

## CHAPTER 7

### *GEORGE W. BUSH: DEMANDING CONSUMER*

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Governor Bush was “the most interactive ‘briefee’ I’ve ever dealt with,” wrote CIA Deputy Director John McLaughlin after a four-hour session at Crawford, Texas, in September 2000.<sup>1</sup> Recalling the experience years later, McLaughlin said, “I remember thinking that whoever would be briefing this president better be ready for a ride.”<sup>2</sup> Bush had little experience with international affairs but, even as a candidate, was a rigorous questioner who expected a great deal of those dispatched to provide him intelligence assessments of the world situation.

McLaughlin had become responsible for this first intelligence briefing of candidate Bush through a scheduling conflict. The standard practice over the years had been for the DCI personally to brief presidential candidates from each party shortly after their nomination. In mid-2000, the DCI was George Tenet, a charismatic leader who had held the position three years and was conversant with all substantive issues. In any normal circumstances, he would have followed the usual practice and traveled to Texas to deliver a comprehensive, worldwide intelligence overview to the recently selected Republican candidate.

As it happened, the briefing of the governor was scheduled for 2 September. Tenet, however, was centrally involved in extended diplomatic negotiations related to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and was traveling in the Middle East in early September.<sup>3</sup> As a result, it fell to Tenet’s deputy, McLaughlin, to prepare the briefing and deliver it in Texas.

Although Tenet stayed completely out of the process of assembling the briefing team and materials, McLaughlin did receive some guidance. Clinton administration National Security Advisor Sandy Berger counseled, “Don’t tell him [Bush] anything sensitive,” to which McLaughlin good naturedly replied that he “would use [his] own judgment.” Berger understood such briefings had been standard practice since the candidacies of Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson and had personally helped make arrangements for President-elect

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<sup>1</sup> John McLaughlin, “Governor Bush Briefing,” 2 September 2000.

<sup>2</sup> John McLaughlin, interview with the author, Washington, DC, 28 September 2011.

<sup>3</sup> George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 73.

Clinton to receive his briefings. At the same time, he was known in 2000 to have limited enthusiasm for the process and came across as wanting to keep the Bush briefing low-key. This understandable dilemma—and exchanges similar to this one—had occurred in a great many transitions, with the outgoing administration not sure which candidate would accede to office and thus very protective of sensitive and classified information, but with its intelligence officers on the hook to provide the best and most useful available information to candidates who might soon be in the White House.

The briefing was held in a casual setting on a Saturday morning in the living room of the modest, original Prairie View home on Bush's ranch at Crawford. In addition to the governor, campaign advisers Condi Rice, Paul Wolfowitz, and Josh Bolton attended. Rice and Wolfowitz asked a number of substantive questions and requested occasional clarifications to highlight a particular point or ensure an area they were interested in was sufficiently covered. All the briefers observed and later remarked, however, that the governor was clearly in charge "from moment one."

From the Intelligence Community side, the team included, in addition to McLaughlin, three senior analysts and managers with expertise in Latin America, East Asia, and the Middle East. McLaughlin himself was a longtime expert in European and Russian issues. The plan was for McLaughlin to deliver a comprehensive overview of the international situation using a series of desktop tent graphics that he would display and flip over as he progressed. The three experts would then join him in fielding questions during a discussion period. Governor Bush listened politely to the first few sentences, then made clear with his preemptive questioning that he was not taken with this painfully systematic approach.

Similarly, the governor was not intrigued by a briefcase the Middle East expert had brought along—one modified to show how easily terrorists could conceal and disperse biological or chemical agents. Such show-and-tell devices usually intrigued individuals and groups being briefed, but the governor gestured to the effect of "get that out of here" and wanted to settle down to serious discussion. He did focus carefully on various satellite images and charts that helped illuminate threats such as worldwide missile proliferation.

There was ample time in this extended session with Governor Bush to discuss all principal threats to the United States and key international players, both states and personalities. Not surprisingly, in 2000 these subjects included countries of perennial interest to the Intelligence Community such as China, Russia, and North Korea; the range of active and potential trouble spots in the Middle East and South Asia, notably Iraq, Iran, and the Israeli-Palestinian dispute; the Balkans, especially Kosovo and Serbia; and a number of Latin

American countries where US interests might be compromised by foreseeable possible developments.

The terrorist threat to the United States was an important element of the briefing. At this time, more than a full year before 9/11, the discussion had a worldwide focus. The Middle East specialist explained his assessment that the next president would face a terrorist attack on US soil, and there was discussion of what certain scenarios could look like. In his memoir, President Bush recalled that he “had received my first briefing on the [al-Qa‘ida] terrorist network as a presidential candidate.”<sup>4</sup> Much of the discussion addressed a particularly high-stakes variant of terrorism—the possible proliferation to terrorists of weapons of mass destruction by rogue states.

During the briefing Bush took care to explore information about world leaders with whom he anticipated he would be meeting as president. One briefer recalled that this discussion involved “much granularity,” with the governor in several instances offering his views of a given leader. He was interested in standard biographical details, but also in gaining less tangible insight into key leaders. The governor’s focus on personalities made an strong impression with a second briefer—“That’s when he lit up,” the briefer recalled. President Bush was very much a people person, and while working knotty issues throughout his time in office, always maintained personal contact with counterparts abroad.

Interactive and sure of himself, Bush was an active questioner and participant throughout the morning, to put it conservatively. In addition to exchanges on key countries, regions, and leaders, he entered into discussion on a variety of military, proliferation, weapons, and big-picture economic issues. Intentionally or not, on some issues he helped the briefers calibrate their presentations by sharing information on countries he had or had not visited and explicitly indicating when information was new to him.

CIA briefers in Crawford were frank to acknowledge areas of importance in which reliable intelligence information was insufficient to draw definitive conclusions. On a couple of occasions during the extended discussion, they could see that Bush was surprised the Intelligence Community did not know more on a given issue. One briefer was concerned the governor might wonder if the briefers were “pulling their punches,” adding they certainly did not hold back. It was clear Bush would want “fine-grained human intelligence” when in office.

