. The President repeatedly asked for the Director’s appraisal of the situation, but the continuing exchange between the two ultimately proved troublesome for the Director. In large part, this was because Johnson sought McCone’s advice on the sensitive issue of who should “run the show”

in South Vietnam and discussed his thoughts on possible impending personnel changes among his advisers and ambassadors.

Johnson remarked to McCone that, although he appreciated the work the DCI was doing in intelligence, he did not want him to confine himself to that role. The President invited the Director to come to him personally with suggestions for courses of action on policy that McCone thought wise, even if his ideas were not consistent with the advice others were providing. Johnson mentioned specifically that he was not satisfied with the advice he was receiving on nuclear testing, Cuba, and South Vietnam. Regarding the latter, the President again questioned McCone about the real future in South Vietnam, underscoring his desire for an “objective appraisal.” The President specifically asked for any recommendations that the DCI might have for modifying Vietnam policy.

Johnson’s confiding in McCone during the first two weeks of his presidency clearly flattered the CIA Director but also put him in an awkward position with other key players in the government, as well as with his obligation as DCI to provide objective intelligence assessments. Within months, events were to reveal that McCone probably took the President more literally than he should have. The Director’s candor in providing advice to the President eventually led to a strained relationship.

### The Cuba Problem

The President was not so completely preoccupied with Vietnam that he

did not remember to focus on another enduring problem—the Castro regime in Cuba. Within a week of becoming President, he asked McCone how effective US policy was regarding Cuba and what the CIA projected to be the future of that country. Johnson was especially interested in the effectiveness of the economic embargo of Cuba and wanted to know what the Agency planned to do to dispose of Castro.

The President said he did not want any repetition of “the fiasco of 1961,” but he felt the Cuban situation was one with which the United States could not live and regarding which the CIA needed to propose a more aggressive strategy. Johnson informed McCone that he looked to the CIA for firm recommendations.

### Meetings and Briefings

Initially, it was unclear whether Johnson would return to a system of regular NSC meetings or continue the more casual Kennedy approach. There was, therefore, much interest in the NSC meeting that the President called for 5 December 1963. At that meeting, McCone was to brief the group on the Soviet military and economic situation. He prepared thoroughly for this first NSC meeting with the new President, bringing one assistant, Clinton Conger, and a number of large briefing charts to the meeting.

To McCone’s surprise, Johnson had invited to the meeting the chairmen and ranking minority members of the leading Congressional committees. The Director accommodated this novel approach by quickly briefing the Congressional leaders on the



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Vietnam in early 1964. During a subsequent trip to Vietnam in March 1964, McCone's reservations deepened, and he concluded that the war effort, even with McNamara's enhancements, was not succeeding.

McCone recommended to the President a six-point program to reverse the deteriorating situation. It was a program that would involve escalation significantly beyond anything considered by McNamara and Johnson. Johnson refused to accept the DCI's recommendations. As the President came to side with McNamara's approach to the conduct of the war, he became increasingly impatient with McCone and with the continuing differences between the DCI and the Secretary of Defense. By the end of March 1964, Johnson clearly had lost confidence in McCone and interest in his regular intelligence updates. In the succeeding months McCone attempted periodically to restart his briefings of the President, at least on an occasional basis, but Johnson turned him aside.

In June 1964, the Director informed the President for the first time that he would like to resign as soon as Johnson had decided on a successor.<sup>6</sup> Despite his growing disenchantment with McCone, Johnson insisted that he remain in his post until after the presidential election in November 1964.

fact of, and restrictions related to, communications intercepts, which were to be mentioned during the briefing. Just as the meeting began, however, there was another surprise when the President gave a nod and in came his White House photographer. McCone was aghast as the photographer began shooting pictures left and right. He turned around with a start to confirm that Conger had managed to turn over a map of Soviet ICBM sites before the first pictures were taken of that end of the room.

In the subsequent months, it was to become clear that Johnson was no more enamored of weekly NSC meetings than Kennedy had been. When such meetings were held, however, they normally began with an intelligence briefing presented by McCone.

### Eroding Confidence

With few formal NSC meetings, thus providing few opportunities for formal CIA briefings, much of the Agency's relationship with the new President came to rest on the briefings McCone was providing Johnson privately. Unfortunately, these soon became a casualty of the differences emerging between the two men regarding Vietnam.

The momentum of McCone's contacts with Johnson was interrupted by a trip the Director took in December 1963 to review the Vietnamese situation. It was his second trip to Saigon since becoming DCI, and McCone was discouraged by what he found. His pessimism led him to be skeptical of proposals McNamara had made for an extended program of clandestine raids against North

### Evolution to the President's Daily Brief

Providing the *Checklist* to President Kennedy had worked so well that CIA naturally hoped the arrangement would continue with Johnson, but this was not to be. In his first weeks as President, Johnson read the *Checklist* and seemed interested in discussing its contents during his meetings with McCone. After those meetings stopped, however, Johnson tended not to read the daily publication.

Observing that Johnson was no longer reading the *Checklist*, Brig. Gen. Chester Clifton (who had stayed on from the Kennedy Administration as military aide to the President) proposed the idea of a twice-weekly intelligence report. CIA managers thought this strategy was worth a try. In truth, they thought that anything that would catch the President's eye was worth a try; several formats were offered during this period. They had been dismayed by Bromley Smith's assessment that Johnson was probably disinclined to read the *Checklist* because he regarded it as Kennedy's publication. He was still smarting because he had not been permitted to receive it as Vice President.

On 9 January, the first issue of the semiweekly *President's Intelligence Review* was taken to Clifton at the White House. The next morning Clifton called current intelligence specialist Richard Lehman at CIA to report that he had shown the new publication to the President at breakfast and it had "worked like a charm." At the end of January, Clifton again made a point of seeking Johnson's reaction to the *Intelligence Review*. The President observed at

that point that he found it a valuable supplement to the intelligence briefings he received and wanted the publication to continue without change.

