

Reforming the President's Daily Brief and Restoring Accountability in the Presentation of Intelligence

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

The size and cost of the U.S. Intelligence Community have not prevented its failure to anticipate threats to our interests.

The information and intelligence currently presented to the President are not necessarily reliable enough to support sound decision-making.

Decentralizing the process, redistributing responsibility, and establishing a feedback mechanism would better support the President and senior policymakers.

The Problem

Each day, the United States government devotes enormous resources—money, time, personnel hours, information technology infrastructure—and risk to produce one product: the President's Daily Brief (PDB).¹ The PDB should provide the President of the United States with strategic foreign intelligence on issues that (1) already require presidential decisions; (2) will cause escalation in a situation to the point at which it requires a presidential decision; and/or (3) impact existing or future policies, negotiations, or initiatives.

Because the audience for the PDB has expanded beyond the President, it is natural that access to the PDB or its various modified versions is a mark of status among senior Administration personnel. Teams of briefers, analysts, editors, production designers, and

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others form part of the extensive process that produces this product each day. Because of the status of this flagship product, analysts, national intelligence “managers,” and other mandarins within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) ecosystem² vie for the inclusion of certain articles and fight over lengths, placements, and what content should be contained within each article and within the PDB as a whole. “Surprise, when it happens to a government,” in the words of Thomas Sehelling, “is likely to be a complicated, diffuse, bureaucratic thing. It includes neglect of responsibility but also responsibility so poorly defined or so ambiguously delegated that action gets lost.”³

The competition for inclusion in the PDB and related products—and for the access that goes with it—has warped the incentive structure, priorities, and value judgments of the Intelligence Community (IC), particularly the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), whose staff still dominates production of the PDB despite not being the intended sole producer; the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI); and related national-level offices. Among ODNI and CIA analysts, placement of PDB articles is a metric for success and promotion; for CIA collectors, it is usage of their raw intelligence reports in these articles. Briefers are evaluated not on their ability to inform and educate, but on their ability to form relationships with their customers, to get their customers hooked on the product, to know what policies they want to promote, and to feed more of it to them, because this access to the President and senior staff is currency. They are not graded on the “truth” or evaluated over time on how well assessments matched reality, predictions matched outcomes, or analysis in general contributed value to policy.

Moreover, politically inconvenient reporting, warnings, and assessments seldom make it into the final product. If the incentive structure itself does not root them out before they make it to draft production, political diktats from the President or his senior advisers will do so.

IC analysts—as products of an education system that heavily favors left-wing perspectives—necessarily tend to view the world through a left-of-center prism.⁴ As it stands, those with the highest level of educational attainment are often the most heavily indoctrinated into the Left’s paradigm.⁵ Consequently, DEI, climate change, women’s issues, LGBTQIA+ rights, and other pet projects of the Left have become topics *du jour* for intelligence analysts and requirements for promotion at the expense of core U.S. interests.⁶ These biases can insert themselves in other, more insidious ways as well—for example, in assessing political developments in countries such as Hungary, Poland, El Salvador, and Argentina.

Analysts who have spent six or more years in undergraduate and graduate studies rarely leave the Washington bubble. They consume information primarily or even solely through intelligence report queues on their computers and tend to apply the U.S. political paradigm and their own deeply embedded misconceptions to the analysis of other countries. This often leads to the development of a Manichean frame that invariably casts only leftist forces in a favorable light and a bias that finds expression at all levels and throughout all avenues of production, from long-form assessments to short pieces, including the PDB. In addition, U.S. schools that teach international relations and related subjects fall far short in core teaching, notably of basic history, geography, and relevant international economics versus abstract economic theory.

The PDB has come to encompass a wide swath of sources and topics, and its distribution has blossomed since President Barack Obama authorized the brief to be provided electronically. There were efforts to curb access to the PDB at the end of the Trump Administration while retaining the Oval Office Intelligence Briefing, often confused with the PDB. As a veteran CIA analyst has observed recalling the failure to prevent 9/11, “[y]ou need subject-matter experts whose job is only to look at the information—not to collect it, not to go to meetings, not to play politics. You need the experts to give you a sound read on what’s happening that’s free of political considerations. If you don’t get that, then it’s one of the way things kind of go off the rails.”⁷

History, Purpose, and Implications for Today

The antecedent of the PDB was a “daily summary” of information and intelligence prepared by the CIA for President Harry Truman at the onset of the Cold War.⁸ It was a time when many states closely guarded political and economic information, and only the intelligence agencies of a few nations possessed the capabilities and resources to conduct the collection and analysis that is widely and publicly available today. Intelligence was reserved for these select national agencies; in the modern national security environment, analysis is produced by a myriad of think tanks, watchdogs, university research centers, economic research units, and other sources.

