The President’s Daily Brief

DELIVERING INTELLIGENCE TO
KENNEDY AND JOHNSON
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.
HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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.
FROM THE PICKLE FACTORY TO THE PRESIDENT’S DAILY BRIEF

DELLIVERING 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 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

1 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 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 1968).
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), 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 PICLs. 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 brief, 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),4 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 Birsch 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 repackage 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 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 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 Daily (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

4 CIA’s Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) was the Agency’s analytic drop tanked with providing assessments to policymakers. OCI was created in 1955 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 Eugene Clapper as head of OCI in July 1952. Richard Lehman was the director of OCI from 1973 to 1975.
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 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 in 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 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.”

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 Peters­son. 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:

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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).
That the shortages had not reached crisis proportions. In described the shortage of food and other commodities Report on North Vietnam for Vietnam. To highlight this assessment, the analysis in the PDBs and the war. During the month of September 1967, the CIA's propaganda on the events occurring in the US to protest described the North's anti-American sentiments and newspaper and news media broadcasts in Hanoi that election on 3 September 1967, the US increased military Vietnam. 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 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 John- son 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 Ad- visor Kissinger; and President Ford dropped his PDB brief 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 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 politics. His years as vice president had served him well.

One major challenge with Intelligence support to the pres- ident – 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 poli- cymaking. Although the CIA provides objective analysis of collected intelligence from numerous sources, the tempta- tion (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 diplo- matic 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 influ- ential on a daily basis because the content is derived from the most up-to-the-minute inputs based on highly sensitive sources. The DCI 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 ad- justed 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, consonant and often expressed their satisfaction and gratitude.

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 pub- lished 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 Poli- tical 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 in- cluded reports on the situation in Hanoi, reflections on any ongoing talks, shipment of munitions and aid to North Viet- nam, and any other topics of timely relevance. The section, "North Vietnamese Reflections of US Political Attitudes on the War," highlighted North Vietnamese anti-American pro- paganda. 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 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 presi- dent. In the early years of the PICL and PDB, the critical re- lationship 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 John- son 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 Ad- visor Kissinger; and President Ford dropped his PDB brief 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 North Vietnamese forces would eventually win the war against US forces. And again in the 27 September supple- mental, the following was reported:

Using virtually all of the toughest North Vietnam- ese formulations, Nhan Duc¹ said that if the US sincerely respects the Geneva Agreements, it must recognize Hanoi's Four Points: stop its "aggress- sion," withdraw its troops from South Vietnam, halt the bombing of the North "definitely and uncondi- tionally," recognize the Liberation Front as the "sole genuine representative" of the South Vietnam- ese, and let the Vietnamese settle their own affairs themselves.

Hanoi's continued anti-American broadcasts – a psychologi- cal gambit intended to weaken the US military's morale and hasten US withdrawal from Vietnam – revealed its unwill- ingness 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

¹ The official North Vietnamese communist party newspaper, Nhan Duc, was first published on 11 March 1951. After US Ambassador Arthur Goldberg's address to the UN in September 1967, Nhan Duc's formulations, and let the Vietnamese settle their own affairs

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.
THE PRESIDENT’S DAILY BRIEF
DELIVERING INTELLIGENCE TO KENNEDY AND JOHNSON

NIXON AND FORD
(These PDB documents are scheduled for release in 2016)

KENNEDY & DULLES
26 Feb, 1953 – 29 Nov, 1961

JOHN A. MCCONE
29 Nov, 1961 – 28 Apr, 1965

WILLIAM F. RABORN JR.

