The President’s Daily Brief: Managing the Relationship between Intelligence and the Policymaker

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WHEN WE THINK ABOUT THE INFORMATION the president and other national security policymakers need in today’s complex and ambiguous world, two considerations come to mind: first, ensuring that they have access to the information they need when they need it, and second, ensuring that they receive advice on what decision to make based on that information. The intelligence community provides the former, and policy advisers provide the latter.¹ As the adage goes, never shall the twain meet, as facts are the purview of the intelligence community, while beliefs are the purview of politicians.² However, these two communities—intelligence and policy—regularly come into intimate contact with each other through the President’s Daily Brief (PDB), a highly classified and agenda-informing document consisting of a set of short articles contained in a “briefing book” authored by intelligence analysts working in the


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intelligence community and under the auspices and direction of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI).

The intelligence community has the daily task of providing the PDB to the president and about two dozen senior policymakers in Washington, DC, to enhance their situational awareness of threats to national security. Policymakers then consider this threat information when making decisions in meetings of various groups, such as the National Security Council (whose members are the president, vice president, and selected cabinet officers), Principals Committee (cabinet officer–level members), and Deputies Committee (members are the deputies to a cabinet officer), as part of the interagency national security process.

The briefing book consists not only of the set of short articles written for the president and approved by the ODNI but also additional articles placed “behind the tab,” which satisfy the unique information needs of each policymaker who receives the PDB. In almost all cases, an employee of the intelligence community—an intelligence officer working in a full-time capacity as the “PDB briefer”—delivers the PDB to the policymaker. The PDB briefer does not author the articles but does select the behind-the-tab articles.

It is the PDB briefer who, on a daily basis, crosses into the world of policy, not to reinforce or dispute policy but to support the policymaking process.3 Because the PDB briefers spend face-to-face time with policymakers, a unique type of highly personal and trusting relationship between the intelligence community and policymakers develops, a relationship that not only takes place during but also extends beyond the duration of their face-to-face encounter. Through this relationship, the PDB briefer adds meta-information—information about information not included in the PDB contents, that is, policy-relevant organizational and background information deemed necessary by the PDB briefer to help the policymaker. This interpersonal, trust-laden service to policymakers, called sensegiving, lies obscured and is not obvious from casual observation because it is neither purely intelligence nor purely policy.4 Sensegiving is defined here as a process that is used by the PDB briefer to contextualize and adapt complex and technical information, thus assisting the policymaker in making the most use of intelligence, but does not include advice on what actions to take.

While sensegiving has previously been studied in superior-to-subordinate contexts—that is, when executives and managers use it to

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help their employees—in this very different context, sensegiving occurs in a reverse direction, from subordinate to superior, during routine yet intimate one-on-one, high-stakes information exchanges. The PDB briefer is not part of the policymaker’s formal organization and therefore is not located within the policymaker’s reporting chain of command; rather, the PDB briefer is someone of lower rank who is related to someone of much higher authority, trusted to help the superior make sense of the PDB information within the unique, personalized decision-making needs of the policymaker’s political landscape. Understanding the PDB briefer’s role in providing sensegiving service to the policymaker is therefore an appropriate focus for research, for three reasons.

First, the PDB has for decades been one of the most sought-after items produced for policymakers within the national security community. Second, in 2015, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) declassified and publicly released about 2,500 PDBs from the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations, affording political scientists and historians the unique opportunity to read firsthand the barrage of complex information faced by the most senior national security policymakers day after day. Third, empirical research on sensegiving has been limited to the superior-to-subordinate direction, mostly in organizational change contexts. Only a few of these studies were conducted in government contexts, focusing on leadership behavior. Because few, if any, studies have focused on the reverse, that is, subordinate-to-superior sensegiving—such as briefer to policymaker—and given the PDB briefers’ politically sensitive placement, operating across the worlds of intelligence and politics, such a study would be quite valuable and would offer a key contribution to the study of a unique phenomenon within national security policymaking.

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Therefore, the critical sensegiving service provided by the PDB briefers and their contributions deserve systematic exploration. Specifically, how and why the PDB briefer conducts this sensegiving service is the research question for this study. The article begins with a history of the PDB. Then it sheds light on the context of the PDB briefer’s interaction with the policymaker, introduces the need for sensegiving to the policymaker, explains the research method used to reveal how and why sensegiving occurs and its results, reflects on sensegiving within the evolution of the PDB, and concludes with practitioner and theoretical implications for sensegiving within the national security arena.

HISTORY OF THE PDB
The intelligence community has evolved its PDB support to the national security policy community. Originally, the CIA produced the PDB and its predecessor publications, but with the passage of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, responsibility for PDB production shifted from the CIA to the ODNI.9 However, even though the ODNI became responsible for the PDB, the PDB briefers and the PDB management team continue to work from their offices at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

Support began decades ago with an assumption that it was necessary to minimize policy influence for the sake of protecting analytical objectivity.10 The intelligence community has been walking a fine line ever since between, on the one hand, not getting too close to the policymaker so that the intelligence does not lose objectivity and, on the other hand, not getting close enough to the policymaker, resulting in intelligence becoming irrelevant to the needs of policymakers and therefore losing value.11 Over

time, the intelligence community has attempted to move from a relationship framed by separation toward one of closeness, a shift that intelligence professionals, more broadly, have advocated. In general, the intelligence community believes it should establish and maintain the trust of the policymaker by using its ability to contextualize information so the policymaker can understand the implications of intelligence data within the threat environment, but it should not recommend policy.

The PDB originated in 1946 during the Harry S. Truman administration. President Truman wanted to be personally notified of the most important intelligence on a daily basis following his brief tenure as vice president and his dissatisfaction with the lack of situational awareness. In response, in January 1946, the CIA predecessor organization, the Central Intelligence Group, published the Daily Summary for him, and so began the product that would evolve into the PDB.

In February 1951, the Current Intelligence Bulletin replaced the Daily Summary. It was not until the Kennedy administration that the next turn occurred. In June 1961, the CIA created an additional daily publication in response to what President Kennedy wanted, the President’s Intelligence Checklist, whose first issue contained seven pages of text and maps. In December 1964, President Johnson wanted something different, so the CIA replaced the Checklist with the PDB. The PDB contained, on average, about 20 pages of information for President Gerald Ford, 15 pages for President Jimmy Carter, and 10 to 12 pages for President Bill Clinton. Inside the PDB are articles that the intelligence community believes meets the threshold of the president’s interest, especially topics that will likely be addressed in major media outlets. PDB articles can also presage topics in an upcoming National Intelligence Estimate, a lengthy assessment of a foreign threat that reflects the judgment of the intelligence

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13Kerbel and Olcott, “Synthesizing with Clients,” 18; and Helgerson, Getting to Know the President, 185.

14Helgerson, Getting to Know the President, 7.

15Ibid., 9.

16Ibid., 49.

17Ibid., 58.


community. As an example of PDB content, in the 18 January 1969 issue, 10 short articles were included: one on South Vietnam, three on the Soviet Union, and one each on Peru, Venezuela, Jordan, Kuwait, Berlin, and Canada.20 The lead item was a short article on the status of discussions between South Vietnamese vice president Nguyen Cao Ky and American ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. One of the articles on the Soviet Union discussed the test firing of a new short-range missile from a Soviet nuclear attack submarine; it also included a terrestrial-based photo of the submarine entering the White Sea three days prior to missile launch, a map of the test firing location, and an overhead image of the submarine at its berthed location in Litsa Bay. Another Soviet article reported on the return to Earth of the Soyuz 5 manned spacecraft, which had completed the first-ever docking of two manned spacecraft (the other being Soyuz 4) and the transfer of the Soviet crew between the two. The articles on Jordan and Kuwait generally addressed the degree to which these two governments supported terrorist organizations and their activities.

