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Central Intelligence Agency

CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates

22 May 1996

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Foreword

Getting To Know the President

CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates 1952-1992

This is an important and original book. How world leaders understand or misunderstand, use or fail to use, the intelligence available to them is an essential but still under-researched aspect both of modern government and of international relations. The making of the American intelligence community has transformed the presidency of the United States. Before the First World War, the idea that the United States might need a foreign intelligence service simply did not occur to most Americans or to their presidents. After the war, Woodrow Wilson publicly poked fun at his own pre-war innocence: "Let me testify to this, my fellow citizens, I not only did not know it until we got into this war, but I did not believe it when I was told that it was true, that Germany was not the only country that maintained a secret service!" Wilson could scarcely have imagined that, less than half a century later, the United States would be an intelligence superpower. Though the intelligence nowadays available to the President is, like all human knowledge, incomplete and fallible, it probably exceeds--at least in quantity--that available to any other world leader past or present.

The starting point for the study of relations between presidents and their intelligence communities since the Second World War are the briefings they receive from the CIA before their inauguration. John L.

Helgerson is well equipped to write this path-breaking study of these briefings. A political scientist before joining the CIA, he served as the Agency's Deputy Director for Intelligence during the Bush administration and was head of the team that briefed Bill Clinton in Little Rock after the 1992 election. In addition to having access to classified files, Mr. Helgerson has interviewed previous Agency briefers and all surviving former Presidents.

Both briefers and former Presidents are agreed on the simple but important fact that each President is different. Presidents differ more widely in their previous knowledge and experience of intelligence than in their grasp of most other areas of government. Harry Truman entered the Oval Office in April 1945 almost wholly ignorant of intelligence matters. His determination that no future president should take office as uninformed as he had been is partly responsible for the intelligence briefing offered to all presidential candidates since 1952. Unlike Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower did not need to be persuaded of the importance of intelligence. Ike was the first President since George Washington already experienced in the use of intelligence when he took the oath of office. He wrote after the Second World War that "intelligence had been of priceless value to me...and, in no small way, contributed to the speed with which the enemy was routed and eventually forced to surrender."

Recent presidents have varied almost as greatly in their experience of intelligence as Truman and Eisenhower. Agency briefers found Presidents Reagan and Bush, in Mr. Helgerson's words, "virtual

polar opposites." Despite Ronald Reagan's membership in 1975 of the Rockefeller Commission on CIA activities within the United States, he had no previous experience as an intelligence consumer and felt the need for generality. Bush, by contrast, was the first former Director of Central Intelligence, with the arguable exception of George Washington, to be elected president. He had a closer working relationship than any previous president with the CIA. Like Reagan, President Clinton had no previous experience as an intelligence consumer.

Mr. Helgerson provides the first detailed account of the way in which Agency briefers have attempted, with varying success, to adapt briefings to the differing experience, priorities, and working patterns of successive presidents. One of the earliest changes in the new administration is usually the format of the President's Daily Brief, probably the world's smallest circulation, most highly classified, and--in some respects--best informed daily newspaper. Some presidents, it appears, like it to include more humor than others. On average, about 60 percent of the items covered in the President's Daily Brief do not appear in the press at all, even in unclassified form.

The most important lesson of this book is that, if the CIA is to provide effective intelligence support to policymakers, there is no substitute for direct access to the President. There is the implied lesson also that, if presidents are to make the best use of the CIA, they need to make clear to the Agency at regular intervals what intelligence they do and do not want. As a result of his own experience as DCI, Bush plainly took this lesson to heart. Some presidents, however, have provided little feedback.

Most good books leave the reader wanting more. Getting To Know the President is no exception. As well as holding the interest of his readers, Mr. Helgerson will also increase their curiosity. What, for example, were the exotic and closely-held methods or the sensitive human-source and technical collection programs on which DCI George Bush briefed President-elect Jimmy Carter? Just as it is reasonable for readers to ask questions such as these, so it is also reasonable on some occasions for intelligence agencies to avoid precise replies in order to protect their sources and methods.

There is an inevitable tension between the curiosity of readers and scholars on the one hand and the security-consciousness of intelligence agencies on the other. Historians and intelligence officers are unlikely ever to reach complete agreement on how much of the past record can be declassified without compromising current operations. In recent years, however, the CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence has gone further than most of the world's major intelligence agencies in opening up some of its records to historical research, publishing important volumes of documents on subjects such as the Truman administration, the Cuban missile crisis, Soviet estimates, and spy satellites. All historians will hope that these documents will be followed by many more.

It is also to be hoped that Getting To Know the President will set a precedent for intelligence agencies in other countries. Until similar volumes are available on the briefing of, among others, British prime ministers, German chancellors, French and Russian presidents, and leading Asian statesmen, the use made of intelligence by world leaders will continue to be a major gap in our understanding of both modern government and international relations.

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Central Intelligence Agency
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Chapter 3

Into Politics With Kennedy and Johnson

The CIA's early relationship with presidential candidate John Kennedy could hardly have been more different from the one it had established eight years earlier with General Eisenhower. In 1952, the Agency's briefings in the preelection period had been undertaken by working-level officers who, for the most part, delivered current intelligence summaries in written form. With few exceptions, the reports and analyses offered by the briefers steered clear of policy issues. In 1960, by contrast, the briefings were handled personally by the Director of Central Intelligence, Allen Dulles, and included extended discussions of sensitive matters.

