MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

INFORMATION

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE/CODEWORD
(Only red Tab A codeword)

March 18, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY A. KISSINGER.

FROM: A. W. Marshall

SUBJECT: Transmittal of memorandum on President's reading package

Attached (Tab A) you will find a report evaluating the process of producing the President's morning intelligence reading package. It contains an assessment of the current product (giving it good marks) and surfaces some problems and possible improvements. I think we ought to discuss these. I have tried not to bother you so far, but some of the problems and improvements may look different from where you sit. My view, so far, has been how the process looks from several levels below up to just below you.

Problems discussed are:

1. The current anomalous position of the CIA PDB.

2. The general weakness of feedback and guidance in the process for those providing inputs and preparing portions of the package, both at CIA and in the NSC staff.

Improvements suggested for consideration are:

1. Changes in the format of the Situation Room product and perhaps the total package in order to reduce the President's reading load. Some changes might be part of a solution to the CIA PDB problem through its closer integration with the Situation Room product.
2. Measures to improve feedback and guidance, especially to the NSC staff.

3. Provision of a limited number of secure, green telephones for the NSC staff to improve their interaction with analysts in the intelligence community and State and Defense Departments.

4. A tentative proposal is surfaced for a radical change in the way intelligence and other information materials are presented to you, and perhaps could be presented to the President at a later date. It is a flexible on-line reading program, available on a TV screen at all times, with controls allowing the reader to pick subjects he wants to read at several levels of detail. Such a system could give you and/or the President more control over what you read and increase feedback to the organizations supplying inputs to the program. Your reactions are required.
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MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY A. KISSINGER

FROM: A. W. Marshall

SUBJECT: Evaluation of the Process Leading to the President’s Morning Intelligence Reading Package

The purpose of this memorandum is (1) to present a general assessment of the process that leads to the President's morning intelligence reading package, (2) to raise some problems for discussion, and (3) to put forward some alternative solutions for consideration.

General Assessment

After looking at the process of preparing the package for a couple of months and interviewing most of the sources of the input, my assessment is rather favorable. The final product, in particular the memorandum prepared for your signature in the Situation Room, is adequate. However, the product is more satisfactory than the process leading to it.

In one of our earlier discussions you expressed some concern as to whether the process worked in such a way as to pick up essentially all available information. I feel I can reassure you on that matter. The process leading to the package on the Presidential desk each morning is fed by what is now the strongest and best part of the U.S. intelligence community; that is, its current intelligence activities. Over the last five or six years there has been a strong development of the current intelligence effort, including the installation of 24-hour-a-day operations centers in all
important elements of the community. This development has taken place partly as an adaptation to the crisis atmosphere of the '60s, the two Cuba crises, etc. Pressures for an information system capable of staying on top of fast-breaking events were increased by President Johnson's continuous demand for up-to-date intelligence and other information input. Thus, you are now tapping a very vigorous, responsive, well established, government-wide activity that surveys all of the collected material and funnels it up to the top of the governmental bureaucracy and to the White House.

The part of the total package produced in the Situation Room provides a unique product with its close blending of policy analysis and intelligence. Analysts in the intelligence community are inhibited, both by U.S. intelligence doctrine and by their more limited awareness of policy issues and Presidential concerns, from producing a similar product. Comparison of the substantive coverage of topics in the CIA PDB and the Situation Room product shows this, although it is clear from other evidence that some parts of the NSC staff include more policy analysis than others. Hence, in some geographic areas there is probably more of a difference between the CIA PDB and the Situation Room product that there is in other areas.

The involvement of the NSC staff in the preparation of the Situation Room product is the proximate cause of this difference in the type of analysis and comment. A survey undertaken by the people in the Situation Room for me showed that during a selected period 60% of the items came from the NSC staff, another 20% were prepared by McManis and Fazio sometimes with interaction with staff members, and 20% were reproductions of items from CIA, NSA, or DIA publications.

In any case, the memorandum signed by you and prepared in the Situation Room is a success; it probably is the only part of the package which the President regularly reads. Indeed, judging from a survey of marginal jottings by the President, it may be the only piece he ever reads. This should be gratifying to you. But this situation can lead to unexpected and unwanted responsibilities and problems. I want to discuss some of the problems I see.
1. The Current Anomalous Position of the CIA PDB

The success of the Situation Room product probably has driven the CIA PDB out of the President's focus of attention. However, a survey of the Situation Room product and the PDB shows that there is about one-third overlap in coverage in the two products. That is, only about one-third of the items in the PDB are reported in the Situation Room product. Thus, two-thirds of the items in the PDB the President may never see. Probably they are of lesser importance to him since a lot of thought goes into the selection of the one-third overlap for inclusion in the Situation Room product.