To regain President John F. Kennedy’s ear following the fiasco at the Bay of Pigs, the CIA began to include operational reports and gossip about foreign leaders in a rebranded “President’s Intelligence Checklist” that appealed to Kennedy’s interests.⁹ A senior CIA analyst delivered it to the White House each morning and stood by to answer Kennedy’s questions. Kennedy reportedly engaged often with the material and its authors.¹⁰ This

demonstrates the most important point about the PDB: Although it is meant to inform, it is also a tool used to gain access to the President, to gather his priority intelligence requirements, to understand how he thinks, to predict the decisions he might soon make, and to shape the intelligence narrative around him and therefore his perspective. Control of the process—deciding what goes into the PDB and what does not, who gets it, and who briefs it—is inextricably linked to access, which is the currency of power in Washington.

The CIA quickly learned what could happen when Presidents showed less interest in its flagship product or skepticism about its analysis and a concomitant lack of personal rapport curtailed access. Lyndon Johnson distrusted the CIA, stopped taking briefings from the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), and insisted that the daily brief—as it was renamed—be limited to one page and delivered in the evenings to be read in bed.¹¹ Richard Nixon paid little attention to the daily brief and also distrusted the CIA. It was Henry Kissinger, not Nixon, to whom the DCI had access, and it was Kissinger’s analysts on the National Security Council staff, not CIA’s, who controlled the narratives and assessments that reached the President.¹²

Today, despite the establishment of the ODNI and the exponential growth of a layer of bloated bureaucracy at the top of America’s Intelligence Community, the CIA still dominates the PDB process and still owns many of the staff who brief it and its other related products to senior Administration officials each day. This is because the CIA retains primacy in foreign intelligence and control of the highest level of all source intelligence production. It is certainly *not* because the agency has proved that it can consistently do the job more competently than other elements of the IC can. The CIA’s certainty about its assessment that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction in 2002 is a pertinent example:

George Tenet, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) and his deputy John McLaughlin went to the White House on Sunday, December 21, 2002 to brief the president, vice-president and the national security advisor on the intelligence regarding Iraq’s nuclear, chemical, biological and missile programs. The president was not impressed with the evidence. At the conclusion of McLaughlin’s presentation, the president asked Tenet, “...is this best we’ve got?” Tenet replied unequivocally “Don’t worry; it’s a slam dunk case!”

Yet as the world now knows, instead of a “slam dunk case” America’s intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) was flat-out wrong. The president’s Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction called this profound intelligence

failure “one of the most public—the most damaging—intelligence failures in recent American history.”¹³

Value. While the PDB process is the primary tool with which the ODNI and CIA maintain access to the President and senior policymakers, gaining access and power is not the purpose of intelligence, and should not be the reason why the U.S. spends enormous sums on intelligence. To fulfill its purpose by being a timely, relevant, and predictive provider of decision advantage, intelligence must remain objective and unpoliticized. The PDB process should reflect this purpose and contribute value through better, more informed decisions on foreign policy and national security, but it falls short of this by three measures of value.

- **Intrinsic Value.** The PDB’s intrinsic value in today’s world is dubious. How well is it informing the President and highlighting emerging problems for which decisions must be made at times when they may be easier to solve? Additionally, how is it identifying and analyzing the most beneficial outcome possible when the only way to respond to a crisis appears to be negative courses of action? We simply do not know. What we do know is that the DNI and CIA have provided incorrect analysis on many significant issues. Recent publicly known examples include:
 1. Incorrectly concluding that the Ukrainian resistance would fall to Russia within days of Russia’s invasion,
 2. Assessing that an emergent ISIS was at most a second-tier terrorist threat, and
 3. Failing to anticipate the Arab Spring and a host of related issues.
- **Relative Value.** Even if the PDB had a high intrinsic value, the degree to which it provides unique, finished, strategic-level intelligence to the President and senior staff is questionable, especially at a time when more easily available information and analysis is produced and consumed in a week than was produced over the course of years in the past. Articles in a PDB on any given day could be of high quality in the abstract, but if they are largely duplicative, or if a President gets the same or a better assessment elsewhere, then the PDB’s value proposition is still low.

