



The President's Book of Secrets: The Untold Story of Intelligence Briefings to America's Presidents from Kennedy to Obama

David Priess, George H.W. Bush (Foreword)

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Every president has had a unique and complicated relationship with the intelligence community. While some have been coolly distant, even adversarial, others have found their intelligence agencies to be among the most valuable instruments of policy and power.

Since John F. Kennedy's presidency, this relationship has been distilled into a personalized daily report: a short summary of what the intelligence apparatus considers the most crucial information for the president to know that day about global threats and opportunities. This top-secret document is known as the President's Daily Brief, or, within national security circles, simply "the Book." Presidents have spent anywhere from a few moments (Richard Nixon) to a healthy part of their day (George W. Bush) consumed by its contents; some (Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush) consider it far and away the most important document they saw on a regular basis while commander in chief.

The details of most PDBs are highly classified, and will remain so for many years. But the process by which the intelligence community develops and presents the Book is a fascinating look into the operation of power at the highest levels. David Priess, a former intelligence officer and daily briefer, has interviewed every living president and vice president as well as more than one hundred others intimately involved with the production and delivery of the president's book of secrets. He offers an unprecedented window into the decision making of every president from Kennedy to Obama, with many character-rich stories revealed here for the first time.

The President's Book of Secrets: The Untold Story of Intelligence Briefings to America's Presidents from Kennedy to Obama Details

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(Foreword)

From Reader Review The President's Book of Secrets: The Untold Story of Intelligence Briefings to America's Presidents from Kennedy to Obama for online ebook

Dean says

Both this book and the daily briefing itself are over rated.

Mike Thiac says

Seeing the United States "Intelligence Community" is looked upon as an colossus, in every spot in the world, it is sometime shocking to people to know it's a fairly recent creation. Until World War II, with the establishment of the Office of Strategic Services (Which became the CIA), the president got his intelligence generally from the War Department or the State Department. It wasn't until the US took a leading roll in the world that the president was presented with an almost daily classified update of issues.

This book goes over how the CIA (later the Director of National Intelligence) would bring a daily briefing, and get to adjust to what the president wanted to know, and more importantly, what he needed to know, and how to best get it to him.

I'll leave it at that, I don't want any spoilers. If you are "into" intelligence, a good light read.

Robert Sparrenberger says

This one started slowly and then got into a good rhythm. I thought the book was going to review the secrets that the president was receiving but it was actually about the book itself and how each president liked the daily brief prepared.

The book is dry and probably geared towards a political junky or someone involved with intelligence.

Ellen Keyes says

Wow!! It's a biography of the intelligence agencies of the US! In addition, the personalities of our past presidents are reviewed by the writer. It's so interesting. I read this during the 2016 election. Now I think about the "daily briefing" every day. I am not encouraged.

Becky says

The main topic in this book is the President's relationship with the CIA. Via this relationship one can begin to see the working President vs. the leading President presented in the media. These insights give one the ability to see the President's working style and to some degree his priorities during his presidency.

Katie Richards says

I listened to this book on Audibles. It was very interesting to learn how the President's Intelligence Brief has evolved through the different Presidency's.

Bettie? says

Every day, the President receives a report revealing the most sensitive intelligence reporting and analysis of world events: the President's Daily Brief (PDB).

James McFarland says

Great read!

This book was insightful into who and what agencies actually brief the president and how the information is filtered to the Oval Office! Anyone who is a political science or history major should read this book!

Marcia King says

This book was interesting because I like politics and secret stuff. A book about the presidents from Kennedy to Obama and how they viewed and received the CIA daily intelligence report would seem to fit the bill. Unfortunately, since most of the info contained in the President's Book of Secrets (the presidential daily brief) remains classified, there aren't too many secrets revealed.

However, each presidents handling of the book, their response to it and the hoops the CIA jumps through to ensure its "First Customer" is pleased, is very interesting. The information about President George W Bush's usage of the book and his generosity toward the CIA briefers is revealing. It seems he (and his father before him) understood the value of the intelligence provided and promoted the book and the briefings as a good way to receive it. The book also acknowledges that the info prior to 9/11 was inadequate given the magnitude of the terrorists attack. The book provides good info on how the Intelligence Agencies were reconfigured to work together more effectively to protect our country.