All versions of the PDB began with a small distribution but expanded beyond the initial intended audience. The Bulletin was given to seven individuals—the president, the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the three service chiefs—but grew to 13 by 1967.21 The Checklist started out with one individual—the president—and expanded to 17 by 1964: the president, the secretary of defense plus two others from the office of the secretary of defense, the secretary of state plus four subordinates, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and two staff members, the secretary of the treasury, and the attorney general.22 The PDB started with seven at the start of President George W. Bush’s administration and grew to 20 by 2008.23

Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson did not read the Bulletin; instead, their White House staff or advisers read it and then summarized it for the president.24 Presidents Kennedy (for the Checklist), Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan did read the PDB, typically in front of a White House policy adviser.25 President George H.W. Bush was

22Helgerson, Getting to Know the President, 57.
23Ibid., 168.
25Helgerson, Getting to Know the President.
the first sitting president to read the PDB in the presence of a career intelligence officer, the PDB briefer, who was seated near the president, a practice that continued through President George W. Bush’s administration.26 President George W. Bush was the first president to conduct “deep dives,” taking topics from the PDB and scheduling in-depth follow-up discussions directly with the intelligence experts, typically in the presence of other key policymakers.27 President Barack Obama made some changes during his first administration: reading the PDB by himself first, then having an ODNI senior executive as the briefer join him later; beginning in 2012, he received the PDB digitally on a mobile device instead of print media.28

The PDB briefer’s daily schedule begins by waking up by about 1:00 a.m.; arriving to work each day on the seventh floor of CIA headquarters in Langley, typically between 2:00 and 3:00 a.m.; reading and preparing for the briefing later that morning; meeting the intelligence analysts who author the PDB articles (called “pre-briefers”) at about 5:00 a.m.; typically heading out by 6:30 a.m. or earlier to meet policymakers in their offices; returning by 9:30 a.m. for an all-PDB briefer feedback session with the PDB management at Langley; then completing administrative work, communicating with analysts and managers, cleaning up and preparing for the next day, and departing CIA headquarters typically by 1:00 or 2:00 p.m.; and arriving at home by 3:00 p.m.29

THE PDB BRIEFER-POLICYMAKER CONTEXT

The purpose of the intelligence information in the PDB is to help policymakers create better policy within the national security arena.30 As such, the PDB often sets the agenda for the president’s daily discussions with his or her closest advisers.31 The presence of the PDB briefer is important to

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26Ibid., 127.
27Ibid., 169.
31Johnson, “Glimpses into the Gems of American Intelligence”; and Pincus, “Measuring a President’s Approach on Foreign Policy.”
both the intelligence and policymaker communities because it implies that the intelligence is essential and that policymakers’ feedback will be captured and incorporated. For the PDB, whose primary customer is the president, it is essential that the contents meet the presidential threshold of attention. However, it is hard for PDB briefers to get accurate feedback from policymakers. There are two primary reasons for this: first, policymakers read the PDB, which is a solitary activity, and second, the harder of the two, the social conditions separating briefer and policymaker are extreme.

First, sitting in front of someone who is reading and trying to figure out whether the PDB meets his or her needs is a psychological challenge. Readers try to understand complex information with as few words as possible, and busy executives have little time to spend reading—both incentives to keep the narrative short. And then there are the technical aspects of how the information is constructed, the nuances of the data and assembly process, and the inferences created by the author. Finally, the nature of reading itself, because it is a solitary act and not a social interaction with another person, means the reader is left to his or her own interpretation, without the observer, such as a PDB briefer, knowing how or why the reader’s views are forming or changing.

The PDB briefer has a very different worldview than the policymaker. The intelligence officer sees his or her purpose as being a source of valuable information for policy formation, whereas the policymaker wants to find information to support his or her policy or to refute someone else’s policy. Differences in worldview create key tensions for the policymaker: intelligence often leaves the situation muddy, whereas clarity is needed to bolster the policymaker’s confidence; intelligence may come across as so clear that it restricts policymaker’s options; intelligence may contradict the policymaker’s policies; the policymaker may be so busy integrating other, less technical, more compatible sources and types of information that focusing on intelligence information is not a priority; intelligence may come after a policymaker has made up his or her mind and therefore is too late to influence policy; intelligence may contain different assumptions about the world than those of the policymaker; or uncertainties stated in intelligence may force contingency thought planning about second- or third-order problems.

32Gardiner, “Dealing with Intelligence-Policy Disconnects.”
33Wolfberg, “Communication Patterns between the Briefer and the Policymaker.”
37Hughes, “The Fate of Facts in the World of Men.”
effects, which is well beyond the need for simplicity within the policymaker’s arena.\textsuperscript{38} However, even though these tensions exist, in the moment of their face-to-face encounter and as a result of their repeated and daily one-on-one interactions, \textit{PDB} briefers and policymakers exchange information of value.\textsuperscript{39}

Second, the \textit{PDB} briefer’s temporary yet recurring journey into the policymaker’s world is affected by at least two intense social forces: the tremendous power distance between briefer and policymaker and the intensity of dealing with senior policymaker personalities. The power distance between two people is the difference in authority; when the difference in authority is great, so, too, is the power distance.\textsuperscript{40} When the distance is great, access to those with power is both highly improbable and, if acquired, highly unpredictable because of a lack of common ground.\textsuperscript{41} Studies of the personalities of presidents of the United States, which likely are applicable to other senior policymakers, show that individuals can vary dramatically in how they process information—using internal versus external informational cues or being comfortable versus less comfortable with ambiguous information—and how they interact personally with others—being introverted versus extroverted, dominating versus accommodating, or having a positive or negative outlook about the job.\textsuperscript{42}

When combined, these psychological factors—the solitary nature of reading and differences in worldview—along with the social factors—power distance and intensity of personality—make it imperative for the policymaker to trust the \textit{PDB} briefer. It is only by gaining and maintaining the policymaker’s trust that the \textit{PDB} briefer is able to provide a sensegiving service, adding information that the policymaker needs in order to use the \textit{PDB}.


SENSEGIVING

Policymakers place a high value on having access to information that helps them make sense of what they read, see, and hear because they are constantly negotiating the game of influence in their policymaking terrain with their peers, superiors, and subordinates.43 Prior to national security meetings, most policymakers need the information contained within the PDB adapted for the language and meaning processes they know. The PDB briefer has unique access, giving him or her the opportunity to simultaneously understand the intelligence information contained within the PDB and the policymaker’s personal cognitive and processing needs. One important result is that PDB briefers are able to increase policymakers’ situational awareness of how other policymakers involved with the interagency national security process think about the PDB content, a key political competency for predicting and compensating for how policymakers will react.44 The policymaker does not usually do the adapting of the PDB information because this ability to contextualize intelligence-based threat information is not a typical competency for most policymakers.45 This is where PDB briefers’ rare access comes into play: their low-key, personalized, and trusted sensegiving service to policymakers aids the policymakers in making sense of the threat information within their cognitive terms and political landscape.46 The research method used to study this sensegiving service is discussed next.