RICHARD M. HELMS
30 Jun, 1966 – 2 Feb, 1973

JAMES R. SCHLESINGER
2 Feb, 1973 – 2 Jul, 1973

WILLIAM E. COLBY
4 Sep, 1973 – 30 Jan, 1976

KENNEDY & MCCONE

JOHNSON & MCCONE

JOHNSON & HELMS

NIXON & HELMS

JOHNSON & RABORN

NIXON & SCHLESINGER

NIXON & COLBY

FORD & BUSH

FORD & COLBY

1960
1961
KENNEDY INAUGURATED

1963
JOHNSON BECOMES PRESIDENT

1969
NIXON INAUGURATED

1970
NIXON RESIGNS
FORD BECOMES PRESIDENT

1974
FORD BECOMES PRESIDENT

1980
1961
JOHNSON BECOMES PRESIDENT

1963

1969

1974

1970

1980

From the Pickle Factory to the President’s Daily Brief
RELATED ARTICLES & RELEASED DOCUMENTS
Mr. Current Intelligence

An Interview with Richard Lehman

Richard Kovear

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 memoirs, The Unknown CIA, that the Presidents 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 Clous 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 organisation 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 OCI 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, summarises 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 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 DIVCL, 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
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.

Dulles’s performances were less structured, but he prepared a series of topics to be covered at a preliminary meeting on Wednesday afternoon, and OCJ would settle together with a rough draft of what Dulles might say. He would amend the list and ask for changes that 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 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 sheet of cables and said, “See if there is anything important in these.” That was my first instruction 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. Lehnert’s heart was the shelling [by Com- munist China] of the [Nationalist Chiu Chi] offshore islands. Eisenhower came in, we all rose and then sat, and Dulles proceeded with his briefing. Eisenhower had one question: “What are the Chinese up to?” “Communist guen?” Dulles referred this to me, and I said, rightly or wrongly, “Just small stuff, 75-mm or less,” my sole contribution to the ses- sion or, in fact, to Eisenhower. Then the briefing ended, and I was showed 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 hab- its 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 limou- sines 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 demurrer that the task involved a serious decision about the future of all our interests. And to John they were.

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 just neurotic and into psycho 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 ana- lysts who had prepared an estimate 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, we were 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 Stoeter, who was the responsible analyst, had just reached the meat of his briefing when Dulles reached around for the tele- phone 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 NISC.

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 hap- less brief 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 briefing 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 regarded it as a trite appendage to the real business of the Agency, the DDP. His interest was in the DDI’s 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 write a briefing himself, as he did when Khushchev kicked out the “anti-
Sheldon had asked me sometime earlier to be thinking about what we could do specifically for the President 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 publications that were daily coming in down here 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 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 bared, covering 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 so. I so 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 nonacademic language and roughed it 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 us to have a live copy the next day, Saturday, to show to the President. Now, it so happened that on that weekend, Dulles was out of town, his Deputy [DIDC] General Charles Cabell was out of town, and [DOI Robert] Ainsworth 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, delivered it to Clifton, Clifton took it to the President, the President read it on the diving board at Glen Ora, down in the hutt country, and liked it. It has been in business from then on. So we produced the next one on Monday 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 start getting 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 possible to print anything that we wanted to, we didn’t go for any interoffice distribution, either. One of the things Clifton asked for was that it be completely of good print quality, 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 argued that Ainsley could see the drafts. After they went out.

### Creating the PDB

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

Johnson really was not 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 as an Assistant to OIC 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 OIC, with (Osborn) “Obbie” Webb as his deputy. And then he had a special assistant, and that was me. I was Assistant for Special Projects, responsible for overseeing the PDB and also for doing various kinds of odd jobs, overseeing this prodigious output of one-page memoranda for the White House that we got into the business of doing.

Johnson’s installation of 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 often forget all the ins and outs of the thing, but it eventually became clear that the President wasn’t reading. We were 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—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.
The Cuban Missile Crisis

I was responsible for rebuilding the office to deal with the thing [the missile crisis]. I was working 12–15-hour days. It involved almost every-thing 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 situation was so critical and everybody 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 summaries 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 pre-pared 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 I was going 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 power- ers that be as to what it was. I think [DCJ 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 did right, what 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 [DD1] 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 ini-tially 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 put this office of “Okie. Come back and see me tomorrow,” or some-thing to that effect. So I was left in New York and the others went back.