If you like politics, you will probably like this book

Abraham Ray says

ok book about presidential secrets

David Huff says

The most important advice I can offer about this book is to not let the title mislead you. The President's "Book of Secrets", actually known as the President's Daily Brief (or PDF for short), is a top-secret document, containing sensitive daily intelligence briefings, prepared for the President. Because the briefings are classified, you won't find any "secrets" revealed in this book.

What you will find is a detailed account of the history of the PDF, from its preliminary evolution, during the Truman and Eisenhower years, to the official birth of the PDF under Johnson and Kennedy, and its subsequent use by every President since. The work of the CIA and other agencies in preparing this important document is traced in considerable detail, and will make you appreciate the efforts of so many different people to provide the President with accurate and timely intelligence. David Priess, the author, was himself a CIA officer and a daily briefer for Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

Most fascinating, to me, was the approach each President took toward the PDF and his daily briefings, and the contrast in management styles, information gathering, and decision making between the Presidents. This gave an interesting human side to what, essentially, is a deeply detailed history of the PDF and how it has grown and developed over the years.

Robert S says

Often times there are articles that would make for an absolutely fascinating book if fleshed out properly and other times there are books that would have worked better as a longer article or essay.

Unfortunately, *The President's Book of Secrets* fits in the latter category for me.

Some interesting tidbits here. Others who enjoy books about the intelligence community might get more out of it than I did.

Evan Kail says

How do you make a great subject boring? I actually stopped reading it half way though because it just wasn't that engaging or interesting.

Bill Tress says

As the title states, this book is about the President's Book of Secrets, also known as the President's Daily Briefing (PDB). There is a lot of redundancy in this book that makes a reader sometimes question, why continue but continue they should!

The writer gives the impression that the preparation and presentation of the PDB is all the CIA does and particularly all the management of the CIA focuses on and I am sure this is the writers failure and not a fact. Over the years the worth of the CIA has come into question many times, this book adds some validity to this point. The author admits to the numerous failures of our intelligence agencies in general and the CIA in particular, yet, he insists that the PDB is a very necessary product of the CIA while at the same time acknowledging that one half of the material in the PDB is already being reported on by the news media. Some of the merits of this book are that you do gain some insight into each President's personality and work habits. Also, some of the questions about how events unfolded, such as, war in Iraq and Desert Storm are answered and may not be found in other historical writing.

It is very clear that all of the intelligence agencies in our government are in competition to such an extent that they withhold information from each other, the tragedy of 9/11 is the best example. These agencies are like children competing for the attention of their father, the President; the President's Handlers, in a child like manner, compete to have exclusive access to the President.

The best of this book is towards the end when the 9/11 tragedy is covered in a step by step manner with all of the emotion of the school scene in Sarasota when the President is informed of the attack and has to decide what to do, next. In reading this book, I gain some respect for President Bush (W). His father has stated in other books that his son was not served very well by his cabinet and this book sheds light on this issue. (W) was misled by his intelligence agencies regarding weapons of mass destruction (WMD), another CIA failure, but also failures such as withholding information in his cabinet and other Departments of Government. After 9/11 (W) took steps to change how intelligence agencies operate and mandated interaction between agencies, maybe not a fix, yet, an improvement.

In the end, the book had some value for me, it did confirm my lack of trust in our intelligence agencies and their management. This lack of trust was also evident in how some President's viewed their briefings, (W) after 9/11 took a "deep dive" into a lot of what they gave him and this of course took a lot of his time from maybe more important Presidential business.. It seems almost impossible that politics does not enter into the culture of intelligence agencies and then into the Presidential briefings, thereby reinforcing untruth as apposed to just the facts. In any discussion with friend who had an interest in the workings of our government, I would recommend the book with all of its warts.

Michael says

If you're looking for an overview of the evolution of the President's Daily Brief (the president's regular written security briefing from the CIA), then this book gives you the detail you are looking for, especially from the Ford administration up through the Obama years.

Two things that are obvious through this book is, whether you agree with certain presidents politically or not, they all took very seriously the duty to know all they could know to assist them in their work. That is also true of the employees of the CIA who viewed it as their responsibility to ensure that their information was shared as accurately and as completely as possible.

I did find the final chapter on the Obama years to be a bit lighter than the rest of the book, but the cause of that is obvious, as the book was written during the Obama presidency.

I recommend this book highly for readers interested in presidential history, or the history of the intelligence services (specifically the CIA) over the last 50 years.