44Beckmann, Pushing the Agenda, 37.
45Noordegraaf, “Professional Sense-Makers.”
46While sensegiving characterizes what service PDB briefers provide, the reason for and method of how they do it are analogous to “informing” behaviors. The phenomenon of informing comes from the management literature; see, for example, Alistair Preston, “Interactions and Arrangements in the Process of Informing,” Accounting, Organizations and Society 11 (1986): 521–540; Heath Colebach, Sam Horrocks, and Jeff Smith, “Executive Models of Informing—An Empirical Study,” Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application 3 (2001): 21–32; and Matthew Hall, “Accounting Information and Managerial Work,” Accounting, Organizations and Society 35 (2010): 301–315. Informing begins with the delivery of an organization’s officially produced document—a product by the official system—to a decision maker. The purpose of the document is to provide the decision maker with information the organization believes the decision maker needs and wants, but in actuality, it does not provide all of what decision makers consider critical and essential information. As a result, the decision maker needs the information contextualized by acquiring additional information. Empirical studies within management settings have shown that decision makers initiate the process of informing by talking with others, observing others, and sharing informal documentation with others—socially constructing information—to glean additional understanding. The reason decision makers initiate their own informing process is that they need to increase their understanding of the context of the official information and how to interpret the meaning of information for future decisions they cannot anticipate. See Martha S. Feldman and James G. March, “Information in Organizations as Signal and Symbol,” Administrative Science Quarterly 26 (1981): 171–186; Preston, “Interactions and Arrangements in the Process of Informing”; and Hall, “Accounting Information and Managerial Work.”
RESEARCH METHOD
The research is based on interviews with 14 intelligence officers conducted during 2011; the intelligence officers had been PDB briefers between 2007 and 2010. The policymakers they briefed were in office during the last two years of the second George W. Bush administration and the first two years of the first Obama administration. The 14 PDB briefers stated that they briefed a total of 24 policymaker positions during these four years, ranging from the president to an undersecretary in various departments. Because almost all PDB briefers who were interviewed—with the exception of those briefing the president and vice president—briefed more than one policymaker during any one day, the number of policymaker positions briefed by the 14 briefers was 37. As briefer tour lengths were far less than the total time the interviewed PDB briefers worked collectively, some briefers supported the same position because one briefed the position during the Bush administration and the other during the Obama administration, for example. Some briefers through replacement tours of duty during the same administration briefed the same policymaker. As a result, the actual number of unique individual policymakers briefed by the 14 briefers was 27. Table 1 summarizes this information.

Using grounded theory as the analytic methodology to analyze the interview data, 251 initial interpretative codes were associated with the interviewees’ statements, consolidated into 11 codes during the second phase of focused coding and further consolidated into four theoretical

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47Fourteen currently employed intelligence officers with PDB briefer experience were interviewed between March and June 2011. Eleven were men and three were women. Their average federal employment tenure as intelligence officers prior to their selection as a PDB briefer was 18.4 years, with a standard deviation of 6.2 years. The length of a PDB briefer’s tour varies, but the average for the 14 briefers was 17.3 months, with a standard deviation of 4.5 months. They were highly educated: of the 14, eight had a master’s degree, one a doctorate, and the remaining five bachelor’s degrees. Most degrees were in the social sciences. To find briefers to interview, the author knew one former PDB briefer through his personal social network and used a snowball approach to invite a briefer to introduce him to another. No PDB briefer who was asked declined to be interviewed. Each, in fact, looked forward to telling their story—an intense experience that was difficult to share with anyone not having the same experience—because they felt it had never been told. Each briefer was asked one question: “Please tell me about a typical day as a PDB briefer from the time you woke up to go to work until the time you left work.” Most interviews lasted 90 minutes, and two lasted almost two hours. The briefers were guaranteed anonymity as well as anonymity of their association with a named policymaker or policymaker’s position. Therefore, every attempt has been made here to ensure that briefers’ identities or associations to policymakers have been protected. All gender references made by briefers in quotations presented in the article have been replaced with the gender-neutral phrase “the office holder.” There was no audio or video recording of the interviews since they all took place in secure government buildings. Only handwritten notes and verbatim quotations were taken. On any one day between 2007 and 2010, 15 PDB briefers were on duty. The 14 briefers interviewed for this study represent about 20 percent of the entire number of PDB briefers on duty during this time period, a large proportion of a sample to participate in qualitative research.
codes during the third phase of coding. The four codes were “information to help the policymaker make sense of information in the PDB”; “feedback information from the policymaker”; “creating a trusting relationship with the policymaker”; and “threats to the mutual trusting relationship with policymaker.”

Because PDB briefer sensegiving involves the social construction of information—where two or more people interact with each other to develop new information—an interpersonal communications-related framework was deemed suitable to guide the analysis. In particular, relational communication theory is designed to explain the ways two

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people communicate. The theory consists of two parts. First, the communication of meaning between two people simultaneously occurs at two levels: cognitive and relational. Second, when communicating with each other, individuals self-regulate the exchange of cognitive and relational meanings through feedback loops; one type of feedback loop changes the relationship usually for the better to increase the opportunity for improving the relationship, while the other type stabilizes the relationship because of the risk of the relationship getting worse. Recent psychological evidence reinforces this theory of communication.

The data analysis identified two sensegiving components within the PDB briefer-to-policymaker context. Sensegiving consists of the provision of information and the existence of mutual trust. Not only do information and trust occur simultaneously, but also they affect each other. Trust is an antecedent of the value of information, but if trust is broken, that puts its benefit at risk and therefore can be an obstacle to sensegiving. Information helps create and reinforce trust, but if the information is not valued, that puts trust at risk and therefore can also be an obstacle to sensegiving. The PDB briefer is constantly balancing all four effects of sensegiving: the benefits of and obstacles to information and the benefits of and obstacles to trust. Next, the effects of information are discussed, followed by the effects of trust.

EFFECTS OF INFORMATION: BENEFITS AND OBSTACLES

Benefits of Information: Helping Policymakers Make Sense of Information

Briefers create value through their sensegiving. They provide additional politically relevant meta-information, or “information about information,” by knowing why policymakers want critical organizational information, where they acquire the information they need to satisfy policymakers’ needs, and how they contextualize threat information effectively to policymakers.

Policymakers want critical organizational information. Briefers describe three types of organizational information that policymakers seek but are not included in the PDB. First, policymakers want to know what PDB-related information the president of the United States is thinking about or focusing on.

(Briefer 9, designated B9) Like North Korea, is in the office holder’s book because the President sees it, but not so much highlighted. I asked the office holder if I highlight too much, was I talking too much or including too many products behind the tab. I asked the office holder twice, for example, “do you want me to include Libya?” The office holder said, “I want to see what the President is paying attention to and by seeing all the articles in the PDB, it helps me see his landscape. It helps me in competing with what I want but have no control over.”

Second, policymakers want to know what peer policymakers think about PDB-related information because having that knowledge gives policymakers a strategic advantage when national security issues are discussed or decided on during various interagency meetings, such as National Security Council, Principals Committee, or Deputies Committee meetings.

(B7) I found it useful to know if the other office holder found something in the PDB useful and if my office holder did not but the other did. My office holder would want to know what the other office holder was interested in. The knowledge of a particular intelligence question or interest then would come up at a PC [Principals Committee] meeting, and my office holder would know the nuances of the topic.

The third reason is that they want to be prepared for other perspectives on PDB-related information that might come up from their staff, peers, and superiors, and if those perspectives cannot be assessed or validated directly, they appreciate it when the briefer provides an independent view—the intelligence community view—about a topic.