Presidents seek advice and obtain information from all types of sources and choose which advisers and sources of information they think are most reliable. Intelligence agencies should help to fill in the gaps of the most difficult problems where other sources of information may be incomplete, where an adversary may be deceiving or manipulating other sources a President is known to regard as reliable, and where exploiting and stealing sensitive and well-protected information would benefit the U.S. What the President needs is more detailed, specialized product streams in place of a PDB. A general daily overview of strategic intelligence for the President will inherently contain duplication of assessments from other inputs the President receives; especially in today's world, this means that the PDB provides little in terms of relative value.

- **Return on Investment.** According to public budgeting reports, no other state or entity—such as a terrorist group—spends anywhere close to what the U.S. spends on defense. This leads to several highly expensive intelligence products,¹⁴ yet there is little evidence that the U.S. receives much return on this investment. The fact the U.S. remains the world's wealthiest country is no excuse to waste resources that are not unlimited. In the long run—years, decades, or even centuries from now—the United States government's proclivity to spend more to accomplish less than its adversaries will lead to a relative loss in power and potentially even the loss of U.S. dominance in what—for now—remains a unipolar world.

A relevant example of this proclivity is U.S. spending on Ukraine. According to a U.S. Department of Defense fact sheet, as of April 24, 2024, “[t]he United States [had] committed more than \$44.9 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of the Biden Administration, including more than \$44.2 billion since the beginning of Russia’s unprovoked and brutal invasion on February 24, 2022.”¹⁵ The results of this massive spending have been incredibly futile. The first several months of 2024 have seen a virtual stalemate in Ukraine. As of May 2024, Russian forces were the ones in advance, gaining territory through offensive campaigns in northern and eastern Ukraine.¹⁶ Continued spending on defense and intelligence products despite evidence that the money is providing little return on investment is a problem throughout the U.S. defense and intelligence communities.

What Needs to Be Done

The United States government should scrap the PDB and replace it with a process that has two major elements.

The Intelligence Production Level: Decentralize. Decentralize the commissioning and production of strategic intelligence assessments, to include products originating from all IC agencies, and shift the initial primary consumer focus from the President and Cabinet officials to a few lower-level officials. This will foster healthy competition in the Intelligence Community to keep this broader customer base informed as well as challenged by new collection and differing assessments; it will also help to realign incentive structures and ensure that resources and priorities are aligned with the needs of the diverse array of consumers executing the President's directives. The ODNI could still produce a community-coordinated daily briefing for policymakers, but it would be rebranded to disassociate it from what is specifically designed for the President and his Cabinet.

The issues associated with a centralized intelligence production process and corresponding bottleneck that have caused outcomes to be distorted by subjectivity and bias can be resolved by implementing multiple established, routine strategic intelligence product lines geared to the Deputy/Assistant Secretary level, Special Assistants to the President, O-7 to O-8 in the military, and so on in place of the PDB. In addition, these consumers should be the main figures who can commission and continue ad hoc product streams as world events change. Above this level, combatant commanders, undersecretaries, and the like already retain sufficient staff to cull these products, summarize and reduce them as needed, incorporate these assessment streams with other sources of advice and informal inputs, and provide real-time updates that their principals need for decisions of major consequence.

Product lines should be viewed as co-equal, and incentives within the various intelligence bureaucracies should be calibrated accordingly. Various agencies should lead or co-lead the different established and ad hoc product lines, choosing the agency that is best equipped to address the particular questions and decisions associated with a particular product line. There is a wealth of different experiences and expertise across the 18 U.S. intelligence agencies; this is the type of diversity the government should do a better job of harnessing to secure and promote U.S. interests.

The current PDB process—in which centralization is pervasive—creates several problems that can be solved or mitigated by the decentralization of this process into multiple streams.

Problem One: Centralization on the President and Key Principals.