During the briefing, the issue of intelligence entanglement with policy matters did not arise in any significant way. The governor expressed his views and noted areas where he anticipated policy decisions would be needed. But even on one or two issues where his questions could have been construed as asking

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<sup>4</sup> George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), 134.

for policy advice, he readily settled for relevant intelligence information devoid of any recommendations on actions that might be taken. He did ask specifically about the role of DCI Tenet in the ongoing Middle East peace process. This was, indeed, an almost unique situation in Agency history, one that Tenet has termed a “semidiplomatic function.” His very close involvement with the Israelis and Palestinians at the end of the Clinton presidency was understood at the time as building capabilities and trust to facilitate negotiations rather than as a policymaking role in the negotiations themselves.

At the outset of the session, Governor Bush had asked the team about their areas of expertise and how their jobs and challenges had changed since the end of the Cold War. At the end, he discussed his expectations of intelligence should he be elected and the importance of deploying intelligence capabilities to identify opportunities, prevent conflict, and protect the United States. Overall, the briefers felt satisfied they had been able to cover most of the considerable ground they had come prepared to discuss. In keeping with the Agency’s preference to keep its officers out of the limelight, McLaughlin declined Bush’s invitation to join him when he met with reporters immediately after the briefing.

During the preelection period in which Governor Bush received his one worldwide briefing, a similar briefing was offered to the Democratic presidential candidate, Al Gore. Not surprisingly, he declined. As sitting vice president, Gore for eight years had been receiving daily intelligence updates in the form of the PDB, as well as more in-depth briefings at meetings of the NSC and otherwise, as requested. At the time President Clinton approved the plan to offer a worldwide briefing to Governor Bush, however, he requested that a similar briefing be offered also to Joe Lieberman, the Democratic candidate for vice president. Senator Lieberman accepted the offer, and was briefed by Martin Petersen, CIA’s associate deputy director for intelligence for strategic plans. Petersen found Lieberman to be most gracious and appreciative.

Senior officers of the Intelligence Community have always been eager to brief candidates of both parties, with the same material, to make clear the process is completely nonpolitical. Despite such efforts, however, the IC and its assessments have sometimes become political footballs in presidential campaigns. In the historic debate on international affairs between Vice President Nixon and Senator John Kennedy in 1960, for example, the candidates engaged in testy exchanges on the so-called missile gap between the United States and the USSR, and on Soviet economic strength. On both of these issues, the candidates cited intelligence assessments and public statements of DCI Allen Dulles to buttress their positions. From the point of view of the IC, no good can come of such a development.

In 2000, the international situation was generally calmer than it had been in many earlier transitions and was destined to be in the next one. On the hopeful side, reformers that year had won control of the Iranian parliament for the first time since the Islamic revolution; North and South Korea signed a peace accord; Serbian President Milosevic was voted out of office; and democracy seemed to have matured in Mexico, as Vicente Fox's election as president ended decades of one-party rule. The immutable problem areas of the Middle East endured, notably renewed, serious clashes between Israelis and Palestinians and the need to contain Saddam Hussein. But in a reflection of the times, as the campaign went on, leaders of IC agencies were deliberating how to scale back their budgets and manpower to meet the stringencies of the post-Cold War "peace dividend" period.

### **The Presidential Debates**

The first of three presidential debates between Al Gore and George Bush was held on 3 October at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. The second was at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on 11 October, and the last at Washington University in St. Louis on 17 October. There was one vice-presidential debate between Joe Lieberman and Dick Cheney, held 5 October at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky. Domestic issues dominated all the debates, but the moderators ensured there were some exchanges related to international affairs. Intelligence issues arose only indirectly or by implication.

The first foreign affairs question posed in the debate in Boston was how to deal with President Milosevic of Serbia, who was clinging to power despite having lost the election. Gore and Bush sought to distinguish their positions from one another, including on the matter of whether Russia could help solve the problem, and whether it would be appropriate to use force in such a situation. Fortunately for the IC, the two candidates agreed more than they disagreed, and the substantive intelligence record on the Balkans was a very strong one, so there seemed to be no temptation on anyone's part to bring intelligence issues into the exchange.

Bush and Cheney offered forceful critiques of US actions and the situation in Iraq. On October 5 in Danville, Cheney charged that the US government "no longer knew what was happening in Iraq, in particular, whether that government was reconstituting its programs for building weapons of mass destruction." Cheney at this time offered no explicit criticism of intelligence related to Iraq, but the implication was clear, especially in light of extensive reviews of intelligence performance on Iraqi WMD programs before and after

the first war with Iraq in 1990–91, when the US-led coalition drove Iraqi forces out of Kuwait and destroyed them.

In his second debate, Governor Bush echoed Cheney’s points, saying, “We don’t know whether he [Saddam Hussein] is developing weapons of mass destruction.” And in the third debate in St. Louis: “The man may be developing weapons of mass destruction, we don’t know.” Again, these were not explicit criticisms of the IC, but they drew attention to a key area where available intelligence did not meet the needs of policymakers.

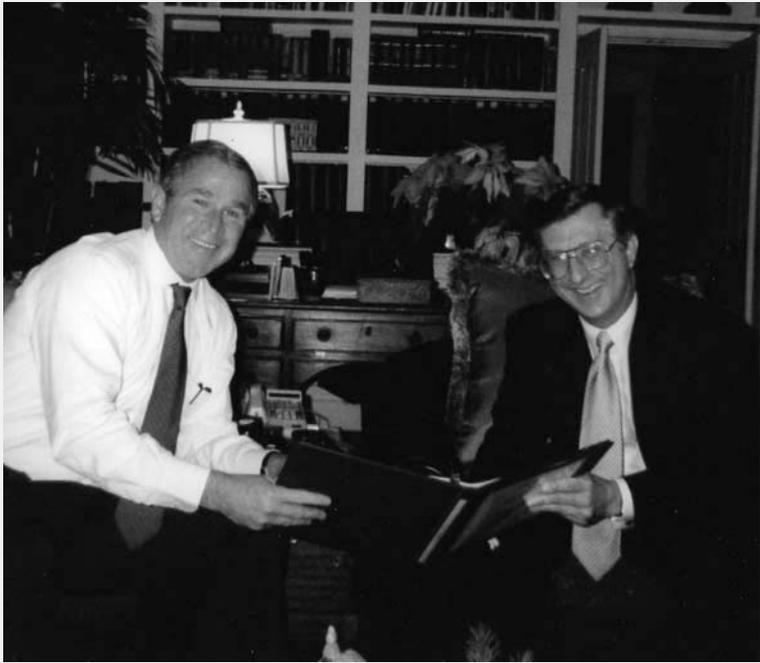
Senators Gore and Lieberman defended the defense policies of the Clinton administration on Iraq and a range of other issues, such as troop strength, combat readiness, and weapons acquisition practices. Gore during the debates twice referred to his service on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence as well as his experience on the Senate Armed Services Committee and on the NSC.