(B3) One day I passed the office holder in the West Wing. The office holder took me into the office and closed the door. The office holder said, “This is what I understand how things are in . . . so what do you think?” I reached into my book bag but the office holder stopped me and said, “I know you have a paper in there, but I want to know what you think.” I knew the office holder was looking for reassurances from intelligence so I mentally reviewed the intelligence I had read recently and said, “I appreciate the question and the answer is . . .” I gave the office holder the position of the Intelligence Community. The office holder said, “That was good. I just wanted to hear from someone outside my staff.”
Where briefers get additional information. Briefers seek out information to increase the policymaker’s knowledge related to a topic prior to a decision meeting, a visit from a domestic or foreign official, or travel to a domestic or foreign location. Briefers do this in at least four ways.

The predominant way is during the daily meeting that starts at 9:30 a.m., when the available PBD briefers who have completed their daily briefings get together in one room to share with each other what policymakers are thinking. What one PDB briefer says about the policymaker he or she supports becomes useful information for other PDB briefers who are listening.

(B6) I realized that the key portion of the feedback session was the first segment. Then, only the PDB briefers were in the room and one or two senior managers of the PDB program. The analysts had not come in the room yet. It was a very frank discussion. I could hear exactly how the office holders reacted to articles. If there was a discussion of a sensitive issue, you can hear the explicit discussion. You get the real low-down of what is going on, if the office holder’s reaction was notable. It provided insight into the workings of the administration, it helped with esprit de corps of the briefers, it was the only time we could freely share what only we were going through. It was a place to talk about a context that only we experienced, and it helped me provide context around the issues that my office holders might be working on.

The second way is the rapport the PBD briefers establish with the administrative and operational support staff assigned to a policymaker in order to collect information that identifies the policymaker’s focus of attention. Examples of the types of information collected are topics of interest, upcoming scheduled visits or meetings, and the attendees. These support personnel are in the reporting chain of command of the policymaker, often work near or adjacent to the policymaker’s office, and have frequent but short contact with the policymaker. However, because of the PDB briefer’s dedicated time, typically spanning 15 to 20 continuous minutes with the policymaker, and the intimate nature of their interaction during that time, the PDB briefer can provide as much benefit to the support personnel in terms of useful knowledge as the support personnel can provide to the PDB briefer.

(B14) I heard all the discussions about the office holder’s meeting schedule, the office holder’s travel schedule, issues coming up, policy decisions the office holder made during the staff meeting, how action oriented the office holder was, the office holder's priorities, including daily priorities, short term priorities, and long-term priorities.

(B11) There is a lot of mystery behind the PDB. The White House . . . office . . . needed a little visibility and I needed insight into what they
needed. After the briefing, I would go to them and let them know what the office holder was interested in. They were very appreciative of my input because even though they were providing three inputs a day to the office holder, they never had any interaction with the office holder. They just put together a list of hot items and fed them forward. I was the only one who actually got feedback so I was helping them so they could help the office holder better.

The third way the PDB briefers get additional information is by talking one on one with other PDB briefers who may share useful information. With the time crunch preparing each morning for the brief, when briefers spend two to three hours sometime between 2:00 and 5:00 a.m., it is almost impossible for the briefer to know everything that might be helpful to a policymaker, so establishing close ties with coworking PDB briefers is an advantage some are able to pursue.

(B7) The PDB briefers who sat closest to me on the 7th floor were the ones I talked with the most. I would talk one-on-one with these PDB briefers. They would show me what they put behind the tab and I would show them what I put. They gave me a nickname, the “...” because I would get and find stuff they didn’t. We bonded that way between PDB briefers.

(B13) I have very good collaboration with the other PDB briefers. I would ask what they are doing as far as selection of products. If I used a product that a PDB briefer gave to an office holder, I would tell my White House office holder that the product was provided to that office holder.

Fourth, almost all briefers brief two or more policymakers, and many are able to talk with a subordinate policymaker who is willing to discuss what information his or her superior needs.

(B6) I interacted with the subordinate office holder. That office holder would be a good source of knowledge about what the secretary was interested in.

(B9) The subordinate office holder is the office holder’s point person into the National Security Council and subordinate office holder is an adviser to the office holder. So, I keep close tabs with the subordinate because the subordinate has all of the office holder’s policy issues, meetings with foreign leaders, cyber topics, and policy core issues like counterterrorism.

How briefers accomplish sensegiving of threat information. Briefers realize that policymakers are very busy people and that intelligence information is only one of many kinds of information—originating from many
types of individuals—coming to the policymaker. Briefers employ at least three techniques to help ensure the policymaker makes sense of the threat information they convey.

The first technique—called “going beyond the article”—involves the recognition by the briefer that the additional information he or she provides has to not only connect the policymaker to something in the PDB but also add context, interpretation, and/or details tailored to the cognitive and processing needs of the policymaker.

(B3) The office holder wanted stuff beyond the article. That means the office holder wanted articles that could have branches and sequels. These would be opportunities to have a conversation that could extend the value of just reading the article. When I sensed that the office holder was willing to go beyond the article, that is when I would start the conversation.

(B12) The briefing has to carry further than what is on paper, it has to advance the story. I have to provide more background and context. I also quizzed the pre-briefer for what was really relevant to the office holder in their articles. I have my game plan, in a way. It is whatever can carry the story farther so that the office holder could ask the team what they can do.

The second technique—the “storyline”—involves the briefer’s recognition that because time has elapsed since the last time a threat item was included in the PDB, the introduction of additional information has to be connected to what the policymaker knew and understood the last time he or she was briefed. The story has to meet the policymaker’s threshold for paying attention. Every successive reintroduction of a story, especially when time has elapsed in terms of days, weeks, or months, has to appear as if the old item is still fresh in the policymaker’s consciousness, as if the elapsed time was just a few minutes.

(B11) You become familiar with the storyline. After a while it is about advancing the story for the office holder. The PDB was either advancing the story, or bringing something new. Some issues were hard-wired like the Middle East.

(B14) All the stories were continuous threads but some were more reoccurring than others. For example, if there was a story that was more strategic like how leadership in Pakistan or Afghanistan was thinking, that would have a developing story and I would only brief those when something new was building on the developing story.

The third technique—the “tee-up”—involves verbally introducing a topic by adding context in a sentence or two before the policymaker
begins to read the *PDB* article. There is usually a reason why a tee-up is needed, normally because the *PDB* article may not explicitly contain an important point that the briefer believes the policymaker should know.

(B12) Sometimes an article came out in the *PDB* because of production timing. The office holder would be confused by that, and ask, “Why is this piece in the book?” It was a matter of story development. Yes, it was arbitrary. But it kept them from being totally captured to the inbox. For the blind spot, we looked for new topics. They required more tee-up, we had to sell the piece. Sometimes I had to annotate in the margins of the *PDB* so that when the office holder read it the office holder would have some context already and not be confused, often reading the *PDB* while the office holder was eating breakfast.

**Obstacles to Information: Attending to Policymaker Intentional and Unintentional Feedback**
While the foregoing describes the benefits of information, briefers also experience two kinds of potential obstacles: the challenges of responding satisfactorily to policymakers’ verbal requests directed at the briefer, and the uncertainty in interpreting policymakers’ nonverbal behavior.

**Verbal feedback from policymakers to briefers.** Briefers can receive verbal feedback from policymakers while sitting with them during briefing sessions. Briefers generally receive three types of requests from policymakers.