Then the problem was to get any fur-ther at that time in this swirl that surrounded a President-elect, but I finally—as 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 get some coherent instruc-tions. 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 about to be turned over to Nixon headquar-ters 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 we agreed he could have it. I went back to Headquarters and got an okay to brief these guys, some 15 of them, and sort of Logistics set up to take care of communica-tions and so on in the area.

Opening a New Office

When 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 bari-caded—it was right under the sidewalk underneath 57th and Park—and put in the furniture and 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 of California] Mitchell and Haldeman, and [domestic policy adviser John] Ehrlich-man, 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 intro-duced them to technical systems of one kind or another.

So we were dealing with Kissinger rather than anyone else from then on. He was suspicious of the Agency.

Kissinger Takes Over

It worked pretty well from a technical point of view. But then Kissinger was brought in and said, “Down, boy” to all my friends, and that, 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 expect 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 weapons 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 we were before everything had to be sped up.

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 impres-sive performance, but to what end?

Relations With Ford

When it came to [President] Ford, we 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 distraught.

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 person 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 the 5th, and when I got back to Washington I called Dick 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 Dem-ocratic 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
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 out and brief him at Kennedeyushpurt.

He was the Vice Presidential candidate. So we went up and did it in an 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 about the 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 cabins out on Latouche Square, because Blair House was under renovation. Again, Turner insisted on being the first 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 Chance’s chance in continuing in the job. This became very embarrassing, because he insisted on putting himself in front, thereby attracting 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 Deputy Directors, 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 when [the Director of OCI from 1966 to 1970], then on my own [as Director of OCI from 1970 to 1975]. Then I was back—in late 1975—sitting in the back row as a special assistant to Colby, and then to the center, until I belonged again when I became [in 1976] the senior NIO [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
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.

The meeting ordinarily opened with a short briefing by D/OC, 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/DIC, 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 D/DIC, and we would send for analysts according to the table. Sometimes, some hapless analysts would have to brief me as I rushed down the hall to the DICI conference room. Then the meeting itself would run from a half hour to an hour and a half (the later during the Congressional investigations). Then I’d have to fill in the DICI 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 hearing that you couldn’t have 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 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 Cutliff, who was CDDP/ONE, 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 him. 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 DDU 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 sort of reported: “They are coming south in the order 36th, 306th, 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-1970s, did not flinch. I suspect I just confirmed what he had been expecting. But I will always remember it.

[DICI 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 business of the brothers that he held the table together through the difficult years had been pretty much disbanded.

The A Team/A Team B Headache

Almost the last thing George Carver told me about as he pulled out of the business was that the Agency (or DICI 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—those were themselves divided—on the other by a team of bowing rightwingers. Not necessarily academically. 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 was worried about the problem and had held the plane terminal at National Airport at 1200, and would I meet him for lunch. In the plane 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. 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 front of them. Between the two teams.

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

It was painful. The A Team did its stuff in the standard intelligence officer manner with a GS-13 from the Agency upgrading his side and a corresponding one from DIA upgrading 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 not 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 to 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 underestimated.
While there had been an attempt to politicize the estimates, they hadn’t succeeded.

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 took the opportunity 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.

Bill Casey and Retirement

Just after Christmas [1980] DCI-designate Bill Case 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 NICs learned indirectly that they had been replaced. They were never told anything. For some of them, I had to tell them.

Innovative Intelligence Support

The Transition to President Johnson

John Helgerson

In reality, there was nothing usual or regular about the DCI’s involvement in a morning briefing, but McConen obviously believed he needed to take an extraordinary initiative to establish a relationship with the new President.

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 auspicious 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 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.”

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. 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 ragged, rumpled, and worried.”