By virtue of not having been mentioned by name even once, the IC and the CIA emerged almost unscathed from the presidential debates of 2000, although the several references to the inadequacy of information on Iraq were embarrassing.

### **Postelection Briefings**

Within a few days of the election, presidents-elect customarily have chosen to begin receiving daily intelligence briefings, in which they receive exactly the same publication—the *President’s Daily Brief*—that is prepared for the incumbent president right up to Inauguration Day. Every president since Harry Truman has recognized the need for his successor to be up to speed on international developments from the moment he takes the oath of office, so these briefings have been approved in all cases. The president-elect may also task the briefers for additional information, in the form of answers to specific questions or additional supplementary papers.

CIA was in position immediately to provide briefings to the president-elect, whichever candidate that might be. If Gore was elected, he would continue to be briefed in Washington. If Bush was elected, he would be briefed in Austin by the Agency’s most senior analyst, Winston Wiley, the deputy director for intelligence, or one of his two deputies, Jami Miscik or Marty Petersen. These briefers were supported in Austin by a four-person team that included a mid-level analyst, communications officer, graphics expert, and information technology specialist. Such a team was in place in Austin on Election Day, with equipment and real-time connectivity that gave them access to the full range of intelligence information they would have had at their desks in Washington.



*President-elect George W. Bush and Associate Deputy Director for Intelligence Marty Petersen before a briefing in Austin, Texas.*

Everyone was surprised when 7 November 2000 came and went with no president-elect. The uncertain outcome of the election in Florida, owing to the “hanging chads,” resulted in a month’s delay before briefings could begin. Ever resourceful, the support teams—which rotated through Austin roughly every 10 days—used this period to practice the process of receiving the electronic PDB from Washington and sorting through voluminous raw reports and finished intelligence products from several intelligence agencies to assemble the morning package that would be briefed to Bush should he become president-elect. The teams found this to be time well spent. As one of the “Austin analysts” put it, “We were trying to get smart on the whole world.”

In fact, presumably anxious about the impact of the extended delay or foreseeing the legal outcome, President Clinton ultimately approved briefings for Bush even before the Supreme Court resolved the election. The CIA was surprised to get the word indirectly, when White House Chief of Staff John Podesta on 30 November announced the president’s decision on the *Today* show. The following day, Miscik met with the Secret Service to coordinate

access to Governor Bush, and on Sunday, 3 December, with the governor's future chief of staff, Andy Card. Miscik recalls that the latter made clear the Agency, in its briefings, would need to prove its worth and could take nothing for granted simply because Bush's "Dad had been DCI."<sup>5</sup>

Wiley provided the first briefing, on 5 December at the Governor's Mansion. Governor Bush greeted him with an unexpected question, "Are you a direct report to George Tenet?" Wiley was able to answer that he was. He and others felt reinforced in their judgment that it was best to have the briefings of a newly elected president conducted by a very senior manager and analyst who has worldwide expertise and experience supporting the policy process, but is not himself or herself a political appointee identified with the outgoing administration.

The briefings of the governor almost always began exactly at 8:00 a.m., or a few minutes early, and lasted 45 minutes to an hour. Andy Card met the briefers downstairs at the Governor's Mansion and escorted them to the governor's office. Often, the future national security advisor, Condi Rice, or her deputy, Steve Hadley, would attend also. Wiley found that Bush was an attentive, curious listener and an active questioner. Wiley conducted the first several briefings in December, then turned the process over to his deputies, returning for the last few briefings in Texas before President-elect Bush and his team moved to Washington at the end of the first week in January.

Even senior officials encounter unexpected problems. The first day Wiley was to brief Bush, he and the support team at 3:00 a.m. were printing the PDB with a fancy, massive color printer, installed for the occasion, when the ceiling collapsed. Water was everywhere; apparently condensate from the air conditioning system that had accumulated and then leaked through the flat roof above them. Fortunately, the deluge just missed the printing and other communications gear. Cleaning up the mess in the middle of the night distracted everyone and dispelled some of the anxiety of preparing to brief the man who looked likely to become the next president.

Marty Petersen was the senior briefer in Austin on the day the Supreme Court decided the outcome of the election. The next morning, he greeted Bush with, "Good morning, Mr. President-elect." Bush beamed. Petersen found that Bush read the PDB carefully and that he sought supplementary material, including raw intelligence reports, international press reports, and the publications of several intelligence agencies. The president-elect regularly received and studied imagery and other graphics. As he had with other briefers, Bush asked Petersen a lot of questions.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jami Miscik, telephone interview with the author, 8 December 2011.

The briefers soon found that the president-elect had an excellent memory and it was important to build continuity into the material they were presenting. Miscik recalls Bush, seeking clarification on one matter, saying, "A week ago you told me X..." She also remembers telling Bush on one occasion that she needed to correct the record regarding what she had told him two days earlier. She was pleased that the president-elect commented approvingly on the Agency's determination to keep the record straight.

Anticipating the transition briefings, CIA prepared a book that contained contributions from leadership analysts in all Agency geographic analytical components. Provided to both candidates, it provided biographical and other information on foreign leaders, including their past experience traveling to the United States. The book included a list of points the foreign leaders could be expected to raise in their calls of congratulations to the president-elect. Bush put this book to use on a number of occasions when he received calls following his election. He was, moreover, a heavy user of the Agency's standard leadership profiles of foreign counterparts, reading more than 30 of them during the transition.

A review of PDB items delivered to the president-elect during a random 30 days of the transition period reveals a wide geographic distribution of subjects addressed. The greatest proportion of pieces devoted to a single region, 25 percent, related to the Middle East. Most of these analyzed developments in the Israel-Palestinian peace process and Iraq.

East Asia and Latin America were also followed closely, each comprising 17 percent of total items. Of the East Asian pieces, two-thirds focused on China and most of the remainder on North and South Korea. The Latin American pieces assessed developments in several countries across the region. Thirteen percent of PDB items related to Russia, which, along with China, was the single country with the most coverage. Europe, other than Russia, accounted for another 13 percent, with most of these focusing on the Balkans.

Fewer pieces concentrated on international economic and energy issues, and fewer still, in this pre-9/11 period, on South Asian countries and international terrorism.

