



Getting To Know the President: CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates, 1952-1992 - Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton

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From the Foreword: 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.


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.

As CIA's Deputy Director for Intelligence under President George Bush, John Helgerson organized and presented foreign intelligence briefings for Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, a service first offered to candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower by President Harry Truman in 1952. Dr. Helgerson has researched Agency records and interviewed past candidates and CIA briefers to produce this account of the contents, circumstances, and consequences of CIA briefings offered to all the major Presidential candidates from Eisenhower to Clinton. *Getting To Know the President* probes deep within the national security apparatus of our government and reveals for the first time the workings of a tiny but vital cog - the mechanism that prepares Presidents to absorb and deal with secret foreign intelligence even before the election results are known. The book also casts light on the President's Daily Brief, the publication the CIA tailors to each new President "for your eyes only." Although written for the edification of CIA officials, Dr. Helgerson's account will be of interest to all students of government, including presidential aspirants and their staffs. The Center

for the Study of Intelligence supports research and publishing on the intelligence profession and its various disciplines and declassifies historical records related to US intelligence analyses and operations during the Cold War.

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