Although the President read primarily the semiweekly review, his staff requested that the *Checklist* continue to be published on a daily basis to enable them to answer the President's frequent spur-of-the-moment questions. With the President not reading the *Checklist* most days, McCone decided he would expand its readership; he obtained permission to send it to four additional officials in the State Department, two more in Defense and in the Joint Chiefs, and to the offices of the Secretary of Treasury and the Attorney General.

The practice of producing two Presidential intelligence publications worked well through the election year of 1964. The President typically read the *Review* on the return leg of campaign trips, and his staff felt well supported with the daily *Checklist*. As the election neared, however, Secretary of State Rusk expressed to McCone his concern about the security of the *Checklist* as a result of its expanded dissemination. Rusk was worried about possible leaks regarding sensitive policy issues during the campaign. The DCI was more concerned about the basic question of whether it made any sense to publish a "Presidential" *Checklist* when the President himself almost never read it, but agreed something should be done.

Meanwhile, during the 1964 electoral campaign Johnson's opponent, Senator Barry Goldwater, set a precedent by declining to receive intelligence briefings. In July, after consulting with the President, McCone had

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President.

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telephoned Goldwater to offer customary briefings. According to Elder, Goldwater replied only that he would consider it. Within hours, an assistant called to decline, explaining that the Senator appreciated the offer but felt he had all the information he needed to conduct his campaign. McCone, reflecting a frustration he and Johnson shared, mused "he probably does; the Air Force tells him everything he wants to know."

Responding to the concerns of the Secretary of State and the DCI about the circulation of the *Checklist*, R. J. Smith proposed that the most graceful way for the Agency to drop a number of the readers of the *Checklist* would be to discontinue the publication and produce a new one. Smith observed that the Agency would maximize the likelihood that Johnson would accept a new publication and read it regularly if it were produced to conform as much as possible to his work habits. Because Johnson did much of his reading at night, in bed, Smith recommended that the publication be published and delivered in the late afternoon as the *Review* had been, rather than in the morning like the *Checklist*. Smith's proposal was accepted, and after the election both the *Checklist* and the *Review* were dropped.

### Gaining Acceptance

The new *President's Daily Brief* (PDB) designed specifically for

President Johnson, was delivered to the White House on 1 December. Its fresh appearance obviously appealed to the President. His assistant, Jack Valenti, sent the first issue back to Bundy with word that the President read it, liked it, and wanted it continued. Quite apart from the packaging of the current intelligence, President Johnson, like other presidents, was becoming a closer reader of the daily products as he became increasingly enmeshed in foreign policy matters. By mid-February 1965, for example, he was reading not only the PDB but also CIA's daily Vietnam situation report. Bromley Smith insisted it be delivered at 8:00 a.m. each day so that it could be sent to the President early.

In early 1965, Johnson agreed that the time had come for McCone to return to the private sector. That understanding undoubtedly was furthered by a letter the Director delivered to Johnson on 2 April in which the Director argued against an expanded land war in Vietnam and concluded that US bombing was ineffective.<sup>7</sup> By coincidence, the day that McCone passed the directorship of CIA to his successor, Adm. William Raborn—28 April—was also the day US Marines landed in the Dominican Republic to deal with the crisis there. It was during the Dominican crisis that word was received that the PDB had taken firm root in the White House. Presidential spokesman Bill Moyers said on 21 May, approximately six months after the PDB had been launched, that the President read it "avidly."

The PDB process that was in place in early 1965 continued more or less unchanged throughout the Johnson Administration. CIA did not receive from Johnson the steady presidential



feedback that it had received from Kennedy. The Agency knew, however, that the President was reading the PDB regularly, and Johnson's aides, usually Bromley Smith, were consistently helpful in passing back the President's reactions, criticisms, and requests. The only significant change made in the PDB process came when the President again reversed himself and indicated he wanted to receive the PDB early in the morning rather than in the evening. He had decided that he wanted to see the PDB at 6:30 a.m., before he began reading the morning newspapers.

Those newspapers later provided conclusive evidence that the publication was reaching the President. Agency personnel were surprised one morning to see a photograph in the papers showing the President and Mrs. Johnson sitting in the White House in dressing gowns. Mrs. Johnson was holding their first grandson while the President was reading a copy of the *President's Daily Brief*.

NOTES

1. Richard Lehman. Interview by the author in McLean, Va., 10 March 1993.

2. Walter Elder. Interview by the author in McLean, Va., 21 April 1993.

3. R. J. Smith. *The Unknown CIA*; Washington; Pergamon-Brassy's; 1989; p.163.

4. Lyndon Johnson. *The Vantage Point*; New York; Holt, Rinehart and Winston; 1971; p.22.

5. John McCone, Memorandum for the Record, "South Vietnam Situation," 25 November 1961.

6. Elder interview, 21 April 1993.

7. *Ibid.*





# THE PRESIDENT'S INTELLIGENCE CHECKLIST

ISSUED BY THE  
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

22 NOVEMBER 1963  
~~TOP SECRET~~

In honor of President Kennedy  
for whom the President's Intelligence Checklist  
was first written on 17 June 1961

For The President Only - Top Secret

Declassified and Approved For Release

Declassified and Approved For Release



For this day, the Checklist Staff can find no words more fitting than a verse quoted by the President to a group of newspapermen the day he learned of the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba.

For The President Only - Top Secret

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Bullfight critics ranked in rows  
Crowd the enormous plaza full;  
But only one is there who knows  
And he's the man who fights the bull.

For The President Only - Top Secret

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