From the start, President-elect Bush seemed to have confidence in his briefers and the CIA. Petersen observed that while he was in Bush's office, for example, the president-elect would often take phone calls regarding obviously sensitive matters. Petersen would offer to leave the room, but Bush invariably signaled him to stay seated, explaining on one occasion, "I can trust you guys." While the relationship of briefer to a president-elect is always a formal

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Petersen, interview with the author, Reston, Virginia, 21 September 2011.

one, Bush was “warm, friendly, and engaged,” according to Petersen. The latter reported that one of his most unexpected opportunities arose suddenly one morning when it fell to him to help the president-elect extract the family cat from the Christmas tree.

### Vice President-elect Cheney

During the transition, the vice president-elect was based in Washington. He received his first briefing on 5 December, just as Bush did. CIA adopted the practice of having Cheney briefed by one of the rotating senior briefers who was not that week in Austin. This helped provide continuity and exposed the briefers to the interests and requirements of both officials. Cheney was often briefed in the car during his morning drive from home to the transition office. As both his home and this office were in McLean, Virginia, the short drive put a premium on thinking through how best to use the limited available time.

The vice president-elect had long experience in government and an equally long memory. It was not uncommon for him to request of the briefers that he be provided national intelligence estimates or other materials that he remembered from his time as secretary of defense as addressing a particular subject. Cheney wrote in his memoir:

*I had spent time on intelligence issues throughout my career, beginning when I was Ford's chief of staff, then when I served on the House Intelligence Committee, and, of course, as secretary of defense. But when I became vice president, I had been away from it for eight years, and I felt it was important to get up to speed.<sup>7</sup>*

When in office, Vice President Cheney was a regular reader of the PDB and other materials. His briefer met with him early every morning, normally at the vice president's home. Briefers found him to be a most careful reader, but more contained and reserved than Bush. In his morning PDB sessions, he generally asked fewer questions and engaged in less discussion than the president. On other occasions, however, the vice president was among the most forceful questioners of intelligence analysts.

The vice president's copy of the PDB normally included the entire package the president received, but also additional material. As Cheney has written, “The second section—‘behind the tab,’ we called it—contained responses to questions I'd asked or items my briefers knew I was interested in.” The vice president usually attended the president's PDB sessions and would sometimes

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<sup>7</sup> Dick Cheney, *In My Time* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2011), 315.

draw on his supplementary material in Oval Office discussions or ask the briefers to share the material with the president. Concerning the makeup of the briefing book generally, the former vice president wrote, "In my experience, intelligence was an absolutely crucial element for those in policymaking positions, and if the briefers thought it should be in the PDB, it should go in."<sup>8</sup>

### Covert Action Briefing

Senior intelligence officials have never been of one mind regarding the best time to brief incoming presidents and other senior executive branch officials on covert action programs and other very sensitive operations. One line of reasoning is that it is best to hold off on such briefings until the new president and administration have their feet on the ground, unless urgent developments dictate otherwise. The alternative perspective is that it is impossible to foresee what might happen on a president's first day in office and that they should at least have been alerted to the existence of all such programs in case sudden developments force them to make policy or military decisions involving those programs.

In recent transitions, it has been done both ways. Clinton, for example, did not receive such a briefing during his transition. Carter did. With George H.W. Bush the issue did not arise, as he came to the presidency directly from the vice presidency, where he had been aware of all such programs for eight years, and before that in other capacities, including DCI.

In this case, a decision was made to brief President-elect George W. Bush on a broad range of CIA foreign intelligence, counterintelligence, and covert action activities shortly before inauguration. On 11 January 2001, Director Tenet and Deputy Director for Operations Jim Pavitt provided the president-elect, the vice president-elect, Andy Card, and Steve Hadley an extended overview of these programs at Blair House. As he was the Agency officer with primary responsibility for operational activities, Pavitt did most of the talking. Pavitt recalls, "The briefing was a tour d'horizon of what we were doing...all of it. President-elect was engaged, listened carefully, and asked good questions."<sup>9</sup> Tenet has written, "We told them our biggest concerns were terrorism, proliferation, and China. I don't recall Iraq coming up at all."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 314–15.

<sup>9</sup> James Pavitt, communication with the author, McLean, Virginia, 6 October 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, 136.

## **Strong Supporting Cast**

The substantive briefings and related materials provided to President-elect Bush during the transition were made possible by the support of a great many Agency officers behind the scenes. CIA's analytical arm, the Directorate of Intelligence (DI), had begun planning the process almost a year ahead. The deputy director for intelligence at that time was John McLaughlin, who had been one of two senior officers providing briefings to President-elect Clinton in Little Rock during his transition. McLaughlin was, thus, particularly mindful and well informed about the logistical, communications, and security issues that needed to be resolved well in advance if the briefings were to succeed.

In December 1999, the DI Corporate Board approved an ambitious initiative to create a system that could provide electronic, online dissemination of the PDB and other materials to the Agency's most senior consumers at any location. Such a system was needed to meet the Agency's responsibility to provide all its consumers real-time intelligence, but the urgency was reinforced by knowledge that a transition would be occurring in less than a year's time. In the early months of 2000, concern also mounted that the DI needed to determine what real estate would be required if the Republican candidate would be supported from a remote location (the assumption was that Vice President Gore would be the Democratic candidate, briefed in Washington). Any such location would present issues involving physical security, communications bandwidth, and coordination with the Secret Service. Mid-level DI officers were identified and assigned responsibility for beginning work in all these areas.

In February 2000, McLaughlin named a coordinator of preliminary work on transition planning, and in May he asked Marty Petersen, the third-ranking officer in the DI, to assume overall responsibility for transition activities. McLaughlin formalized the roles of other officers already working on IT system development, operational and security issues, coordination, and the preparation of substantive material. Petersen held weekly meetings of these officers to ensure corporate awareness and proper coordination as they worked to implement their goals. He included representatives of the Agency's administration and operations directorates in these sessions. Looking back on that period, Petersen stressed that the keys to success were to start early; get the support piece right, as "that can kill you"; and pave the way for timely assistance from relevant nonanalytical components, for example, needed approvals from the operations directorate related to the sourcing of raw intelligence reports to be shown to the president-elect.