One type is a request by policymakers to use the *PDB* as a venue to raise to the president what they feel are important issues that would be otherwise difficult for them personally to raise within a sometimes contentious interagency process. Getting a topic written for the *PDB* raises the visibility of that topic to the president.

(B14) The office holder has a keen interest in . . . So I would brief anything to do with . . . There were times the office holder would say, “Put this in the *PDB.*” I would then come back to the 0930 feedback session and report this. And they would say, “oh no, here comes another request for . . .” After all, it’s competing with other articles. I have seen my office holder use the *PDB* as a marketing strategy to raise the visibility of issues my office holder was committed to, like . . . The office holder’s approach was always multi-pronged. The approach was to integrate departmental interests. The office holder knew one way to get that done was through raising the issue through the *PDB* because then the President would be exposed to it and he would ask questions, and the departments that needed to be involved would do so.
The briefer mitigates obstacles to meeting such a request by balancing the ease of being in the presence of policymakers, who have tremendous power distance from them, with the need for the briefer to coexist within the hierarchical PDB and intelligence community structure in which they officially are subordinated. The briefer tactfully relays the policymaker’s request using the voice of positional authority of the policymaker.

Another type of request asked of PDB briefers is to better understand the quality of the information presented in the PDB. Policymakers want to know about the intelligence sources of the information. The sources are often from human intelligence or signals intelligence collection. The briefer knows that knowledge about foreign threats is rarely complete, rarely available to be answered in the way a puzzle has a definitive answers. Intelligence problems are more mysterious and therefore are conducive to the necessary art of framing. Knowledge about sources provides a way for policymakers to frame the quality of the information, an especially important competency for policymakers motivated by the investigations of the 11 September terrorist attacks of 2001 and the reforms prompted by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004.

(B5) With the office holder and the subordinate office holder, they are getting the feed every day. Both office holders knew the sources like an analyst would. They could weigh the source. I was very surprised how many times I get questions about sources. I thought they would not care about details on sources, how intimately familiar they were with sources; I was told that even the President recognized particular sources. Why are office holders interested in sourcing? It provides a sense of confidence in the reports. It tells them how close the source of the intelligence was to the information. The office holder was also interested in the history of the source. How reliable has the source been?

Because the briefers are not the authors of PDB articles and usually do not have expertise about the specific human intelligence sources used in an article, they mitigate this potential obstacle either by making use of intelligence-related material made available to them as part of their briefing preparation in order to answer the question on the spot, or they let the policymaker know they do not know the answer and promise to get the information to the policymaker at a later time after discussing the issue with the intelligence analysts who authored the article.

A third type of request asks for additional analytical information about a PDB article. While briefers meeting with policymakers on a daily basis tend to provide them with an understanding of what intelligence capabilities more or less can or cannot do and what else the intelligence community generally knows or does not know, it is usually policymakers with a greater understanding of intelligence, typically those longer into their term of office, who are the ones who ask more meaningful questions.54

(B6) When I did not have the answer, I generated a tasking when I got back to headquarters. I always had a dialogue with the office holder and the subordinate office holder when I was going to task their questions to make sure I understood exactly what their questions were. Sometimes, their question was for extra data, and sometimes it was for a more complex analysis that for a variety of reasons that I said the PDB article was not designed to accommodate.

As discussed earlier, briefers do not author the PDB articles and may not be experts in the topic. To mitigate the potential obstacle of not being able to provide additional analytical knowledge during the briefing, briefers make formal requests to the intelligence community. Policymaker questions become “tasks” within the PDB management system, which means an intelligence analyst in the intelligence community is assigned the responsibility of providing an answer to the PDB briefer.

Nonverbal feedback from policymakers to briefers. Briefers observe nonverbal behavior from policymakers while sitting with them during briefing sessions. Nonverbal behavior includes the gesturing, posturing, finger touching and positioning, facial expressions, and eye movements by policymakers while reading the PDB. A policymaker’s use of nonverbal behavior can be unintentional, yet the briefer may attach significance to it even though the policymaker is not aware of such meaning.55 Briefers attach great meaning to policymakers’ nonverbal behavior in three ways.

First, briefers become an accepted part of the policymaker’s surroundings, and policymakers let their personalities show, which includes the changeability in their mood.

(B1) I gave the office holder the morning briefing at the office holder’s residence. I would arrive before the office holder came downstairs. I sat in the chair waiting for the office holder. When the office holder started down

the stairs, I stood up and said “good morning.” Depending on how the office holder answered, would determine how I talked to the office holder the rest of the day. If, say, the office holder would talk on and on in response to my “good morning,” then I knew it was good. If the office holder was not chipper but was real quiet, then I was quiet also. It was very important to watch nonverbal communication as cues to the office holder’s mood. I got good at it.

When a briefer enters the area where the policymaker is located for the briefing—an office, a home residence, a car, or an airplane—the briefer mitigates the potential of not considering his or her mood by paying an exceeding amount of attention to the mood of the policymaker to gauge whether the timing is right to provide additional information during the briefing session. Detecting and acting accordingly in response to the policymaker’s mood is one of the most important competencies for the briefer.

Once the mood is established, then the briefer monitors the policymaker’s nonverbal behaviors while he or she is reading the PDB, which provides cues to when additional information can be conveyed.

(B4) You are trying to crack the code. Everybody thinks that when you say you are giving a brief, you are talking, like how you see it on television, someone standing behind a podium talking to an audience. But that is not the case with the PDB. The nonverbal cues are critical because the PDB is meant to be read. There is really not a lot of opportunity to brief in the normal sense of what people think of talking.

The briefer mitigates the potential of not being aware of what the policymaker is concentrating on by sitting near the policymaker, close enough to watch how and where the policymaker’s eyes, hands, and fingers physically track the narrative of the PDB content.

Lastly, after the briefer finishes monitoring the nonverbal behavior, the briefer also has to interpret what it means in such a way that it can be meaningfully fed back as input to the intelligence analysts who wrote the PDB article, which is also part of the briefer’s responsibility.

(B7) The biggest frustration I had was more about coming back after the briefings. The analysts were upset if I didn’t get feedback. But because the office holder and the subordinate office holder were readers, that was hard. I had to explain that the office holder was a reader and that you (the analyst) were lucky if they read the article. That is why I created those categories to give some detail, to differentiate how they read an article if they read it. I also looked at the amount of time they spent on a page. You could see eye movement of the page, or if they turned the page, or if they got
to the bottom of the page. I categorized their body language in a way that would provide feedback to the PDB authors and management into four categories: “was not read,” “was read,” “was read but skimmed,” and “was read and appreciated.”

Sometimes, because reading the PDB is a solitary act, when there is little dialogue between briefer and policymaker, these nonverbal behaviors are the main source of feedback to the intelligence analyst and the PDB management. PDB briefers mitigate the potential of not making use of what becomes an important source of nonverbal feedback by categorizing the extent to which the policymaker pays attention to a PDB article.

Next, the trust component of sensegiving is discussed in detail.

EFFECTS OF TRUST: BENEFITS AND OBSTACLES

Benefit of Trust: Creating Mutual Trust with the Policymaker

A trusting relationship is important for both briefer and policymaker, but for different reasons: for the briefer, it is to feel the policymaker values him or her, while for the policymaker, it is to be comfortable and to trust the briefer. Briefers, in addition, provide types of incidents that demonstrate why a policymaker needs a trusting relationship with a briefer.