In 1960, the CIA and its programs for the first time became involved in the political campaign, sometimes within public view and sometimes behind the scenes. Issues arose relating to the need for, and the protection of, the US Government's intelligence capabilities, specific intelligence collection programs such as the U-2 aircraft overflights, and substantive analytic findings related to Soviet economic and strategic capabilities. Charges were made regarding the allegedly selective use of intelligence information by the White House and the Agency. And, for the first time, CIA faced the question of what obligation it might have to brief a presidential candidate on a major covert action program.

The Presidential Debates

Many of these issues were on display during the presidential debates, held for the first time in 1960. The first debate, in Chicago on 26 September, focused exclusively on domestic issues, but in the second debate, on 7 October in Washington, Republican candidate Richard Nixon attacked Senator Kennedy's earlier statement that the United States should have apologized to the Soviets for the incident in which Francis Gary Powers' U-2 aircraft was downed over the USSR during a CIA reconnaissance mission. "We all remember Pearl Harbor," the Vice President began. "We lost 3,000 American lives. We cannot afford an intelligence gap. And I just want to make my position absolutely clear with regard to getting intelligence information. I don't intend to see to it that the United States is ever in a position where, while we are negotiating with the Soviet Union, that we discontinue our intelligence effort, and I don't intend ever to express regrets to Mr. Khrushchev or anybody else...."[31]

In the third debate on 13 October, featuring Kennedy from New York and Nixon from Los Angeles, Kennedy cited the DCI as his authority for an invidious comparison of US and Soviet achievements: "The economic growth of the Soviet Union is greater than ours. Mr. Dulles has suggested it is from two to three times as great as ours." [32] In that debate and in the fourth and final encounter in New York on 21 October, Kennedy pursued the theme that the Soviets were surpassing the United States economically and militarily, a topic that headed the list of CIA intelligence production priorities.

Perhaps the most crucial foreign policy issue raised in the 1960 debates, which derived directly from US

to side with McNamara's approach to the conduct of the war, he became increasingly impatient with McCone and with the continuing differences between the DCI and the Secretary of Defense. By the end of March 1964, Johnson clearly had lost confidence in McCone and interest in his regular intelligence updates. In the succeeding months McCone attempted periodically to restart his briefings of the President, at least on an occasional basis, but Johnson turned him aside.

In June 1964 the Director informed the President for the first time that he would like to resign as soon as Johnson had decided on a successor.^[74] Despite his growing disenchantment with McCone, Johnson insisted that he remain in his post until after the presidential election in November 1964.

Evolution to the President's Daily Brief

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

Observing that Johnson was no longer reading the Checklist, General Clifton (who had stayed on from the Kennedy Administration as military aide to the President) proposed the idea of a twice-weekly intelligence report. CIA managers thought this strategy was worth a try. In truth, they thought that anything that would catch the President's eye was worth a try; several formats were offered during this period. They had been dismayed by Bromley Smith's assessment that Johnson was probably disinclined to read the Kennedy-tailored Checklist that had been denied him 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 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 continued without change.

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

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

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

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

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



Smith's proposal was accepted, and after the election both the Checklist and the Review were dropped. The new President's Daily Brief, designed specifically for President Johnson, was delivered to the White House on 1 December 1964. Its fresh appearance obviously appealed to the President. His assistant, Jack Valenti, sent the first issue back to Bundy with word that the President read it, liked it, and wanted it continued. Quite apart from the packaging of the current intelligence, President Johnson--like other presidents--was becoming a closer reader of the daily products as he became increasingly enmeshed in foreign policy matters. By mid-February 1965, for example, he was reading not only the PDB but also CIA's daily Vietnam situation report, which Bromley Smith insisted be delivered at 8:00 a.m. each day so that it could be sent to the President early.

In early 1965, Johnson agreed that the time had come for McCone to return to the private sector. That understanding undoubtedly was furthered by a letter the Director delivered to Johnson on 2 April in which the Director argued against an expanded land war in Vietnam and concluded that US bombing was ineffective.^[75] By coincidence, the day that McCone passed the directorship of CIA to his successor, Admiral William Raborn--28 April--was also the day US Marines landed in the Dominican Republic to deal with the crisis there. It was during the Dominican crisis that word was received that the PDB had taken firm root in the White House. Presidential spokesman Bill Moyers said on 21 May, approximately six months after the PDB had been launched, that the President read it "avidly."

The PDB process that was in place in early 1965 continued more or less unchanged throughout the Johnson administration. CIA did not receive from Johnson the steady presidential feedback that it had received from Kennedy. The Agency knew, however, that the President was reading the PDB regularly, and Johnson's aides, usually Bromley Smith, were consistently helpful in passing back the President's reactions, criticisms, and requests. The only significant change made in the PDB process came when the President again reversed himself and indicated he wanted to receive the PDB early in the morning rather than in the evening. He had decided that he wanted to see the PDB at 6:30 a.m., before he began reading the morning newspapers.

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

[31] *The New York Times*, 8 October 1960, p. 10.

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Chapter 7

Concluding Observations

Through nine transitions since 1952, the CIA has provided intelligence support to presidents-elect. This support, endorsed by each of the sitting presidents, has been designed primarily to acquaint the incoming president with developments abroad that will require his decisions and actions as president. A second goal has been to establish a solid working relationship with each new president and his advisers so the Agency could serve him well, once in office.

The CIA has been generally, but not uniformly, successful in accomplishing these goals. Overall, it has proved easier to help the new president become well informed than to establish an enduring relationship. Both aims have been met better in recent transitions than during some of the earlier ones. At the time they took office, the first five postwar presidents differed markedly from the second group of five. In general, the latter had a greater and more up-to-date familiarity with intelligence information. Two of the earlier group, Eisenhower and Nixon, were experienced and expert in foreign affairs, but their knowledge of intelligence programs was dated and incomplete.