The current centralization on the President and key principals ignores other important customers and overburdens the President. It also creates a resource and incentive mismatch between what is devoted to the PDB versus what is devoted to other products. Numerous studies have concluded that the job of the modern presidency demands more physiological resources than any one human-being possesses: for example, the number of waking hours, cognitive bandwidth, mental stability, and the ability to track and maintain the close relationships required to function as both head of state and head of government.¹⁷

Presidents and their principals need to delegate more than ever before. Arguably, their key personnel at the Deputy and Assistant Secretary levels, who develop, shape, and implement policy and tee up the unresolvable or key policy options that require decisions by the President and other principals, will spend the most on more detailed resources and products to inform their decision-making. They also maintain many of the critical day-to-day foreign interpersonal relationships that drive diplomacy, policy implementation, and enforcement. Rather than devoting resources to a system that channels much of the daily energy and talent of the CIA and DNI into a product in support of one person who is already subject to a deluge of information, we should diversify and enable a broader set of key individuals within the government.

Problem Two: Centralization on National Levels of States. The existing process and inherent bureaucratic incentive structures, in addition to the placement of embassies in foreign capitals, lead to a largely national-level focus on states. Collectors want their reports published, and they will be published if the reviewing staff and top customers recognize and care about the plans and intentions of the actors discussed. Reports will also be published if analysts use them, and analysts will use reports that gravitate toward the organizations, people, and issues that they have spent their education and careers studying and therefore value. Each report that talks about the familiar or suggests some small, incremental change is one more brick in the path of the “analytic line,” one more weight on the scale in favor of past assessments and inherited or unchallenged assumptions.¹⁸ Anything that would imply a drastic change in course tends to be rejected. This lies at the core of why the Intelligence Community continues to miss and make incorrect assessments of nearly all of the most pivotal events.

Analysts also tend to be wedded to classified reporting—what comes into their raw reports queue—at the expense of cultivating a deep understanding of the people and issues in play and anticipating and accounting for what

they don't know. They are also limited in what they can access by a profound lack of language skills. The entire structure and process lead to a system—like academia, although not entirely for the same reasons—in which very smart people learn more and more about less and less, engaging ever more deeply in a conversation among only a small group of peers and cultivating the ideal environment for groupthink.

At the PDB level, this leads to a tendency to view states as a black box, tempered only by leadership profiles of top leaders and the personal relationships Presidents and their senior staff have with some of their counterparts. It misses the developments at local and provincial levels and often fails to capture how domestic political considerations that appear to have less significance will end up driving the foreign policy decisions of key actors. For example, intelligence regarding a low-level official in the St. Petersburg mayor's office might seem to be of little value until that individual rises to become President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation. The key is properly analyzing the seemingly insignificant local and provincial intelligence to determine who is truly the low-level official and who is the potential future leader. The danger arises when one ignores or overlooks crucial intelligence at this level—noticing it only when it becomes a state-level threat.

Coincidentally, this is something at which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is very adept. Its structure lends itself to engaging states on this level, and its intelligence and security agencies are also organized in a fundamentally different way to excel at this level. This becomes a problem when the Chinese cultivate and support lower-echelon political leaders who later become heads of state, leaving the U.S. government to catch up.¹⁹

Because of our current structure and process, the U.S. routinely misses critical political developments and movements, nascent insurgencies, terrorist groups, and the like until they become problems detectable on the national level: too big to ignore and often identified too late to resolve in a manner that best advances U.S. interests. The emergence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, the Houthi takeover of Yemen, and China's acquisition and construction of military and dual-use infrastructure as well as its construction of artificial islands are just a few of the many "surprises" that the intelligence community, despite all of its resources, failed to identify and assess as it should have. A decentralized, diversified product stream with a few dozen co-equal prime consumers would offer more platforms for diverse, competitive collection and more well-rounded and considered assessments.

Problem Three: Centralization with the CIA. The CIA has many talented people that possess deep expertise, and it is good at many things,

but it is not and should not be the only game in town. Efforts to afford article space in the PDB to other agencies—frequently on more niche or specialized topics—and to include dissenting or alternative analysis in pieces address this problem only on the margins. As long as the CIA has primacy in foreign intelligence, “DNI Reps” who oversee and approve what goes on in each country remain almost exclusively CIA, and CIA analysts comprise the bulk of the personnel drafting, editing, producing, and briefing the PDB, the PDB process will reflect the strengths, weaknesses, and biases of the CIA and will fail to leverage the exceptional diversity of experience and expertise that exists in pockets throughout the executive branch.