Why briefers need a trusting relationship with the policymaker. Briefers have a professional need to be of value to the policymaker. The briefer feels his or her value must be consistent with the level of important matters of state surrounding the policymaker’s setting, which means the briefer has to span a tremendous power distance between the two. To the outside observer, the spanning of great power distances must seem unreal, but to the briefer, his or her relational trust component overrides the distance and actually determines the value of the information component.

(B9) I want to offer something more than what is in the PDB. What is in the PDB is often bare bones, just the facts. If I am to provide a service instead of just a courier, I need to have a discussion and provide some kind of context for things that are in the office holder’s primary bin of interest.

(B4) If they have to ask for it, by the time you get it to them, it is too late. I saw my value as anticipating what the office holder needed. When I was giving the brief, my mission was for the office holder to consume data and have the context needed to understand it. And to ascertain what the office holder needs to make the office holder’s job easier. When I sit down with the PDB, I am focused on the individual. I am engaging the individual in order to provide support for the institution.
**Why policymakers need a trusting relationship with the briefer.** Briefers said that policymakers have two main reasons for wanting a trusting relationship with them.

First, at a minimum, the policymaker needs to have a level of comfort—feeling at ease—in the presence of the briefer. If there is unease, the briefer will likely not be invited back.

(B11) Over time, the office holder got more comfortable with me. Probably it was harder to develop a rapport. I know for a fact that the office holder was comfortable with me. I was told that by one of the staff.

Second, once comfort is established, the policymaker can begin to trust the briefer, trust being the expectation that what the briefer says he or she will do, he or she actually will do. Briefers understand that trust by the policymaker means that what is heard or seen by the briefer will be carefully guarded.

(B1) Office holders establish trust with you. During the first few months of my tenure as briefer, the office holder would only make comments in reaction to the articles in the PDB that were directly related to the content in the articles. I knew that trust had been established when the office holder gave me information from others. For example, while thinking about an article while reading, the office holder might say to me “I had lunch with . . . who had a different point of view.” When the office holder revealed that kind of information to me, I knew I was trusted.

**Evidence that policymakers need a trusting relationship with the briefer.** Briefers discuss three types of incidents when they feel trust is demonstrated by the policymaker.

The first type involves the briefer feeling part of a team with the policymaker.

(B5) The office holder had just gotten back from two weeks of leave. I come in and the office holder says, “Good morning, how was your leave?” Of course, I was not on leave. I was doing my briefings. The office holder said on Monday you have to recharge your soul, “When was the last time you took leave?” On Friday, the office holder asked me what are my leave plans and said “I will call your supervisors and tell them to get you leave.” The following week, the office holder brought it up again and pressed me. On some level, the office holder cared for me. Caring is part of the familiarity. The office holder values people who are close. The office holder asked me if I could stay on as the briefer until . . . but could have said, “I want you to stay.” But the office holder asked in a way that was very cognizant of my life as a briefer, one that I had done it for two years. The office holder asked in a way I could say no.
The second shows what it is like when trust is established.

(B2) The relationship I had as briefer with the office holder was like the glue that let the knowledge get to the office holder. The office holder knew that analytic products were watered down by consensus. The office holder would ask how it was watered down, who and what were the dissenting views because not all that kind of dissenting information is put into print. The office holder would like it when I could give the inside story of the analysis disagreements. One day, I told the office holder about the disagreements but that I would only be willing to share that with the office holder if the office holder did not attribute me as the source because if it ever got out that I snitched on the analysts, I would lose my integrity. I directly asked the office holder if this could be kept private. I said, “Don’t out me.” The office holder said, “You can trust me.”

The third case is quite interesting. Sometimes after trust is established, an incident happens between the briefer and policymaker to break that trust. This third case is an example of when trust is reestablished.

(B3) One day, the office holder said, “What else do you have for me?” I gave the office holder the behind-the-tab articles but after three articles, the office holder fell asleep. I went into a cold sweat. I immediately thought this incident would impact my future access to the office holder and I wasn’t sure what to do. The office holder awoke after two minutes; I just stood there for those two minutes. It was just the two of us in the room. The office holder saw me upon awakening. I ended the briefing real quickly, like within three minutes. After that, I was not invited back to give the office holder a briefing. But after one month, the office holder called me back to start the briefings again. I believe the reason I was called back was that no rumors were heard around the White House. In other words, I kept my mouth shut.

**Obstacles to Trust: Mitigating Any Threats to Trust**

Threats to the briefer’s trusting relationship with the policymaker are of utmost concern to the PDB briefer because without trust, the briefer cannot provide sensegiving service to the policymaker. Without trust, there is no benefit to the information. Threats originate from three sources: the PDB editing process, the analyst who authors the PDB article, and the PDB briefer.

**Quality of the PDB articles.** All briefers see the quality of the articles as a reflection of themselves. They are sales men and women, selling the intelligence product, one they have not authored. The biggest and strongest
concern they have is that the *PDB* editing process sometimes omits the most compelling part of the article.

(B12) Oftentimes, the most important part of the story was not present in the story. This was evident during the pre-briefer session with the analysts. Some pre-briefers made it very easy to understand what was important about the article. Others made it hard for me to figure out what was important. While for other pre-briefers, it was impossible to tell. Occasionally, the author may even say, “I don’t agree with the piece.” It could be that the editing and review processes had so changed what the author said, that the author disagrees what is now said.

When this happens, briefers mitigate this obstacle by adding their own oral narrative when briefing the policymaker to compensate so that the compelling part can be voiced, a decision the briefer makes independent—without consultation—of the *PDB* management system and yet depends on the briefer’s assessment of the informational and processing needs of the policymaker at the time of the briefing.

Another concern briefers have, although less serious a threat, are readability problems and grammar errors within the *PDB* articles.

(B6) I also read the PDB for quality control purposes. You cannot believe that after so many layers of review how many mistakes there are. There are typos, grammatical errors, missing words, and sentences that do not make sense. What I did, as all the PDB briefers did when they found errors, was to take the article back to the production center to have them correct it.

Briefers mitigate this obstacle by having the errors corrected by the *PDB* production team.

*The analyst who wrote the PDB article.* For many briefers, coming back to headquarters and meeting with analysts is one of the most stressful parts of their job. Briefers talk about three problem areas they have to manage.

The first and most important to the briefers is not revealing to the analyst all the feedback they get from the policymaker in order to protect the policymaker’s trust in them.

(B1) The President’s Support Staff would leave the room and the authors of the articles that were included in the PDB were invited into the room and sat behind the briefers. The briefers discussed how each of the office holders reacted to the articles, if any comments were made. I would explain the feedback by my office holder but I had to protect what was said. You had to develop trust with the office holder. Bad comments would not make their way back to the author. I would paraphrase comments that the office
holder said so that the author could not attribute anything negative made by the office holder.

(B4) You had to guard very carefully this feedback, only for those in the circle of trust. I had to protect the relationship. It is key to the access and what to talk about. The only people that I could share what was said were other PDB briefers. If the office holder talks with . . . , you don’t talk about their conversation. You just give them the information they asked for, not the inside baseball.

Holding back this kind of feedback is a balancing act for the briefer. On the one hand, briefers know what it is like—as they have served as intelligence analysts—to want feedback from their customers, but on the other hand, briefers are protectors of policymaker’s trust and know that such feedback cannot be fully disclosed. Briefers mitigate this obstacle by providing some feedback but not anything so direct and nothing that can be associated with any policymaker. The briefers are the gatekeepers of this intimate kind of policymaker feedback into the intelligence system, and it is an important competency they must master.