As early as late May, when it had become clear Governor Bush was very likely to become the Republican nominee, DI officers visited Austin to look into real estate options and travel routes for the briefers. The team arranged

for secure office space within a reasonable driving distance of the Governor's Mansion. The DI's senior officer responsible for security matters contacted and consulted with the Secret Service well in advance of the election in order to pave the way for seamless cooperation immediately after Election Day. At the appropriate time he also made contact and contingency arrangements with the governor's own staff. By the time briefings began in December, this officer had made multiple trips to Austin, and he stayed in the city for the first week of briefings to ensure everything worked as planned.

The most suspenseful part of the preparations was the challenging IT effort to provide the PDB online and ensure that the analysts and briefers in Austin would have all the capabilities they had on their desktops in Washington. In January 2000, the DI named a program manager for the new presidential intelligence dissemination system.<sup>11</sup> That officer was charged with creating a modernized system second to none, yet cautioned that the effort in Austin "will be the briefing of your lifetime.... We want to impress him as best we can...the briefing cannot fail." From the outset, all involved were concerned these considerations might prove mutually exclusive.

The program manager worked closely with In-Q-Tel to provide managers with options on how to proceed. Founded in the late 1990s, In-Q-Tel was a unique innovation for CIA. Although funded by the Agency, it is an independent, nonprofit, private corporation that undertakes to harness the best of private sector technology to meet Agency operational and programmatic needs. Inevitably, there have been some successes and some failures. This time had to be a success.

In-Q-Tel in 2000 provided some dramatic possibilities for technologically enhanced briefings. The most memorable, in the judgment of the program manager, was an iPad-like system in which the briefer could immediately bring up virtually any relevant intelligence information (albeit with a click rather than a touch of the screen). In-Q-Tel's proposed options were carefully considered by officers representing analysts and briefers who would be using the new system. Not surprisingly, given the very high stakes involved, the prospective users "were very uncomfortable with the most far-reaching and untested approaches."

The dissemination system delivered by this program was a substantial improvement over existing capabilities for briefing senior consumers while they were traveling and proved reliable when deployed. It included some powerful web-based tools developed by In-Q-Tel. In the end, however, the

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<sup>11</sup> The quotes in the following paragraphs concerning the IT initiative come from an interview with the program manager, an Agency officer under cover, in Herndon, Virginia, 27 September 2011.

technology used was, in the view of the program manager, “far more limited and fundamental than many of the options—it was not all that avant garde or different.” While many of the capabilities developed were not used in 2000, they were, for the most part, introduced into Agency IT services over the next 10 years. “Our ideas got leveraged.”

From the point of view of Agency analysts working in Austin, the important thing was that—for the first time in a transition briefing effort—they had computer workstations with full Headquarters capability and adequate bandwidth to meet their needs, including instant messaging. They could receive the PDB electronically (rather than by fax), and they had full access to all Agency databases. Their other equipment included secure telephones and cell phones, secure and nonsecure fax machines, and a desktop publishing capability with a “big, fancy” printer. IT professionals rotated through Austin throughout the period of the briefings to ensure everything functioned properly.

The DI selected four experienced analysts to serve in Austin, helping the briefer prepare for the morning sessions with the governor. The analysts typically were in Austin for 10-day, solo tours of duty, overlapping a day or two with the colleague who would relieve them. The analysts were chosen for their versatility and initiative rather than their areas of expertise, which varied widely. Although the days in Austin were demanding, the analysts reported that they enjoyed and were challenged by the work, which forced them to become knowledgeable about developments worldwide. Looking back on the experience, one of them commented that after the job in Austin was finished, “it was very hard to go back to our narrow accounts.”

The analyst reported for work sometime between midnight and 3 a.m. each day to begin sorting through the large volume of intelligence reporting. The basic PDB was the centerpiece of the presentation to the president-elect. There were also press reports from around the world, individual reports from human assets, satellite imagery, communications intercepts, and a wealth of publications from all US intelligence agencies, ranging from leadership profiles on foreign leaders to multiagency NIEs. The governor obviously would not have time to read great quantities of such material, so the task was to identify specific items that related directly to that day’s PDB, were otherwise responsive to a particular request or need, or enabled the briefer to make helpful, supplementary oral comments.

A big part of the analyst’s work throughout the day was to follow up on questions the governor or his aides raised in the morning briefing. The briefer could answer some on the spot, but often the answer would be provided the following morning in the form of written material prepared by analysts in Washington, or with an oral answer made possible by information acquired

from intelligence databases in the 24 hours since the last briefing. The analyst, graphics specialist, and communications officer were all involved in sorting and researching information and preparing responsive material for presentation at the next session. The daily deadline was to get the briefer on the road in time to arrive at the Mansion well before the 8:00 a.m. scheduled start time, as the governor was often ready to begin a few minutes early.

CIA officers at Headquarters were eager to assist the team in Austin—sometimes too eager, in fact. The virtually limitless communications capability presented the analyst and briefer in Austin with a challenge. They were sent a great deal of material and were tempted or needed to access a huge amount themselves. Some material, including many of the most sensitive, “raw” reports from the Directorate of Operations, came to the Agency’s Operations Center only in paper form, rather than electronically. The Operations Center therefore tended to use the secure fax to forward various materials to Austin, to the point that the fax pipeline and the analysts were both overwhelmed. When interviewed about their experience and recommendations, the analysts, while grateful, diplomatically noted that Headquarters, and the Operations Center in particular, might have exercised more selectivity and discretion in what was sent to the Agency’s support operation in Austin or wherever it might be the next time around.

The president-elect was briefed almost exclusively in Texas during the transition period. There was one important exception, however, when he asked that he continue to receive briefings while visiting Boca Grande Island, Florida for a two-day family gathering Christmas week. The Agency learned of this requirement at the last minute, with the result that briefer Jami Miscik and her supporting colleagues had to stay in a hotel that was a 45-minute drive from the briefing site. On Christmas Day, Miscik and an analyst conducted a trial run, both to familiarize themselves with the route and to try out a portable suite of communications equipment that was much less capable than the sophisticated system they had been using in Austin.

The briefing team was in suspense the early morning hours of 26 December. The download time for the PDB and associated background material was greater than they had anticipated, and they learned by telephone that the president-elect wanted to receive his briefing earlier than even he usually required. In the end, the PDB was received less than an hour before Miscik needed to depart the hotel for the briefing site. The package was assembled, and she reached the president-elect’s hotel in time to hear him ask, as he arrived, “Is the CIA here yet?”