There are two solutions that address this issue at the core: Change the CIA’s primacy in foreign intelligence and create other organizations for centralized, national-level intelligence assessment—which we do not recommend—or decentralize and distribute the PDB process into multiple product streams with various agencies leading them based on the best fit for each stream. The reasons why we do not advocate changing the CIA’s primacy in foreign intelligence are that (1) the operational coordination process works fairly well, (2) unity of command and authority overseas is important, and (3) creating duplicative organizations in Washington is never the answer and would only exacerbate the waste of resources.

The Evaluation and Policy Level: Coordinate and Centralize. Centralize the evaluation of whether these production streams are informing decisions on national interests and priorities, how well they are doing so, and which products require the attention of the President. Officials a few tiers below the Cabinet level will choose which topline assessments, products, and disagreements are the most critical to U.S. national security interests and should be delivered up to the President and Cabinet level for review, just as unresolvable or critical policy options are pushed up for final decision.

Additionally, the method of dissemination should be continuously reevaluated to ensure proper operational and cyber security. The scope of users and means of distribution have generated unique challenges that must be weighed. User feedback is essential, but pains must be taken both to ensure that neither the perception nor the reality of the IC’s collection of information from those briefed exceeds appropriate bounds and to protect the trust and confidence of those receiving a daily summary.

The President’s Oval Office Intelligence Briefing would be retained at the discretion of the President as administered by the White House Chief of Staff and National Security Adviser in consultation with the Director of National Intelligence and Cabinet officers as appropriate based on focus

and content. This would ideally be captured in a Presidential Memorandum along with the structure, process, and duties of the National Security Council and staff.

Proposed Structure for Presentation of Intelligence to the President

At the evaluation and policy level, the answer is the opposite: coordinate and centralize. A portion of the NSC staff, along with a small group of counterparts supporting Cabinet officials, should evaluate the various production streams; issue recommendations to enhance, amend, or abolish them over time; situate them in a political and policy context; and select from among them those that require the attention of the President and most senior policymakers. Staff should evaluate and call attention to the confidence in the material informing the major conclusions of each product stream.

While there are several methods by which to accomplish this, perhaps the most logical would be to allow the National Security Adviser, supported by the NSC staff in consultation with the Director of National Intelligence, to administer the provision of regular intelligence to the President to complement the coordination and decision-making process for which the National Security Adviser is responsible, as they are interdependent. Naturally, Cabinet officers would retain their ability to engage the President directly and independently as the President determines, providing a safeguard.

Confidence. To place source material, intelligence, assessments, and conclusions in context, it is essential to ascribe levels of confidence, allowing the President to appreciate the adversary or other aspects of the operational environment²⁰ as well as the veracity of the data and their derivative judgments. This has the added benefit of providing context that the President can also use to judge the inputs received from other sources, such as a meeting with business leaders conducting business in a target country.

Access. Naturally, all information and intelligence depend on the methods of collection and our ability to collect and analyze it. It is vitally important to ensure that senior decision-makers understand the community's access to the sources, which determines its confidence in the information provided. If, for example, our access to an adversary's senior leadership is extremely limited, the confidence in even fragmentary reporting of their deliberations will be equally uncertain.

Assessments. In particular, staff should guard against assessments of decisions that the decision-makers themselves may not have even made

yet. These types of assessments are too frequent and tend to occur when consumers demand an answer to a question and analysts lack the sourcing with access to answer that question directly, leaving them instead to build an assessment on a series of questionable assumptions.

For example, a piece on the likelihood of China's invading Taiwan in or by any given year must first address whether CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping has even made up his mind about whether to invade and the degree to which he has changed his mind on other pivotal issues in the past—both of which would require access to the mind of Xi, which would be rare to obtain and difficult to sustain. As opposed to “will China invade by X year” assessments, it would be more useful to offer consumers assessments that present the factors or conditions that are most likely to influence Xi's decision-making and those that explain how various actions and policies undertaken by the President and other consumers would impact Xi's decision-making process. Therefore, staff should discourage assessments built on assumptions covering for lack of access and encourage assessments based on feasible access that contribute to policy formulation.

