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## Few PDBs declassified for public

By John Diamond, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — President Truman's note to his CIA director, Walter Bedell Smith, raved: "You have hit the jackpot with this, Bedell!"

That was in 1951, and the president had just read the first copy of a new top-secret CIA publication, the Current Intelligence Bulletin, a daily digest of intelligence for the president and his top advisers. That summary included developments in the Korean War.

The successor to that document, the President's Daily Brief, is at the center of a controversy over secrecy, presidential prerogatives and the search for what went wrong in U.S. intelligence before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Under pressure from a commission reviewing the Sept. 11 attacks, the Bush administration on Saturday declassified the Aug. 6, 2001, edition of the President's Daily Brief (PDB). The document, titled "Bin Ladin Determined To Strike in US," said al-Qaeda might use hijacking as a terrorist tactic. **(Related item: [See the PBD](#))**

The decision to release the PDB reflects the importance the Bush administration places on how voters will gauge his reaction to terrorism before and after Sept. 11.

The White House had opposed public testimony under oath by national security adviser Condoleezza Rice before the commission. It had argued that the president's closest advisers are not subject to questioning by congressional or other government panels. The Bush administration also for two years opposed release of the Aug. 6 PDB on the grounds that such highly sensitive intelligence documents have never been subject to public scrutiny.

Last year, Bush told reporters that it was important that he receive unvarnished assessments from the CIA without the writers worrying that their words might be made public.

CIA Director George Tenet offered a different argument to a joint House-Senate investigative committee in 2002. He said the issue was not the content of the CIA briefing but the fact that it was being briefed to the president that made it sensitive.

The PDB has been described as a highly classified newspaper. Overnight-watch officers pick up dispatches from overseas offices — embassies or CIA stations — and boil them down. Maps, spy satellite photographs and reports of communications intercepts are attached. The president receives a copy first thing in the morning and discusses it with a CIA officer. In Bush's case, Tenet often accompanies his CIA briefer.

Officials and experts disagree on the history of declassifying editions of the PDB. A CIA spokesman said that some PDBs had "found their way into the public domain" at the Lyndon B. Johnson presidential library but that the agency had never declassified them. The White House says it is unprecedented.

"In fact, 10 historic President's Daily Briefs have previously been declassified," said Thomas Blanton, director of the National Security Archive, a non-profit organization at George Washington University.

The CIA came into being under Truman, and it was Truman who first requested a daily digest of intelligence. Before the creation of the CIA in 1947, Truman had received a Daily Summary.

A reading of some of the publicly available PDBs underscores how national security has changed. But the one

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thing that hasn't changed is the primary purpose of the document: "To avoid another Pearl Harbor," as one of the CIA's 1960s-era officials put it.

Not all presidents have been as enthusiastic about the daily briefing as Truman was in his note to Bedell Smith. A 1996 study by the CIA's history office said presidents sometimes complained that the PDB contained too much material available in newspapers.

The PDB follows the president wherever he goes. The copy Bush received Aug. 6, 2001, at his ranch in Texas was the same as the document he would have been handed at the Oval Office.

In her testimony last week, Rice said the Aug. 6 brief provided background information, not a call to action. Some members of the 9/11 commission disagree. They called it a warning that should have been heeded.

The criticism points at another aspect of presidential intelligence briefings: An intelligence warning is only as good as the attention it receives. What the 1967 history said about the Current Intelligence Bulletin could be said about the PDB: that its "major problem has been to ensure that it commands the attention of all those to whom it is addressed."

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