The background and attitudes that the president-elect brings with him obviously are powerful variables in determining the extent to which the CIA effort will succeed. Ironically, prior familiarity with the Intelligence Community and experience with foreign developments--or lack thereof--do not by themselves predict much of anything. Presidents Clinton and Reagan, for example, were by any objective measure the least experienced in foreign affairs at the time of their election, yet by inauguration day each had absorbed an immense amount of information. Once in office, their dramatically different operating styles dictated the nature of their equally different relationships with the CIA.

At the other extreme, Presidents Bush and Eisenhower provide the clearest cases of individuals who had had long experience with foreign affairs before their election. Here too, however, their management styles, personal interests, and backgrounds determined their different relationships with CIA after inauguration--informal and close in one case, formal and aloof in the other. The Agency had provided good substantive support to each during the transition.

In the three cases where the CIA's relationship with the White House was to prove the least satisfactory--or the most volatile, a different but equally challenging matter--the president either brought a grudge with him or quickly became disillusioned with the Agency. President Nixon felt the CIA had cost him the 1960 election; President Kennedy was immediately undercut and disillusioned by the CIA-run Bay of Pigs misadventure; and President Johnson was alienated by CIA's negative assessments on Vietnam. In each of these cases the relationship was not helped by the fact that the Agency had not succeeded in providing good intelligence support to, and establishing ties with, any of the three before their inauguration.

The obvious but sometimes elusive key for the CIA, and particularly its director, is to grasp each new president's needs and operating style and accommodate them during the transition and beyond. Individual proclivities aside, however, some generalizations can be offered about how CIA can best approach its unique mission of providing substantive support during presidential transitions. Most of the evidence suggests that the Agency has learned from its past experiences and built on them.

Patterns of Support

In looking at the intelligence support provided the first five presidents before their inauguration, it is necessary to set aside President Truman, who came to office before the creation of the CIA, and Johnson, whose elevation to the presidency came suddenly amid extraordinary circumstances that one hopes will never be repeated. Concerning the other three, it is notable that each of them--Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nixon--received intelligence briefings both in the preelection period and during the postelection transition. Kennedy and Nixon received few briefings; Eisenhower was given somewhat more, including several presented by the DCI. However, not one of the first group of five read the Agency's daily publications or met with a CIA officer for daily updates during the transition. Only Kennedy received a briefing on covert activities and sensitive collection programs before being sworn in.

During the first 25 years of its existence, CIA enjoyed no significant success in its efforts to establish a more productive and supportive relationship with each President. The reverse was true: these relationships went downhill after Truman. He had received intelligence information at the weekly meetings of the National Security Council, read the Agency's daily and weekly intelligence publications, and received in-depth weekly briefings from the DCI. His successor, Eisenhower, was perhaps the best at using the NSC as a vehicle for receiving intelligence, but he did not read the publications regularly and did not routinely see the DCI for separate intelligence briefings. Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon also received intelligence information at NSC meetings, although they relied less on the formal NSC system.

Once in office, these three presidents did read a daily intelligence publication, which took a different form for each. However, none of the first five presidents read it with the assistance of an Agency briefer, as has been the custom in more recent years.

No DCI during the Agency's early decades was able to replicate on a continuing basis the relationship that Bedell Smith had established with Truman. During the early Johnson years, John McCone attempted to restart regular briefings of the President, but the President became impatient and ended them before long. The third DCI to serve under Johnson, Richard Helms, saw that an alternative approach was needed and managed to establish an excellent relationship with the President by providing him intelligence at the famous Tuesday luncheons and via short, highly pertinent papers. But even Helms could not sustain his access or influence with Nixon. During Nixon's years in office, the relationship between the President and the CIA reached the lowest point in the Agency's history.

The five presidents who came into office since the mid-seventies received from the CIA significantly more up-to-date information regarding developments abroad and on the activities of the US Intelligence Community than their predecessors did prior to taking office. Like their predecessors, they all received briefings from the DCI or other senior CIA officials. Unlike their predecessors, however, they read the President's Daily Brief (PDB) throughout the transition. With some variations in how it was done, each of them met daily with an officer of CIA who provided oral briefings to supplement the PDB. Four of this group--Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush--were given in-depth descriptions of CIA covert action and sensitive collection programs. Clinton did not receive such a briefing. Outgoing DCI Robert Gates decided to use his one briefing opportunity with Clinton to concentrate on substantive issues and to leave discussion of sensitive activities to the post-inauguration period.

Once in office, all five of the recent presidents received intelligence at meetings of the NSC and all read the PDB regularly. Distinguishing them from their predecessors, however, was the fact that all of the recent presidents, except Reagan, reviewed the PDB with a briefer in attendance. During the presidencies of Gerald Ford and George Bush, and sporadically with Bill Clinton, a CIA officer (sometimes the DCI himself) would be present for these morning sessions. During Jimmy Carter's presidency and for a portion of Ford's term, there were no daily CIA briefings; instead, the National Security Adviser was with the President while he read the PDB and other intelligence information. During Carter's term, the DCI played a lesser role during daily briefings but had a more formal and satisfactory system of weekly, in-depth discussions on subjects of expressed interest to the President.

The single, most critical test of whether CIA is properly supporting the US policymaking process is the effectiveness of the intelligence support provided to the President. Overall, the level of that support deteriorated somewhat during the CIA's first 25 years, but it improved and strengthened during the period from the early seventies to the early nineties. To a substantial extent, this strengthening resulted from the leadership of one man, George Bush. Bush ensured that full intelligence support was given to Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan, and his own presidency was a high point in terms of the CIA's relationship with the White House. President Clinton and his national security team received extensive intelligence support during the transition, and in office this support continued at a historically high level.