Feedback. It is essential that all information and intelligence provided to the President and senior policymakers provide an assessment with a corresponding probability of both outcome and impact on our national security interests. It is equally important that these probabilities be assessed to determine the correlation to what ends up happening in order to improve predictive ability and apply appropriate confidence in assessments over time consistently. Avoiding predictive analysis escapes the consequences of error but is of little value and cannot be evaluated. The absence of feedback does not allow for an opportunity to receive the correction that is required to improve precision and confidence in providing probable outcomes. Under the current PBD process, there are few notable efforts to reevaluate predictions and consequences despite the intrinsic value of doing so.

Rewards. An enduring problem associated with evaluating what intelligence is the most important is the evaluation of low-probability, high-impact events. No President has time for all the things that may have a 1 percent chance of happening in any given month or year and yet are critically important and may have an increased, potentially significant probability of happening over a four-year or eight-year term. Collectors should be encouraged to report on, and analysts should be encouraged to produce on, those things that may be unlikely to happen but that would have a major impact on the President's initiatives and vital U.S. interests.

Having multiple product streams rather than a PDB to provide a home for these pieces allows this material to be read by consumers who are actively

involved in the policy process. These consumers can contribute their own assessments of which low-probability, high-impact events deserve more time and attention and may need to be anticipated at higher levels—and how their own initiatives and decisions may be affecting the probabilities of outcomes in real life. A small staff or board can evaluate trends over time and reward those collection streams, analytic product lines, and customers who raised awareness of and acted on critical events of this nature in a productive way while eliminating those that did not contribute.

Focus. The information and intelligence reaching the President and senior policymakers must be focused to reduce the trivia and ensure that those issues that are of highest priority yet are often neglected under the current system have been addressed. The logical basis of this focus must be vital national interests²¹ that directly impact U.S. strength and security. In addition to these interests, the President’s priorities as captured in the National Security Strategy (NSS) should be included to ensure that the most relevant intelligence is provided. Currently, there are systemic weaknesses within the IC that are reflected in the lack of PDB analysis of topics that are essential to the preservation of our most vital interests.

- **Security Studies.** Analysis that focuses on traditional international relations and comparative politics problems—for example, the nature of security dilemmas, alliance formation, and authoritarian politics—should receive more attention than analysis of intellectually fashionable but less useful topics such as human rights and climate security issues.
- **Economics.** During the Cold War, the IC maintained a better understanding of the Soviet economy than it did of the Politburo.²² Since the USSR’s collapse, the IC has not prioritized economic analysis. Economic health is essential as it is a component of state power. Strategic forecasting requires a cadre of analysts who understand economic forces and, most critically, can apply them to assessments of other countries’ geopolitical perspectives and foreign policy decision-making. The IC should prioritize econometrics and political economy as it contributes to strategy development and geopolitics. Recently, analysis that has focused on economics has been on ephemeral issues that are irrelevant to a national security strategy grounded in the protection of core U.S. interests: This trend must be reversed.²³ For example, the relationship between internal politics in China and that nation’s economic performance should receive preference over the economic implications of gender discrimination in Angola.

- **Science and Technology.** Technological innovation, both in the civilian and military sectors, has been and will continue to be a key element of national power. Understanding trends in technological development will help the IC to “lead the target.” The challenge here is to attract the best and brightest in a job market in which technology-related degrees allow a person to command a high private-sector salary. This refers to people whose research and real-world experience have been in areas of relevance to core U.S. policy concerns rather than in the latest intellectual fads advanced by the Left.
- **Leveraging Private-Sector Assets.** To leverage the immense talent the U.S. possesses—a comparative advantage it holds over any other country—the IC (and the military, Commerce Department, and Foreign Service) must become nimble and more flexible in the employment and clearance processes. The IC must also embrace new ways of allowing people to contribute in critical areas over a short period of time, even if they do not elect to pursue a career in government service. Finding ways for private-sector specialists to work a year or two within government on an area of critical concern should be a priority, and the existing, promising efforts already underway in this regard should be nurtured and supported, allowing the best employment model(s) to emerge and create new avenues of contribution for a diverse array of citizens to support their country in some way.

Given that its purpose is to provide predictive decision advantage to decision-makers, the Intelligence Community is irrelevant without policy and decision-maker access. The establishment of clarity by focusing on core, legitimate policy concerns emerging from a scoped set of interests—protection of American lives and property, access to key markets, and freedom of navigation—will help to set the tone for the IC. This will signal to analysts that there is no place in the PDB for puff pieces and will help to keep analysts on the straight and narrow. Rewarding analysts and organizations that meet these objectives while punishing (through denial of access) those that flout Administration guidelines can be a short-term corrective. Appointing agency heads and elevating, when practicable, mid-level personnel who share this vision will be a key element in ensuring responsiveness.