One unique aspect to the Florida trip was that Miscik on 26 and 27 December briefed President-elect Bush and former President Bush at the same time.

She recalled thinking that the last person in that situation would have been President John Quincy Adams's intelligence briefer.

Bush's two briefings in Florida and one in Washington during a stopover on his indirect return to Texas were a harbinger of things to come, as the briefer during the Bush presidency would accompany him wherever he traveled. The requirement for briefings while on the road, especially during a family holiday at Christmas, also seemed to signal that the president-elect had come to value and rely on the briefings.

When Governor Bush relocated to Washington at the end of the first week of January, analysts who had served in Austin continued to support the briefer who met with the president-elect. From the beginning of the transition, analysts who were back in Washington (rather than serving in Austin that week) would support the briefer who was meeting each morning with the vice president-elect. Ironically, the analysts found it was harder to do their job in Washington than in Austin. While in Washington, they were "super executive assistants" with a variety of tasks that diluted their efforts to support the briefers. They also observed tension between the long-established PDB staff working with the incumbent administration and themselves. Preparing the range of materials necessary to support properly both the outgoing and incoming administrations created a lot of work for everyone.

All the supporting cast in Austin found they became caught up in "duties as assigned" that were largely unpredictable. It fell to them, for example, to install a secure telephone in the Governor's Mansion, a secure phone and fax in the president-elect's home in Crawford, and safes for secure storage in the mansion and in a second building on the ranch. When the transition briefings in Texas were completed, Agency officers recruited a Secret Service counterpart to help them remove one of the safes to an Agency location.

### **Impact of Austin**

President-elect Bush was provided transition briefings in Austin until 6 January 2001 and was then briefed in Washington right up to Inauguration Day. Deputy Director for Intelligence Wiley used the occasion of the last briefing in Texas to introduce Michael Morell, a senior DI officer who would be taking over briefing responsibilities in Washington and would continue as briefer to President Bush after inauguration. The pre-inauguration briefings in Washington were usually at the Madison Hotel, a setting that Wiley recalled as vastly different from Austin, primarily because of enhanced security—the corridor of the hotel through which the briefers accessed the office of the president-elect was "full of security forces in combat gear." <sup>12</sup>

In their final session in Austin, Governor Bush expressed to Wiley his appreciation for the briefings he had been provided, pronouncing them “great, and helpful.” It was what he said next, however, that really stuck in Wiley’s mind. The president-elect said, “When I am sworn in, I expect I will be getting the good stuff.” CIA knew it had work to do, believing it had been giving him “the good stuff” all along.

Within a week of his return to Washington from Texas, Wiley sent a message to all hands in the Directorate of Intelligence. He reported President-elect Bush had very high expectations regarding the intelligence support he would be receiving from CIA as president and had indicated he would be approving distribution of the PDB only to a few senior cabinet members and White House advisers. Wiley informed his workforce that he would be making a number of fundamental changes to the PDB.

Immediately after Inauguration Day, Director Tenet announced to the Agency workforce that changes would be made to presidential support. “I know that we are off to a strong start with President Bush,” he wrote, continuing with an admonition that the Agency should “step up the quality of our support.” The director noted that the DI would be taking the lead in implementing improvements to the PDB process, but would rely more than ever before on input from the other directorates. Jim Pavitt added that the DO saw the PDB as a key way it supported the president and his advisers, and that the directorate was prepared to shed more light on the sourcing of intelligence reports because it would increase confidence in the reliability of the information.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, senior CIA officers understood well that the “good stuff” the new president really wanted was what one of them called the “blood and guts” of operations. Historically, CIA had run very sensitive pieces in the PDB, but these almost always were analytical items that did not include operational or programmatic details. Clearly, with the new president wanting such information and willing to limit sharply the distribution of the publication, more such explicit information would need to be included. Wiley also made a number of other changes, the thrust of which, as he put it, was to “break the binding on the book” and make the PDB briefing “an event rather than a book.”

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<sup>12</sup> Winston Wiley, interview with the author, McLean, Virginia, 5 October 2011.

<sup>13</sup> “Agency Announces Changes to Presidential Support,” *What’s News at CIA*, No. 829, 23 January 2001.

## President Bush as a Customer

During his eight years in office, President Bush continued to be actively engaged in the PDB process—his briefings really were events. In the week following his inauguration, Director Tenet and the president’s briefer, Michael Morell, met every day with the president, vice president, chief of staff, and national security advisor in what were described at the time as “highly interactive sessions.” Initially, in addition to the White House team, PDBs were delivered only to the secretaries of defense and state and to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This limited dissemination enabled the Agency to include very sensitive operational information as the new president wanted. By the end of Bush’s tenure, however, the list of PDB recipients had grown to 20.

After the initial launch, there was a brief time when Tenet did not attend every PDB session. Tenet had confidence Morell would handle the job well, and he did not want it to appear, as a result of his daily appearances at the White House, like he was lobbying to keep his job as DCI on a permanent basis in the new administration.<sup>14</sup> However, the president soon informed Morell that he wanted the director there every day. The briefer was highly knowledgeable about the contents of the PDB, as well as the raw intelligence and analytical considerations that undergirded the day’s pieces. He normally introduced the pieces and answered questions. Tenet’s contribution, as he has described in his memoir, was “to provide color commentary and the larger context.” The director would also “pull back the curtain” and explain to the president how CIA and the Intelligence Community had acquired the intelligence. President Bush undoubtedly became significantly more knowledgeable about the sources and methods of the IC than any previous president, with the exception of his father, George H. W. Bush, who carried into his presidency such knowledge gained during his time as DCI.

To facilitate this free flowing discussion and meet the president’s needs, the Agency each day provided Bush with intelligence tailored to his schedule right up to the last minute. This included late-breaking intelligence reports, numerous maps and charts, imagery, and information on operational developments interspersed among the more traditional analytical pieces. The compilation of material was put together with a greater flexibility of format and writing style, clearly leading with the most important items, of whatever length, and greater transparency regarding the source of the material, whether human or technical. Even during the Bush presidency, however, CIA protected absolutely the true names of human sources—those were never included in the PDB.

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<sup>14</sup> Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, 137.