What the Presidents Recommend

Interviews with four former Presidents eliciting their opinions on why the system of intelligence support worked better during some transitions and administrations than others unearthed one immediate, common, and obvious reaction: each President is different. Ford, in particular, stressed that point, asserting that "the backgrounds and circumstances of the various presidents are so different that there can be no one formula for future support. Eisenhower or Ford or even Kennedy were so much more familiar with intelligence than a Clinton or a Reagan." Ford went on to underscore that "the Intelligence Community has to be prepared to be flexible to accommodate the different experiences."^[140]

Carter had some of the most concrete advice on how the CIA ought to go about establishing its relationship with each president-elect. As a start, he urged the Agency to "give a new president-elect a paper on what previous presidents had done regarding intelligence support. Let the next incumbent decide--show them the gamut of material."^[141]

In discussing how presidents and times change, Carter noted that, if he were in the White House in the nineties, he would welcome computerized intelligence support in the Oval Office. Pleased to hear that the Agency had been experimenting for some time with a system for making real-time intelligence available via a computer terminal on the desk of senior consumers, Carter volunteered, "If I was in the White House now I would welcome it. I feel comfortable with computers and would use it, not as a substitute for the other support, the PDB and the briefings, but in addition to it." He explained that when a question arose about developments in a particular country he would "like to have access to something where I could punch in a request for the latest information."

CIA's experience indicates that a critically important variable in establishing a successful relationship is the approach taken by the DCI. Comments of the Presidents who were interviewed reinforced that impression. During every transition, the CIA's Director has been involved personally in providing at least one, and in some cases many, briefings. In those cases where the relationship was established most effectively, the common factor was that the DCI succeeded in bringing the institution into the process so that CIA officers could assist him and carry the process forward after his role diminished or was discontinued. In one form or another, this has been accomplished with each of the presidents elected in the last 20 years.

When the institutional link between the Agency and the President was not properly established, it was usually because the DCI attempted to handle the relationship singlehandedly. Two cases show that this can happen in quite different ways. DCI Allen Dulles, for example, chose to support the incoming Kennedy administration almost entirely on his own, giving three briefings to Kennedy and involving only one other Agency person. Those briefings reportedly did not impress Kennedy, and the relationship between the two men, complicated immensely by the Bay of Pigs fiasco, unraveled within months.

In the case of Nixon, Helms was involved in one briefing immediately after Nixon's selection and in a later perfunctory discussion at the White House. Unfortunately, the handoff of responsibility from the DCI to the CIA career officers positioned in New York to provide support did not succeed in its fundamental purpose. Nixon was never seen personally, and he read very little Agency material. Given his deep suspicions of the CIA and Henry Kissinger's determination to monopolize all contact with the new president, it is doubtful that the relationship could have been handled any better. The Agency's inability to establish a satisfactory relationship at the outset continued throughout the Nixon presidency--arguably, to the detriment of both the President and the Agency.

While vigorous and effective action by the DCI clearly is a determining factor in establishing the Agency's institutional relationship with a new president, it does not follow that such involvement solidifies the position of the DCI himself with the new president or administration. The directors who were the most involved in transition support activities included Smith with Eisenhower, Dulles with Kennedy, Bush with Carter, and Turner with Reagan. Sadly, each was disappointed with the role he was given, or not given, by the incoming president.

No CIA director retained from one administration to the next is destined to succeed. All in this category were dismissed or felt obliged to resign. Dulles was very successful serving under Eisenhower but lasted only a few months with Kennedy. McCone served successfully under Kennedy but quickly wore out his welcome with Johnson. Helms was among the Agency's most successful directors during the Johnson years but was later dismissed by Nixon. Colby served in particularly difficult circumstances under Nixon, only to be dismissed later by Ford.

The most recent case in which a director was held over, that of William Webster, illustrates a larger point as well. He was appointed by Reagan and served successfully in a rather formal relationship with him. Webster had a fairly extended period in the Bush administration as well, faring better than any predecessor who had been extended from one administration to the next. On the other hand, he never established with Bush and his key White House aides the close relationship that his successor, Robert Gates, enjoyed as a result of his prior service as Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

It is often suggested that for each of the DCIs who was asked to resign there was a single explanatory cause. For Dulles, the argument goes, it was the Bay of Pigs; for McCone, the Agency's independent analysis of the war in Vietnam; for Helms, the failure to cooperate on the Watergate coverup; for Colby, his failure to alert the White House in advance of the public exposures of the Agency's misdeeds. A more careful analysis, however, indicates that every DCI encountered serious difficulties of one kind or another, including some that were an embarrassment to the White House. Most of these problems, however, did not lead to the DCI's dismissal. The common link among Directors who were dismissed was that none was appointed by the President whose confidence he later lost.

Looking at the matter from a different perspective, in almost all cases the president has protected directors of the CIA whom he has appointed. Since the Agency was founded in 1947, a president has selected and appointed a DCI in 14 cases, and in five the President has retained a director appointed by his predecessor. In none of the 14 cases did the President ask for the resignation of the CIA director he

appointed.[142] The psychological and political commitment a president makes to a director he has appointed is obviously critical to sustaining their relationship.