A second concern is how the briefer is going to deal with cases in which the policymaker knows more than what the analyst writes about.

(B12) The office holder was so well informed. The office holder had conversations throughout the day with many types of people. And the office holder got inputs from staff. I assumed the office holder was more knowledgeable than what the PDB article said.

(B14) The office holder has met many foreign leaders. The office holder would challenge the way the PDB authors characterized the leaders whom the office holder knew. The office holder knew more about some of these foreign leaders than the analysts.

Briefers say that many policymakers know more about people and issues through their personal involvement through years of professional contact, yet intelligence analysts write about such people and issues for these same policymakers who may know more than the analysts. Policymakers are reluctant to give negative feedback to the analyst in such cases; while the policymaker may do so in front of the briefer, the briefer mitigates this obstacle by not revealing such feedback to the analyst. The briefer knows that the policymaker is concerned that negative feedback may have the unintended effect of reducing access to topics in which the analyst is an expert and the policymaker may need in the future.

The third concern involves the difference between the feedback policymakers give and what analysts expect as feedback. Briefers say that analysts
are concerned with the quality of their presentation and the structure of their argument, whereas the policymaker is concerned with whether the article influences his or her policy position.

(B7) If the office holder had a critical comment, I would go to the analyst’s manager because the analyst would usually personalize it and think it was about them. Handling the critical comment required tact because if the office holder did not like the content for reasons they stated, it had nothing to do with the author. I would let the manager then deal with the author. The manager got it.

Analysts can take feedback about their writing quality and logic very emotionally and personally, especially when the audience is a senior policymaker. Analysts typically do not understand that the policymaker views the knowledge in a PDB article by whether it does or does not support his or her policy position. Briefers mitigate this obstacle by giving their feedback to someone in a management role supervising the analyst because managers—having little or no personal involvement in the article—are better positioned to objectively hear the needs of the policymaker.

The PDB briefer’s own missteps. Briefers discuss two areas of interaction with policymakers where they—the briefers—are the very instigators of threats to the trust they want to protect. The briefers’ own missteps are the greatest threats to trust with policymakers.

Briefers are constantly judging whether they are eliminating the power separation from the policymaker from their consciousness in fear that they might cross the line into an improper professional relationship.

(B2) One day, there was article in the PDB about . . . talking about the tension between Democracy and Islam. I knew the office holder’s comfort zone and assumptions about Islam. The office holder talked about a Middle-East expert who had written about. . . . , and I said [the scholar] was not very current. The office holder then said that [the scholar] was coming to dinner. I offered an opposing analysis off the cuff. The office holder did not embrace my comments. I said, “It is just another data point.” The office holder said, “It’s interesting and I’ll bring it up with him.” I thought this was not a good sign and that I had overstepped my boundary.

(B6) What is the inner circle? They have their senior advisors who have easy access to them all of the time, who the office holder relies upon. The PDB has aspects of the inner circle. If I called down to the office holder’s staff that I needed to see the office holder only for five minutes to talk about a critical issue, they would get me in. But you don’t want to play that card
too often. You don’t want to cry wolf. I did that one time. There was a lasting impact. For about a week, the office holder did not want me to brief, and when the office holder did see me, it was different.

Briefers are drawn into the policymaker’s “inner circle” by the desire to be on the inside, where the action is.56 Briefers mitigate this obstacle to trust by constantly being reflexively aware of a professional line they must not cross, no matter how tempting it is, and they are almost always able to catch themselves in the act if they find themselves doing so.

The other area of the briefer’s concern is the tendency to move toward a close emotional, interpersonal relationship with the policymaker and the need to fight the tendency.

(B13) The delivery was great. It was so conversational. But both these office holders were disarming. They were very senior people; they had a lot of authority. There were not intelligence types. They talk about their personal life. You have to watch what you say because they will take it as the official intelligence position and their being disarming makes it easy to fall into that. I caught myself once and pulled myself back. They use very colorful language. You have to maintain a professional stance. Its okay for them to say whatever they want. But not okay for you.

(B3) I never saw my relationship with the office holder as friendship because I knew the office holder was political. But when you have an emotional connection with the office holder, you see the person as a real person, not as a position of authority.

Briefers find themselves, amplified by their close proximity to and high degree of intimacy with policymakers, in a close, familiar relationship with them. Briefers are aware of the possible negative consequences of being too friendly, yet know they cannot be unfriendly. They walk a thin line between emotional closeness and distance by being constantly and reflexively aware of themselves, by being cognizant of the politically sensitive situation they are in, and having other briefers available—who understand the unique context no one else in the world is experiencing—to support them by sharing their concerns and learning from each other.

Figure 1 summarizes the components and effects—the how and why, respectively—of PDB briefers engaging in sensegiving to policymakers, specifically, the interrelated components of information and trust as

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56See C.S. Lewis, “The Inner Ring,” Memorial Lecture, King’s College, University of London, 1944, accessed at http://www.lewissociety.org/innerring.php, 20 March 2016, for an insightful analysis of the natural temptation to be inside the “inner circle,” or what Lewis called the “inner ring.”
well as the interrelated effects of their benefits and obstacles. PDB briefers create, protect, and maintain trust with the policymaker in order to assess and provide customized meta-information needs—critically needed, contextualized information related to but not included in the PDB—to help the policymaker make use of intelligence information within the policymaking process.

ENTER THE AGE OF SENSEGIVING
How did the PDB briefer’s sensegiving come into existence? The PDB is the official daily product of a large, federated system of 17 intelligence agencies (including the ODNI), each a rule-based, authority-driven organization, like most government agencies, whose primary purpose is to marshal people, systems, and processes to maximize the output of their product or service. This is the nature of hierarchical organizations; it is the nature of the beast—the official system.

Sometimes, leaders of national security organizations realize—proactively or reactively, intentionally or not—that their official system is not designed to meet all of the needs of those they serve. Rather than attempt the difficult task of redesigning the organization to satisfy a new need, they construct a supplemental organization—like PDB briefers—to handle such responsibilities that sits alongside yet outside the official system but may require different norms, rules and procedures, division of labor, and levels of authority. Official systems tend to be hierarchical, whereas PDB briefers tend to operate nonhierarchically, having few levels
of authority, few divisions of labor, highly networked inside and outside, where individuals achieve influence by solving problems and have fewer rules and different norms.\textsuperscript{57} PDB briefers are aware they behave in these nonhierarchical ways. These characteristics of PDB briefers are indicative of a \textit{parallel organization}; the nonhierarchical system of PDB briefers is connected in parallel to, in order to supplement, the hierarchical official system of the intelligence community.\textsuperscript{58} Members of parallel organizations, such as PDB briefers, enjoy a freedom of movement and a freedom from reporting, a unique type of independence that is not typically found in an official hierarchical system.

Even though, as noted, President George H.W. Bush was the catalyst for the creation of a full-time briefer for a sitting president, thus creating a parallel organization to the intelligence community, it was not until the George W. Bush administration—following the September 11 terrorist attacks of 2001 and the resulting Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004—that escalation in the emphasis and value of intelligence to policymakers occurred.\textsuperscript{59} In response to this escalation, sensegiving emerged as a necessary service for PDB briefers to help policymakers attend to the use of intelligence during this difficult and rare time in recent American history—when America was attacked on its own soil—by contextualizing it within the policymaker’s decision-making cycle. Sensegiving helps ensure knowledge is not wasted.