President Bush received an intelligence update every day. As he put it, “Six mornings a week, George Tenet and the CIA briefed me.... On Sundays, I received a written intelligence briefing.”<sup>15</sup> His Agency briefer traveled with him wherever he was, which was unprecedented. This daily contact and close relationship enabled the briefer immediately to refer any questions the president might have to Agency colleagues for quick follow-up. It also ensured the contents of the book, and the supporting material, would be as relevant and timely as possible. Periodically throughout his eight years, Bush’s chief of staff or national security advisor would work with the DNI or CIA to focus the PDB even more closely on what one of them called the “president’s rhythms.”

In these efforts to focus the PDB, no one attempted to tell the IC what to say substantively; rather, it was guidance to ensure certain high-priority subjects would be addressed in the PDB at a time when the information would be most useful to the president. For example, for a period the president held twice weekly video conferences with the US commanding general and ambassador in Iraq. It was requested that on those mornings the PDB should include the latest intelligence on Iraq. On the off days, the proportion of the book devoted to other areas and issues would expand, along with the time to discuss them.

In addition to his daily PDB sessions, or as an extension of them, President Bush in early 2007 began a practice of receiving more in-depth briefings directly from CIA and IC experts in selected countries, regions, or functional areas. These sessions, which came to be known as deep dives, were nominally bounded by a specific, planned length of time, but if the president was interested, they would go on longer. The president would often begin by questioning the briefer or briefers about their backgrounds, including the time they had worked on their account, their language expertise, residence in their area of responsibility, and the like. He did this so consistently that before long the Agency started giving him prepared biographies of the briefers for upcoming deep dives. The president obviously wanted to confirm that he was hearing from individuals who really knew their subject. Usefully, he would often characterize his own experience or inexperience with a given subject, which would help the analysts calibrate their presentations.

The vice president, senior White House and NSC aides, and sometimes the secretaries of state and defense would sit in on the deep dive briefings, either in person or via video conference. Generally, the White House aides liked the briefings because they were of interest to the president and were useful to him. Others had reservations, because the president took seriously what he heard in these sessions and would sometimes make what turned out to be quite firm

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<sup>15</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 153.

decisions about courses of action based on the briefings but before the normal interagency policy process had a chance to run its course.

On one early occasion the president was briefed by two analysts in a session at Camp David that was planned for 30 minutes, but which as a result of his extended questioning lasted 90 minutes. Not long after this briefing, the president, according to DNI Michael McConnell, said, “As long as I am president, we will keep doing these.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Intelligence and Politics**

In his memoir, President Bush explained he had initially intended to nominate Donald Rumsfeld, veteran of previous Republican administrations, to be DCI. As events unfolded, however, Rumsfeld was selected to be secretary of defense. With no obvious alternative candidate for CIA, Bush decided to postpone resolving the matter definitively, and instead leave George Tenet in the job for an indefinite period. President Bush, in his memoir, explained his thought process:

*I had great respect for the Agency as a result of Dad’s time there. Retaining Bill Clinton’s CIA director would send a message of continuity and show that I considered the Agency beyond the reach of politics. I had been receiving intelligence briefings as president-elect for a few weeks when I met the sitting director, George Tenet. Tenet...obviously cared deeply about the Agency. As George and I got to know each other, I decided to stop looking for a replacement. The cigar-chomping, Greek-to-the-core director agreed to stay.<sup>17</sup>*

In his memoir, Tenet wrote, “In my heart I wanted to stay because I felt the job was unfinished.” He recounts it was at the conclusion of the briefing of Bush on Agency operations (on 11 January) when the president-elect asked him to stay behind to discuss the matter of his continued service. “Why don’t we just let things go along for a while and we’ll see how things work out?” he remembers Bush saying. “I gathered from that I was neither on the team nor off it. I was on probation.” Tenet explained also that while he would not be a member of the cabinet in the Bush administration, he would soon find he had extraordinary access to the president. “Being in regular, direct contact with the president is an incredible boon to a CIA director’s ability to do his job.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> VADM Michael McConnell, interview with the author, Herndon, Virginia, 26 October 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, 136–37.

The president and the DCI were alike in many respects and bonded closely. Their daily contact during the PDB briefings—and shared burden to protect the country from additional terrorist attacks in the wake of 9/11—ensured the director’s relationship with the president and senior White House staff was initially strong despite their different party backgrounds. Unfortunately, however, events unfolded in such a way that Tenet’s relationship with the White House deteriorated seriously before the end of Bush’s first term.

Several intelligence-related issues—including public statements by the administration and the IC about Iraqi WMD, the reported acquisition from Niger of raw materials for Iraq’s nuclear program, and alleged cooperation between Iraq and al-Qa’ida—became highly charged politically and caused growing disaffection with the Agency on the part of some senior officials. In such circumstances, the nuances or even essential facts of the issues become irrelevant. When any intelligence matter seriously embarrasses the administration, the head of the CIA, as captain of that ship, is held responsible. By July 2004, Tenet had concluded that trust had been broken between him and the White House. He informed the president’s chief of staff, “It’s time to go,” and, after seven years in the job, resigned.<sup>19</sup>

Porter Goss succeeded Tenet as DCI and assumed responsibility for the daily intelligence briefings. Goss was to be the last DCI. As a result of perceived weaknesses in the structure and functioning of the IC related to the events of 9/11, Congress and the Bush administration created the cabinet-level post of director of national intelligence. In April 2005, John Negroponte was appointed the first DNI and responsibility for the daily briefings thus fell to him. Goss continued as director of the CIA and, like his successors, attended Oval Office sessions, albeit less frequently, to discuss Agency operational matters. Negroponte, in turn, was replaced in February 2007 by Michael McConnell, who carried on the briefings until the end of Bush’s second term.

### **Kerry and Edwards Briefed in 2004**

President Eisenhower, running for reelection in 1956, established the practice of approving intelligence briefings for his challenger. Most challengers have accepted. Stevenson (1956), Carter (1976), Reagan (1980), and Clinton (1992) were briefed. McGovern (1972) accepted a briefing offered by Henry Kissinger, which was to be followed by CIA briefings, but Kissinger’s briefing and thus the series were cancelled as McGovern dealt with the political fallout from the withdrawal from the race of his running mate, Senator Eagle-

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

ton. Senator Mondale (1984) declined to be briefed. Senator Dole (1996) apparently was not offered a briefing.

CIA has always taken seriously the opportunity and obligation to brief challengers, knowing the process is a nonpartisan one that should favor neither side and that an incumbent president has access to the full range of intelligence information. Beyond that, almost half of those who have challenged an incumbent president in the period the Agency has existed have been successful, making it all the more important for them to receive the government's best information about developments abroad as soon as practicable.