Each of the former presidents interviewed underscored that it is of the highest importance for a president to have a CIA director in whom he has confidence and with whom he feels comfortable. Opinions were mixed regarding the best background or qualifications of a DCI, whether a nominee should be an intelligence professional or an outsider, and concerning the importance of the candidate's political background. Recalling his nomination of Gates, Bush explained, "It helped that Gates had been a professional, but I picked him because he did such a good job sitting right here [on the deck of the Bush home at Kennebunkport, while serving as Deputy National Security Adviser]. Actually, I had known Bill Webster better over the years socially, from tennis and so on, than I had Bob Gates." [143] With the unique perspective that came from having been CIA Director as well as President, Bush refused to be pinned down on the issues of whether a CIA professional should hold the director's job and whether there should be a turnover of directors at the end of each administration. Rather, he suggested, "There should be no set rule. It would be good for the Agency to know that one of their own could be DCI. We should never feel like the torch has to pass (at the end of an administration)."

Like Bush, Ford had no strong feelings on the question of whether a DCI should continue in office from one administration to the next. He pointed out that he "had inherited one and appointed one. You need the right person that you are comfortable with. I worked well with both Colby and Bush." Ford underscored repeatedly that he had the highest confidence in Colby's handling of the Agency's intelligence collection and analytic activities, but he concluded midway through his term that he simply had to appoint a different director to defuse tensions with the Congress over the CIA's past activities. Ford was most charitable in his characterizations of Colby, euphemistically referring to his "resignation" and noting that "I offered him the job of Ambassador to Norway, but he declined."

All of the former presidents interviewed, with the exception of Reagan, expressed the feeling that the individual selected to run the CIA should be apolitical. Carter, for example, volunteered that, although Bush had proved to be a very capable director of the Agency, his selection had been ill advised because of Bush's role as Chairman of the Republican Party--"he was too political." Without, ironically, discussing his own initial choice of Kennedy political adviser Theodore Sorensen to serve as DCI, Carter stressed that the man who did serve as CIA Director in his administration, Adm. Stansfield Turner, had been a career military officer without any political ties who was also experienced in using intelligence.

More than one of those interviewed was critical of, and used as an example, the selection of William Casey as CIA Director. Bush, who like Helms has been a forceful advocate of the need to keep intelligence and policy separate, volunteered, "Casey was an inappropriate choice. We would be having a Cabinet discussion of agriculture and there would be Casey. That shouldn't be--the DCI should not enter into policy discussions."

Kissinger has written that Nixon also believed that the job of CIA Director should not be a political plum and that this conviction led Nixon to retain Helms rather than appoint a new director. Nixon's decision was made against a backdrop in which his two predecessors, Johnson and Kennedy, had retained a CIA Director from the previous administration. Kissinger records that it was his discussion of these considerations with Nixon that led the latter to retain Helms despite Nixon's reservations about CIA as an institution and his lack of comfort with Helms personally. Nixon's discomfort allegedly derived in part from the fact that Helms moved in Ivy League and Georgetown social circles.[144]

Kissinger's recollections of Nixon's decisionmaking during the transition are fascinating, but mistaken regarding the sequence of events surrounding the reappointment of Helms. According to his own

account, Kissinger's first meeting with Nixon during the transition period was on Monday, 25 November, in Nixon's suite at the Pierre Hotel in New York City. Kissinger apparently was unaware at that time, and perhaps was always unaware, that Nixon had summoned Helms to that same suite 10 days earlier, on Friday, 15 November. At that meeting, Nixon, accompanied only by John Mitchell, formally offered Helms the job of CIA Director in the Nixon administration. Nixon's action apparently was taken because outgoing President Johnson had twice recommended Helms to Nixon. The most recent occasion on which Johnson had commended Helms had been four days earlier, on 11 November, when Johnson, Nixon, Helms, and others had met in Washington at the White House.

The inescapable lesson from CIA history--albeit a lesson that neither Presidents nor DCIs are eager to draw explicitly--is that it works better when a new president appoints his own CIA director. In the intelligence business innumerable delicate actions are undertaken that have the potential to embarrass the US Government and the President personally if they are mishandled or if misfortune strikes. In these circumstances it is not only a matter of the President being comfortable with his DCI, but also he must trust him implicitly, be associated with him politically, and, above all, give him routine access.

The alternative thesis argues that some things are more important than a close relationship with the President. According to this view, appointing a CIA career officer as director and routinely carrying over a DCI from one administration to the next is the best way to protect the Agency's nonpolitical status and its operational and analytical integrity. Appealing as this notion is to Agency professionals, history does not treat it kindly. The incidence of occasions in which the CIA has become embroiled in politically stupid or even illegal actions does not correlate with whether the DCI was a political appointee or an intelligence professional.

The relationship of trust between President and DCI occasionally derives from close personal or professional associations in the past, witness the cases of Ford and Bush, Reagan and Casey, and Bush and Gates. Alternatively, there have been several cases where the President did not personally know well the individual he appointed as DCI, but was willing to accept the assurances of others that the nominee would serve with distinction. Such cases included Kennedy and McCone, Johnson and Helms, Carter and Turner, and Clinton and Woolsey.

Keeping Out of Politics

Perhaps the most challenging of the political issues with which the Agency must grapple in establishing and sustaining its relationship with a new administration is how to support the President without being drawn into policymaking. It frequently takes some time for a new administration, and even for a new CIA director, to understand that the Agency's proper, limited role is to provide policymakers relevant and timely raw intelligence and considered, objective analyses, including analyses of the probable ramifications of different US courses of action. Experience has shown that the Agency should not go the additional step and become involved in recommending policy.