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 McConne, who, in turn, reassured the new Presi-
dent that he and the Agency stood ready to support him in every way. McConne 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 McConne 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 tutor-
ials. In his memoirs, Johnson wrote of his relief to discover “on that sad November morning” that the inter-
national front was peaceful and that there was nothing in the material McConne brought to him that required an immediate decision.4

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

McConne also used these opportuni-
ties to inform the President of a variety of CIA covert action and tech-
nical collection programs, including the successful efforts to build what became known as the SR-71 reconnaiss-
ance aircraft to augment the U-2. McConne brought the President up to date on the status of the pro-
gram (by that time a number of aircraft had been built) and to brief him on an exchange that McConne had with President Kennedy about the advisability of surfacing the program publicly. Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara had urged Kennedy to make a public announce-
ment 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 post-
pone any public announcement of the program, at least until the follow-
ing spring (in fact, the President revealed the existence of the aircraft at a press conference in February 1964). In the meantime, he ordered McConne to get as many aircraft pro-
duced and deployed to the operating site as possible.

Vietnam

The most significant issue Johnson and McConne discussed during this period undoubtedly was Vietnam. McConne was straightforward in pro-
viding the Agency’s analysis of the course of war there. Initially, this won him points with the new Presi-
dent, who had not favored certain of the steps taken in Vietnam by his predecessor, but it was to lead ulti-
mately to a falling out between McConne 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, McConne, and Ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge. According to McConne, Lodge informed the group that the United States had not been involved in the recent coup against President Diem.5 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 popula-
tion 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 “real progress” by Feb-
ruary 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. McConne wrote in his memorandum for the record that Lodge’s state-
ments were “optimistic, hopeful, and left the President with the impres-
sion that we were on the road to victory.”6

McConne registered with the group a much more pessimistic CIA assess-
ment. He cited the continuing increase in Viet Cong activity over the previous month, predicting addi-
tional sustained guerrilla pressures. The Director pointed out that the South Vietnamese military was hav-
ing considerable trouble organizing the government and was receiving lit-
tle help from civilian leaders, who seemed to be staying on the sidelines. McConne said the Intelligence Com-
munity could not give an optimistic appraisal of the future.

Johnson stated that he approached the situation in Vietnam with misgiv-
ings 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 upholding the Diem regime, although he recog-
nized it was a fast accomplishment with which he would have to live. The President included in his remarks some harsh criticisms about the divi-
dions 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.”

Johnson’s confiding in McConne dur-
ing the first two weeks of his presidency clearly flattened the CIA Director but also put him in an awk-
ward 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 McConne 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 Cas-
 tro regime in Cuba. Within a week of becoming President, he asked McConne 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 “frasco of 1961,” but he felt the Cuban situa-
tion was one with which the United States could not live and regarding which the CIA needed to propose a more aggressive strategy. Johnson informed McConne 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 Presi-
dent called for 5 December 1963. At that meeting, McConne was to brief the group on the Soviet military and economic situation. He prepared thoroughly for this first NSC meet-
ing with the new President, bringing one assistant, Clinton Conger, and a number of large briefing charts to the meeting.

To McConne’s surprise, Johnson had invited to the meeting the Chairman and ranking minority members of the leading Congressional commit-
tees. The Director accommodated this novel approach by quickly brief-
ing the Congressional leaders on the
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 agitated as the photographer began shooting pictures left and right. He turned around with a start to confirm that Bangor 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.

Evolution to the President’s Daily Brief

Providing the Checklist to President Kennedy had worked well so 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 inclined to read the Checklists 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, he 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 in readerhip; 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 presiden
tial 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 telephoned Goldwater to offer custom
ary briefings. According to Elder, Goldwater replied only that he would consider it. Within hours, an assist
ant called to decline, explaining that the Senator appreciated the offer but he had all the information he needed to conduct his campaign. McCone, reflecting a frustration he and Johnson shared, mused “he prob
ably 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 Checklists, B. J. Smith proposed that the most grace
ful way for the Agency to drop a number of the readers of the Check
list 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 pos
sible to his work habits. Because Johnson did much of his reading at night, in bed, Smith recommended that the publication he 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... obviously appealed to the President.

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, served the first issue back to Bundy with word that the President read it, liked it, and wanted it contin
ued. 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 receiving 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 fur
thered 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. Bromley Smith stated that McCone passed the directorship of CIA to his successor, Adm. William Raborn—28 April was also the day the US Marines landed in the Domi
can 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 spokes
man 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

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.

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

Dedicated and Approved for Release
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