Conclusion

The presentation of information and intelligence to the President and senior staff is critically important; it informs every decision that affects U.S. vital interests and national security. However, this process has devolved to a point at which it is more likely to distort than inform, wastes tremendous resources, and has resulted in suboptimal outcomes that require comprehensive reform. It has also become untethered to the national security decision-making process, which has been designed and implemented to provide rigor and discipline to a broad array of challenges requiring input from nearly every component of our complex executive branch.

Because the global crises threatening our national security interests are often produced by poor policy choices, the process that presents intelligence to the President and supports his decisions—currently the President’s Daily Brief—needs comprehensive reevaluation and reform. This reform can be implemented by scrapping the PDB and establishing convergent product streams that come from the various agencies and are evaluated by presidentially commissioned NSC staff and supporting Cabinet officials incorporating the necessary feedback loop based on accuracy, value, and relevance.

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Endnotes

1. The President's Daily Brief is a daily summary of high-level, all-source information and analysis on national security issues produced for the President and key Cabinet members and advisers. The PDB is coordinated and delivered by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) with contributions from the CIA and other elements of the Intelligence Community and has been presented to the President in some form since 1946, when it was known as the Daily Summary.
2. These are common features in the capitals of all mid-stage and late-stage empires. They seek ever-greater authority, resources, and control, and they never run out of meetings to attend. Exactly what else they do is unclear, but one thing is certain: Despite their enormous cost, they contribute almost nothing to national security or to informing sound policy.
3. Thomas Schelling, Foreword to Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962).
4. Christopher Dictus, Yuliya Shokh, Isabelle Nazha, Marek N. Posard, Richard S. Girven, Sina Beaghley, and Anthony Vassalo, *Has Trust in the U.S. Intelligence Community Eroded? Examining the Relationship Between Policymakers and Intelligence Providers*, RAND Corporation Research Report, 2024, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA864-1.html (accessed November 13, 2024).
5. Julianne Hill, "Lost Trust: US Intelligence Community Must Make Reforms, Change Culture to Regain Public Faith," *ABA Journal*, July 5, 2023, <https://www.abajournal.com/web/article/lost-trust> (accessed November 13, 2024).
6. John A. Gentry, "Demographic Diversity in U.S. Intelligence Personnel: Is It Functionally Useful?" *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2023), pp. 564–596, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/08850607.2021.1994346?needAccess=true> (accessed November 13, 2024).
7. Cynthia Storer, former CIA Counterterrorist Center analyst, in Sean D. Naylor, "Government Terrorist Trackers Before 9/11: Higher Ups Wouldn't Listen," The History Channel, updated July 18, 2023, <https://www.history.com/news/government-terrorist-trackers-before-911-higher-ups-wouldnt-listen> (accessed November 19, 2024).
8. Adrian Wolfberg, "The President's Daily Brief: Managing the Relationship Between Intelligence and the Policymaker," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 132, No. 2 (July 2017), pp. 225–258, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318014660_The_President's_Daily_Brief_Managing_the_Relationship_between_Intelligence_and_the_Policymaker (accessed November 13, 2024).
9. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 266.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 309–311.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 353–354.
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21. “[V]ital American interests are only those that are strictly necessary to safeguard and enhance Americans’ survival and well-being in a free and secure nation. ‘Extremely important’ interests are precisely that—no less, but no more. They are interests or conditions that if compromised would severely prejudice, but not strictly imperil, the ability of the US government to safeguard and enhance Americans’ well-being in a free and secure nation. ‘Important’ interests are again not irrelevant but also not critical to the survival, or even prosperity, of Americans. Compromise of ‘important’ interests could, however, have negative consequences for the safeguarding and enhancing of Americans’ well-being. Finally, interests listed under ‘less important or secondary’ are intrinsically desirable but have no major effect on the ability of the US government to safeguard and enhance the well-being of Americans.” Commission on America’s National Interests, *America’s National Interests*, July 2000, p. 19, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/pantheon_files/files/publication/amernatinter.pdf (accessed November 13, 2024).
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