Not infrequently, CIA directors during transition periods have been offered tempting opportunities to go beyond the bounds of proper intelligence support into policy deliberations. DCI Smith reportedly was highly alert to these potential pitfalls and held to a "strict constructionist" view of his responsibilities. When Eisenhower, not wanting to rely solely on the US Army's analysis of how the war in Korea was going, called for a CIA briefing that virtually invited a different interpretation and policy involvement, Smith--an experienced general officer and once Eisenhower's Chief of Staff--was very careful to stick to the facts and make no recommendations.

The line between intelligence and policy was not respected so carefully by those providing support to

the two following Presidents. The written record leaves little doubt that Agency analysts' independent assessment of developments in Castro's Cuba was not solicited by or offered to Kennedy when he began his deliberations leading up to the Bay of Pigs operation. Not even the informal assessments of the working-level operations officers were included in the presentations given the new president and his team. CIA's senior managers, including Allen Dulles and Deputy Director for Plans (Operations) Richard Bissell, perceived an obligation to devise and execute a program that would "do something" about Castro. Some consciously proceeded against their better judgment of the probable outcome but, ironically, did not want to let down either Eisenhower, who was pressing for action, or Kennedy, who had committed himself to their program.

Johnson presented a temptation of a different sort to the DCI he retained from the Kennedy period. The President found that John McCone would give him independent assessments of the course of the war in Vietnam. McCone's candor and outspokenness led Johnson to solicit from him advice on what should be done regarding the conflict and concerning the assignments of diplomatic personnel--matters that were not properly part of McCone's responsibilities. Flattered by the new President, McCone offered advice going beyond his brief in a manner that soon put him at odds with his counterparts in other government departments and, before many months had passed, with the President himself.

The lesson that Dulles and McCone had been burned by their involvement in policymaking was not lost on Helms, who served as DCI for the bulk of the Johnson and Nixon presidencies. More than any previous Director, Helms was careful to limit his role to providing intelligence while staying out of policy discussions. He also recognized and stressed the need to get intelligence facts and analysis to the President at a length and in a form that was digestible.

Kissinger has written perceptively of the challenge a DCI faces in walking the fine line between offering intelligence support and making policy recommendations. Probably more than any other National Security Adviser, he was sensitive to the reality that an assessment of the probable implications of any US action can come across implicitly or explicitly, intended or not, as a policy recommendation. He wrote in *White House Years*, "It is to the Director that the assistant first turns to learn the facts in a crisis and for analysis of events, and since decisions turn on the perception of the consequences of actions the CIA assessment can almost amount to a policy recommendation." Of Helms, he said, "Disciplined, meticulously fair and discreet, Helms performed his duties with a total objectivity essential to an effective intelligence service. I never knew him to misuse his intelligence or his power. He never forgot that his integrity guaranteed his effectiveness, that his best weapon with presidents was a reputation for reliability.... The CIA input was an important element of every policy deliberation...."[145]

In discussing how to ensure that the information provided the president-elect regarding developments abroad is politically neutral, Bush observed that the key factor is the people selected to provide the information. He volunteered that the CIA is probably better positioned than other intelligence agencies to ensure a neutral presentation: "It is much better to leave the briefings to CIA than to get other outfits involved. The others are all involved in policy. If you include the military intelligence people and DIA, the president-elect would think you were trying to sell him something." Bush added that he had complete confidence in CIA to represent all sides on controversial issues and to avoid getting into politics.

The Arrangements Make a Difference

Improvements can and, in this author's view, should be made to strengthen the support the Intelligence Community provides to new presidents. Despite Bush's confidence in letting the CIA represent the other agencies in its daily briefings of the president-elect, the Agency's past performance of that responsibility has been decidedly uneven. The success of the process cannot be left to the initiative of the individual

charged with supporting the President; better institutional arrangements are necessary to ensure that relevant material from the other agencies also reaches the president-elect.

From the earliest years, comments by the presidents-elect or their senior staffs have revealed that they were aware of this problem. Eisenhower, for example, lamented that he was not receiving regularly both Army operational assessments and CIA information on the situation in Korea. Kissinger, speaking for Nixon, at one point insisted--without result--that information and/or personnel from the State Department accompany the Agency's daily support. In 1992 one of the first questions raised by Clinton's staff with the Agency's representative in Little Rock related to how the various agencies of the Intelligence Community worked together and whether the CIA officer would be including their information in his briefings.

Expanding the size of the team that provides daily intelligence to the president-elect would be unwieldy and duplicative. One suggested solution would be to designate an officer in each of the other agencies--such as the Department of State, National Security Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff--to support the operation remotely. Each day these officers could forward to the CIA officer on site a brief paper with points they would like to bring to the President's attention. The President-elect would be likely to concentrate on the PDB, but on a case-by-case basis he could read important stand-alone papers from the other agencies, and the material would be a useful supplement ensuring an informed discussion. More important, perhaps, such a procedure would ensure that the full range of the Intelligence Community's input was available for review by his staff.

During the Clinton transition, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research routinely sent its daily Intelligence Summary to the support team in Little Rock. About once a week, information tailored for the President-elect was provided by the National Security Agency, and, on occasion, other agencies. Better management of this hit-and-miss approach would support the President-elect with more timely intelligence and provide other agencies valuable opportunities to show what they can do and to establish themselves with the President-elect.

The chief impediment to establishing the proper links in the past has been the fact that at the highest levels of the policy agencies, especially State and Defense, virtually everyone empowered to put these support arrangements in place has been a political appointee whose loyalties are to the outgoing administration. Hence, they typically have little stake in supporting the incoming administration. Historically, outgoing presidents have risen above this parochialism much better than their own staffs or their political appointees in the various departments. Advance preparations initiated by the CIA could deal with this problem.