Figure 2 shows the 70-year evolution of the PDB-based policymaker and intelligence community relationship, as discussed earlier in the history of the PDB section of this article, stepping through four distinct “ages,” from one originally based on separation between these two worlds to one now based on a parallel organization with PDB briefer sensegiving: the age of little feedback (1946–1964); the age of indirect feedback (1964–1988); the age of direct feedback, when fulltime PDB briefers were created as a parallel organization (1988–2001); and the age of sensegiving by PDB briefers (2001–present).


How can sensegiving survive and flourish? Sensegiving in national security parallel organizations is a double-edged sword. On the beneficial side, official systems survive, in part, because they create parallel organizations, ones that act nonhierarchically in order to satisfy a sensegiving service that the official system is not designed to perform. On the detrimental side, most individuals within official systems cannot see into parallel organizations and are not able to understand the sensegiving service to clients or its value to the official system.

There are three dilemmas that make it difficult for intelligence community members, the official system, to understand PDB briefer sensegiving: first, sensegiving occurs in a subordinate-to-superior direction, quite the opposite of the normative superior-to-subordinate direction that is usually found in official systems; second, sensegiving takes place by bridging the worlds of policy and intelligence, not a typical competency found within the official system; and third, sensegiving across dramatically different organizational boundaries thrives in nonhierarchical conditions, quite the opposite condition as that found in official systems.
Official systems using parallel organizations require individuals—both in the intelligence community and with PDB briefers—to consciously acknowledge these dilemmas. The PDB briefers interviewed for this study were able to put these dilemmas into perspective; they possessed the emotional calmness and maturity necessary to handle apparent contradictions within their work life. But it likely does not work to the same degree for those from the intelligence community in their relationship with PDB briefers because of the dilemmas stated earlier. This double-edged sword breeds a tension that must be continually managed in order for sensegiving to flourish.

CONCLUSION
This article brings the PDB briefer sensegiving service to national security policymakers to the forefront and, by making it transparent, presents six contributions, practical and theoretical.

First, scholars now have access to the subordinate-to-superior contextualizing service that intelligence officers—playing the role of PDB briefers—have in the policymaking process. What PDB briefers add through sensegiving is more than the narrative available in the PDB. Sensegiving is based on reciprocal trust with policymakers, providing policymakers contextually relevant information to help them understand the value and implications of intelligence within their policymaking process.

Second, intelligence community professionals managing and employed in the official system can better understand the contextualizing service that sensegiving and parallel organizations contribute to the success of the official system. To conduct sensegiving activities, PDB briefers operate in a very different, nonhierarchical way than the official systems from whence they came; PDB briefers operate in a context that is independent and self-regulated, characteristic of a parallel organization as they operate outside of but alongside the official intelligence community system, yet essential to the success of the official system. Therefore, the success of the parallel organization (and the national security system at large) is not only dependent on the PDB briefer relationship with the policymaker, but also on appropriate stakeholders within the official system who understand the PDB briefer role as subordinate-to-superior sensegivers.

Third, sensegiving can be recognized as a valuable competency. In subordinate-to-superior contexts crossing between different organizational worlds, as occurs with PDB briefers and policymakers, the

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intelligence community can improve the design of PDB briefer job descriptions, selection criteria of applicant material and interviews, and initial orientation and ongoing training. The components and effects of sensegiving identified in Figure 1 could be the basis for developing sensegiving into a competency: providing meta-information to policymakers to help them effectively use the PDB in their policymaking process; detecting and interpreting policymaker reactions to the PDB and responding as needed; establishing a trusting relationship with the policymaker so that meta-information needs are detected and become valuable to the policymaker; and detecting and mitigating threats to that trust. Sensegiving, as a professional competency for the role of PDB briefer, could lead the way for recognizing the value of sensegiving in other subordinate-to-superior national security and policy contexts.

Fourth, this article raises the question of whether a parallel organization must first be in place to bridge two worlds—in our case, of intelligence and national security policymaking—before sensegiving can emerge in subordinate-to-superior contexts. It was the case for the PDB briefer, but it is not known how generalizable this context is. Regarding generalizability, in the Department of Defense, a group of employees serve as briefers within a parallel organization—the Executive Support Office—and its official system, the Defense Intelligence Agency, interfacing with policymakers within the Department of Defense. These briefers provide a briefing product analogous to the PDB to department officials and provide sensegiving to the unique needs of defense officials. In the Department of Homeland Security, we might expect a similar capability in law enforcement fusion centers—where intelligence analysts from various organizations are collocated to share information across levels and sectors of government—that uses analysts, serving as briefers, to provide sensegiving service to state and local public safety policymakers, private sector partners, and the federal government. These two departments would be appropriate contexts for future national security research on sensegiving.

Fifth, this article also raises the question of why and when sensegiving emerges in national security policymaking domains. Is the reason the nature of a specific context that needs contextualizing services, the occurrence of a catalyst such as an event like the September 11 terrorist attacks, a combination of both, or something else? The question becomes especially relevant for other national security and public safety contexts beyond that of PDB briefer sensegiving to policymakers. One notable study specifically focused on sensegiving triggers, but neither within a national security or policymaking context nor from within a parallel organization, and included both managers and employees; the study found that sensegiving
emerged when individuals felt an issue had important consequences for themselves and others in their organization and when they felt their leaders lacked competency in that issue.\textsuperscript{61} Sensegiving research on triggers in national security and parallel organization contexts is suggested.

Sixth, this article focused exclusively on the process of sensegiving within the \textit{PDB} context because the purpose of the research question was to bring to light knowledge about this relatively unknown phenomenon. However, a future research question, given what we now know about the process of subordinate-to-superior sensegiving, could address sensegiving under different security threat and policy conditions. For the threat condition, the \textit{PDB} could contain articles during a national crisis as well as those of a routine nature. The example from the 1969 \textit{PDB} discussed earlier is suggestive that this may be the case: one article involved diplomatic discussions about the Vietnam War, while another article discussed the latest Soviet manned spacecraft developments. Similarly, for different policy conditions, there might be decision-making contexts in which the \textit{PDB} includes a topic for which a presidential policy already exists, but it may also include a topic for which policy does not yet exist. From a policy perspective, knowing whether and how sensegiving might be different for national security situations in crisis from those not in crisis, and in situations when policy does or does not already exist, would be especially relevant and important topics.

In summary, sensegiving is needed by policymakers to make sense of and use the \textit{PDB} during policymaking processes, such as those that occur prior to, during and after National Security Council, Principals Committee, and Deputies Committee meetings. \textit{PDB} briefers use sensegiving to provide a contextualizing service to policymakers, which requires establishing and maintaining a very close and trusting relationship with policymakers in order for \textit{PDB} briefers to anticipate, detect, and react to the meta-information needs of policymakers—information about information—such as politically relevant organizational information as well as the contextualization of threat information not included in the \textit{PDB}. Yet, at the same time, \textit{PDB} briefers also establish and maintain a very close and trusting relationship with intelligence analysts who author articles in the \textit{PDB} and the managers who oversee the production of the \textit{PDB}. Hence, \textit{PDB} briefers connect two very different information-intensive worlds by managing the emotional relationship within each and between them.

\textsuperscript{61}Maitlis and Lawrence, “Triggers and Enablers of Sensegiving in Organizations,” 76–77.