In 2004, the George W. Bush administration followed the well-established tradition and approved briefings for Senators John Kerry and John Edwards. Each candidate received two briefings. Presidential candidate Kerry was briefed on 1 September in Nashville and on 25 September in Boston. Vice presidential candidate Edwards was briefed on 31 August in Wilkes-Barre, and on a second occasion at his home in Washington, DC.

Acting Director of Central Intelligence John McLaughlin conducted both of Kerry's briefings and Edwards's first. McLaughlin had been serving as acting director since Tenet's resignation in July. In addition to having just served four years as DDCI, McLaughlin had been centrally involved in the briefings of President-elect Bill Clinton and candidate George W. Bush and was ideally suited for the task. Deputy Director for Intelligence Jami Miscik conducted the second briefing of Edwards; earlier she had been heavily involved with briefing President-elect George W. Bush.

Agency components provided inputs to an inch-thick package of written material that McLaughlin studied to formulate his briefing for Kerry and Edwards. From that, McLaughlin distilled a briefing that was literally worldwide. His approach, he stressed, was to construct a briefing "that would answer the question, what does he really need to know to be president?"<sup>20</sup> It was also intended to respond to seven pages of questions that had been received from the Kerry/Edwards campaign.

Not surprisingly, three years after 9/11, the briefing highlighted the global war on terrorism, with a focus on al-Qa'ida and other groups, political Islam, and terrorism-related developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It also focused on the political situation and insurgency in Iraq, and on states of proliferation concern such as North Korea, Iran, and Libya.

The briefing provided the IC's assessment of developments in countries and regions of longstanding high intelligence interest—Russia, China, and the

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<sup>20</sup> McLaughlin interview, 28 September 2011.

Middle East—and trouble spots in a half dozen selected states in Africa, Latin America, and East Asia. Finally, it addressed a few transnational issues, including energy security. Even the distilled version of the briefing was substantial—it lasted two hours.

Referring to the subject of Iraq, Senator Kerry informed McLaughlin and the analysts who accompanied him that he wanted the briefing “with the bark off.” He asked to hear “exactly what you would tell President Bush.” McLaughlin felt he provided the same objective assessment of developments that the Agency had been providing the administration, recalling, “At that time, we [CIA] were not all that popular in the White House [concerning CIA’s assessment of Iraq].”

Overall, the briefers found Senator Kerry in both sessions to be “more inclined to be briefed than Edwards or Bush,” meaning Kerry would hear them out while they made their points rather than moving immediately to discussion or questions. At the same time, while the senator was very friendly, even gracious, he asked well-informed, probing questions. One of the experts accompanying McLaughlin recalled Kerry asked very specific, hard questions, almost like an interrogation. He felt the session was challenging and rewarding, but intense, saying there “was not a 10-second period that was wasted time.” Kerry’s highly professional and systematic method of questioning obviously reflected his years of service on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The briefings of Senator Edwards were considerably more relaxed than those of Kerry, and did not run as long. CIA briefers were pleased the first session occurred at all, as they heard Edwards tell his staff as he approached the briefing room at the hotel, “I know I have to do this, but I will get it over with quick and we can go for pizza.” In the event, Edwards gave the briefing team a generous amount of time, and the session, although conversational, was interactive and substantive. Edwards’s staff participated more fully in the back and forth than did Kerry’s, where one accompanying staff member limited his role to asking a few questions to clarify particular points.

Looking back on the briefings of the challengers in 2004, McLaughlin remarked that he “felt very good about the briefing of Kerry in terms of the substance and our relationship with him.” He felt the briefing of Edwards was “less thorough” than he wanted it to be.

The presidential debates leading up to the election of 2004 began only days after the second intelligence briefings of Kerry and Edwards. Debates between President Bush and Democratic challenger Kerry were held on 30 September at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida; on 8 October at Washington University in St. Louis; and on 13 October at Arizona State University in

Tempe. There was one debate between Vice President Dick Cheney and John Edwards, held 5 October at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

Inevitably, in light of the intervening events of 9/11, intelligence issues featured more prominently in the debates of 2004 than they had in 2000. The umbrella topic of the first debate was foreign policy and homeland security. Bush referred to the intelligence on Iraq that had contributed to his decision to go to war to remove Saddam Hussein. Kerry said he had accepted the intelligence reporting on the threat from Iraq and supported the president's authority, and displayed an awareness of what had been reported in more recent Intelligence estimates on Iraq.

In the second debate, Bush was more pointed in saying, "We all thought there were weapons there [in Iraq]. I wasn't happy when we found out there were no weapons, and we've got an intelligence group together to figure out why." The president in the first debate underscored his intention to "reform our intelligence services to make sure that we get the best intelligence possible," and, later in the debate, his plan to "strengthen our intelligence gathering services."

In their one debate, the vice president and Edwards had a direct exchange on another controversial issue related to Iraq. In answer to the first question asked in the debate, Cheney charged that Saddam Hussein "had an established relationship with al-Qa'ida. Specifically, look at George Tenet, the CIA director's testimony before the Committee on Foreign Relations two years ago when he talked about a 10-year relationship."

Edwards countered, "Mr. Vice President, there is no connection between the attacks of September 11th and Saddam Hussein. The 9/11 Commission has said it. Your own secretary of state has said it. And you've gone around the country suggesting that there is some connection. There is not. And in fact the CIA is now about to report that the connection between al-Qa'ida and Saddam Hussein is tenuous at best." Later in the debate, Edwards cited his service on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the travel to the Middle East he had undertaken while on the committee as a reason he had "a very clear idea of what has to be done to keep this country safe."

These exchanges regarding the CIA, its director, and specific intelligence issues were the most explicit such references in a presidential debate since the debates between Nixon and Kennedy in 1960. In general, they reflected the dissatisfaction with the IC that was felt by many in Congress and the administration as a result of the events of 9/11 and the WMD issues associated with the start of the war with Iraq. Within six months of the presidential debates of 2004, the White House and Congress disestablished the position of DCI and created the post of director of national intelligence.

George W. Bush restructured the Intelligence Community more fundamentally than any president since Truman in 1948. By a significant margin, he also made more use of the IC to provide information on international developments than any previous president. He almost never missed his daily PDB briefing, acquired unprecedented knowledge about IC sources and methods, devoted a great deal of time to focused, in-depth briefings, and became uniquely informed about intelligence operations.