Experience has indicated that the system works best if the Agency's support team is in place in the city where the President-elect has set up his offices. The CIA has attempted to do this from the outset but has had mixed results. During the Eisenhower transition, for example, the support operation established in New York City was never utilized by Eisenhower himself and provided relatively minimal support to his senior assistants, notably Sherman Adams. Because Kennedy spent much of the transition period in Washington, albeit with extended stays at Hyannisport and Palm Beach, there was no separate team set up specifically to support him. Provision of daily intelligence had been approved by outgoing President Eisenhower, but a satisfactory system to provide continuous support was never established with the incoming Democratic president. This clearly was a missed opportunity to establish a good relationship with Kennedy and his senior assistants, many of whom were unfamiliar with and suspicious of the Agency.

In the cases of Nixon and Carter, support operations were established that succeeded in making intelligence available on a daily basis. Retrospectively, however, it may be that the officers who

supported the Nixon transition in New York were too junior to gain the necessary entree. Nixon never received the Agency's representatives, although Kissinger did so frequently. Carter personally received an Agency officer each day, but he was more a courier than a substantive expert.

The system has worked best when the CIA has made available to the incoming president--on a continuous basis and on the scene--an experienced senior officer who can engage in some substantive give and take on the spot. The two contrasting cases where a Vice President moved up to the presidency in midterm provide an instructive example of the benefits of having established a familiar relationship for the discussion of substantive issues one-on-one. Ford had been receiving daily briefings from a senior member of the PDB staff for many months before his accession to the presidency. This compared favorably to the difficult situation where Johnson, as Vice President, had been specifically denied the President's daily intelligence publication and had received no regular briefings. He had been sent a copy of a less sensitive daily intelligence publication, to which he paid little attention.

In the most recent transitions--for Reagan, Bush, and Clinton--the Agency dispatched more senior officers who were experienced in supporting policymakers and were familiar with the full range of substantive issues about which the President-elect would be reading each day. In fact, in a great many of their daily sessions, the President-elect would simply read through the PDB with few if any questions. On other occasions, however, he would ask follow-up questions about subjects treated in the written material or, less frequently, ask for an update on issues not discussed at all in the publication. In each of these cases it proved valuable to have senior officers in place who could elaborate on the material presented. Occasionally they explained Agency collection programs or the way the material related to covert action efforts under way.

Fortunately, modern technology has provided a solution to what had been a problem in several early transitions: communications links to transmit securely the most timely and relevant intelligence information to the president-elect wherever he may be. Now it takes only the installation of a portable computer, printer, and secure fax machines in a hotel room to provide printed material on site that is literally indistinguishable from that which the President receives in Washington. This communications capability permits the support team to draw on the full resources of the Intelligence Community in Washington and around the world to provide text, high-quality imagery, and graphics.

By the time anyone reaches the presidency, that individual has long-established work habits that are not going to be changed by the CIA. The military approach of Eisenhower or the highly disciplined styles of Truman and Carter, for example, were vastly different from the more relaxed and less predictable approaches of Kennedy, Reagan, or Clinton. The job of the CIA director and his representative is to accommodate each person's style. Flexibility is critical on matters ranging from the scheduling of appointments to the presentation of the substantive material, where the length, level of generality, and subject matter must be within parameters suitable to the incoming President.

The CIA must provide support not only to the incoming President but also to his senior assistants as well. This does not mean that subordinates should be shown the most sensitive material prior to inauguration, a practice successive outgoing presidents have made clear is not acceptable. Nevertheless, designees to Cabinet posts and other close aides to the President-elect have intelligence needs and can be shown a full array of less sensitive materials. The CIA in the past has sometimes served these individuals well and on other occasions has ignored them. Meeting this responsibility in a prompt and well-organized way would help establish a better relationship with an incoming administration. Other things being equal, it is obviously easier to accomplish this if the outgoing National Security Adviser is sympathetic to the need for a smooth transition in the intelligence area. It is easier still if the transition is between two presidents of the same political party.

In the preelection period, it has proved feasible and desirable to provide intelligence briefings to candidates from both or even multiple political parties. For the most part, this has been done; it certainly should be continued. For various reasons intelligence support was not provided to three major party candidates over the years. Barry Goldwater declined the Agency's offer. George McGovern and Walter Mondale displayed only limited interest and when scheduling difficulties arose, the prospective CIA briefings fell by the boards. All of those who have been elected to date have accepted and benefited from the proffered intelligence support.

Material That Was Welcome

Whether in the preelection period, during the transition, or once in office, presidents almost without exception have concentrated on the current intelligence that related directly to the policy issues with which they were grappling. Similarly, they were also the most interested in oral briefings that related to those same issues. Written items or briefings were most welcome if they were concise, focused, and accompanied by graphics or imagery that helped get the point across quickly. The best received briefings were those delivered by experts who were obviously masters of their subject. Worldwide overviews provided by CIA's directors were politely received but were sometimes judged to have repeated material available in the newspapers.

The substantive topics addressed in the material presented to a given president-elect are obviously a function of contemporaneous international developments and, therefore, vary significantly with each new incoming administration. There have been some nearly constant themes; however, such as developments in Russia, China, Korea, and the Middle East that are subjects the CIA knows it will be called on to address during each transition. Korea's Kim Il-song was probably the only foreign leader whose activities were the subject of intelligence reporting over the whole of the 40-year period under review.

Agency officers are well advised to be acutely conscious of the issues debated in the election campaign. Presidents-elect typically are well informed on such high-profile issues; in those areas they require only continuing updates and help in sorting the vital nuggets from the torrent of information they will receive. CIA's greater challenge with a new president is to provide useful intelligence on important issues that have not been highlighted in the campaign. On a continuing basis, roughly 60 percent of the items covered in the PDB are not addressed in the newspapers. This body of information, in particular, is likely to be unfamiliar to a prospective president.

With virtually every new president, CIA has experimented with offerings of supplementary written intelligence to elaborate issues raised in the PDB. Only two presidents-elect have clearly welcomed such supplementary material and read it thoroughly when it was offered. Those two were otherwise quite different individuals: Eisenhower and Reagan. Other presidents who were presented such background material, especially Nixon and Clinton, showed no sustained interest. Supplementary material should be made available to, but not pushed on, a president-elect who is already overburdened with reading material and short on time.

The staff aides who support the president on security issues showed a deeper interest in the extra information. The best known of them, Kissinger, once told Helms, "You know the most useful document you fellows turn out is that Weekly Summary that you put together. That's much more valuable than the daily stuff. That I can sit down on a Saturday morning and read and bring myself up to date and I think it's a good publication."^[146]

As a result of the presidents' preference for material that can be digested quickly, it has always been a

challenge to interest them in longer analytic studies and the Intelligence Community's formal National Intelligence Estimates. As a rule, presidents have read carefully only those studies or Estimates specifically urged on them by the DCI or the National Security Adviser because they related directly to a policy matter of high, ongoing interest. Otherwise, the CIA has found the most success when it has gisted the findings of longer papers and integrated a summary into the PDB. Indeed, the Agency has been told by National Security Advisers that the PDB was the only publication on any subject that they could be absolutely confident their principal would read on any given day.

From the Agency's perspective, there are clear advantages to having a new president come into office well informed not only about developments abroad but also about CIA's covert action and sensitive collection programs. Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush all were well briefed on such activities; together, their terms spanned a period of almost 20 years during which each, as an incoming president, had a thorough understanding of the Agency's most sensitive activities. Three other presidents--Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Clinton--entered office with limited familiarity with the Agency's sensitive activities. Two others, Johnson and Nixon, had no up-to-date knowledge of those programs when they took office.

Familiarity with sensitive programs does not necessarily result in support for them. Carter, for example, ordered a halt to some of the Agency's sensitive undertakings within weeks of taking office. A president's early awareness of such programs is, nevertheless, essential for him, the country, and the CIA. He needs to be in an informed position to defend and support these often politically charged activities or to change them if necessary to ensure their consistency with his overall foreign policy objectives. If the Bay of Pigs fiasco taught nothing else, it was that Administration policy should drive covert action; covert action projects should not drive policy or color the intelligence provided.

There has been an almost unbroken pattern over the years in expanding the support provided a new president and his team in areas beyond daily intelligence. Beginning with the Nixon transition, his key staffers--Kissinger and Eagleburger--were provided significant quantities of material for their own policy-planning purposes. This assistance continued during the Carter and Reagan transitions and was further expanded for the Bush and Clinton teams. For Clinton, the Agency provided background material for use by the President- and Vice President-elect and their senior staffs for telephone calls with foreign leaders, speeches and press conferences, and internal policy deliberations. The key to success in these efforts, as with intelligence generally, is to stick to the facts. The new team must know that CIA is neither defending policy for the old Administration nor creating it for the new one.

There has never been any doubt that the PDB, right up to inauguration day, is designed to address the interests of the president in office. Realistically, however, as the time for the turnover draws closer and as the incoming president is reading the PDB with greater care, the inevitable and probably appropriate tendency is to select and address substantive items in a way that meets the needs of the new president as well as the outgoing one. Fortunately, in practice this usually amounts only to adjustments on the margin.

The experience of the CIA in providing intelligence to 10 presidents--through nine quite different transitions--has led many of its officers to appreciate the wisdom displayed by President Truman in a speech he delivered on 21 November 1953. On that occasion he observed, "The office of President of the United States now carries power beyond parallel in history. That is the principal reason that I am so anxious that it be a continuing proposition and the successor to me and the successor to him can carry on as if no election had ever taken place." Truman said, "That is why I am giving this president--this new president--more information than any other president had when he went into office."[147]

President Truman was the first and the most senior of the intelligence briefers to be involved in the 40-year series of briefings that led up to CIA's support of President Clinton in Little Rock in 1992. Truman

personally had provided an intelligence overview to General Eisenhower on 18 November 1952. In his speech to the Agency three days later he said, "It was my privilege...to brief the man who is going to take over the office of President of the United States." It has been the CIA's privilege as well, many times.

[140] Gerald Ford, interview by the author in Beaver Creek, Colorado, 8 September 1993. Subsequent observations by Ford also come from this interview.

[141] Jimmy Carter, interview by the author in Atlanta, Georgia, 23 June 1993. Subsequent observations by Carter also come from this interview.

[142] It could be argued that the cases of Adm. William F. Raborn, Jr. and James Woolsey were exceptions. According to former DCI Richard Helms, Raborn had been appointed by President Johnson primarily because of his high standing on Capitol Hill. Raborn resigned after only 14 months, in large part because he and the President had become aware that key Senators were critical of his obvious failure to have mastered the substantive issues on which he testified. In the more recent case, James Woolsey served two years, but, like Raborn, resigned when he ran afoul of the Congress and received only limited White House backing.

[143] George Bush, interview by the author in Kennebunkport, Maine, 6 May 1993. Subsequent observations by Bush also come from this interview.

[144] Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979), pp. 11, 36.

[145] Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 37, 487.

[146] Richard Helms, interview by R. Jack Smith, Washington, DC, 21 April 1982.

[147] *The New York Times*, 22 November 1952, pp. 1, 10.

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