However, an ambiguous situation exists. The selection procedures for inclusion in the Situation Room product may not be wholly consistent with the widely shared suspicion that the President does not ever read the CIA PDB. If one really believes that the PDB is not read, is one-third overlap too low? Should one provide more overlap, perhaps changing the format of the Situation Room product to make this easier? Does not the current level of overlap tend to make the President feel it is safe not to read the CIA PDB? Should steps be taken to shut off production of the PDB? A great amount of energy and talent goes into producing the PDB. (See Tab A for a description of the process, written by [REDACTED] of CIA.) It may now be largely wasted effort. How can it be saved or made useful?

This situation presents a number of awkward problems. The CIA is not likely to suggest stopping production of the PDB. CIA has a major institutional stake in the PDB. It will not give it up easily. Moreover, in a recent discussion with Jack Smith, he strongly expressed his view that the CIA people consider themselves almost as part of the President's staff. They have no other natural superior. I told him I thought that view somewhat unrealistic in organizational and bureaucratic terms. But nonetheless, it may be the view of some of them and suggestive of their likely reluctance to give up publication of the PDB. Over time they are likely to find out about the current situation if it persists. Their likely reaction...
is not clear. A possible CIA response could be to continue publication, but to put in less effort and allow the quality to slip, hoping to live through the current situation and later regain the position the PDB had with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

However, you need to address this problem. What worries me is that: (a) You may get in trouble with the President if post hoc an important item slipped by him because it was in the CIA PDB but not the Situation Room product, especially if he has come to feel, or has been encouraged to feel, that everything of importance to him is included in the Situation Room product. (b) The PDB goes to the SECDEF and Secretary of State, who may not be aware the President seldom reads it. They may be almost entirely unaware of the Situation Room product and its displacement of the PDB. This could lead to some misunderstandings.

I suggest we discuss some solutions or strategies for changing the current situation. But I may be too concerned because of some things in the situation I am not aware of.

One possible solution is a format for the total package which could make the CIA PDB input an integral part. Another idea is that of a President's brief divided in two parts -- one part to include items like those currently supplied by the NSC staff, that is, items based in part on intelligence inputs but including policy discussion and other analysis; the second part to include a number of brief information items. There might be some reduction in the number of longer analytic items supplied by the NSC staff and an increase in the number of brief news items. If the format of the President's reading package were changed in this direction, one could ask CIA to provide the news item portion, overlap in coverage between the two parts of the package being eliminated through daily discussion between McManis/Fazio and [REDACTED].

Another alternative would be to leave the Situation Room product as it is, but include at the end of it a reference to other news items appearing in the PDB. At present, if the President does not even open the PDB, there is no way of his being aware of what items it includes that might be of interest to him.
2. **Deficiencies of Feedback and Guidance**

As my investigation of the process of preparing the President's morning intelligence brief proceeded, I became more and more aware of a feedback and guidance problem. As the process now operates, it does not produce much guidance and/or feedback for those providing inputs. There are a number of factors that produce this situation, and it varies in effect from one input source to another. Several of the proposals made later in this report are primarily motivated by my belief that some steps should be taken to improve feedback and guidance. You and the President will be better served if some progress can be made in this area.

Neither you nor the President can read all of the relevant information available; others must sort, screen, and package the information. The less feedback and guidance the "others" get, the less assurance there is that you and the President get what is wanted and needed. Today CIA writes a type of newspaper, the PDB, hoping it is interesting and relevant. The Situation Room people and the NSC staff collaborate to produce a memorandum for your signature. They have more effective feedback and guidance than CIA does, but almost uniformly feel they don't get enough to do as good a job as could be done. I feel there is a real problem here, and it starts at your and the President's levels.

(Let me say my investigation of current sources of feedback and guidance made it clear that the current NSC process produces a good deal more feedback and guidance to the bureaucracy as to what the important issues are than the prior arrangements. Most people I talked to were quite pleased with the new NSC process and the NSSM study process, for this reason.)

I will deal with the feedback problem as it applies to the NSC staff, below. Here I want to address the feedback and guidance problem of those producing the PDB. They feel they do not get much direct guidance or feedback they can use in the selection of their items. Currently they describe the process used to pick items for the PDB as follows:
(a) There are usually one or two obvious items in every day's news (there is for these an overlap problem with the Situation Room product that may be settled in phone conversations with McManis);

(b) Good additional items are surprise developments: coups, deaths of important foreign governmental people, etc.;

(c) Continuing items known to be of interest: Vietnam, the Middle East situation;

(d) Soviet missile tests and new Soviet aircraft; usually these are reports containing the results of completed intelligence studies and, as such, are different from the usual current intelligence content of the PDB;

(e) Occasionally an item will be weeded out of the draft PDB late in the day on the basis of a call from McManis that it has already been sufficiently covered;

(f) Some items are included with the conscious notion of making a record (not being caught out later);

(g) makes a call to Al Haig perhaps once every two weeks to get guidance on a specific item, but doesn't want to wear out his welcome by calling more frequently.

As you can see from the above, the selection process is based mainly on very general knowledge of what is of interest to the President. It is derived in part from the participation in the NSC process of people like Helms and Jack Smith, but to a large extent, I believe, from a sense of what's timely as judged from the New York Times, press, and wire service coverage. There is rather little specific feedback within the process itself that comes directly from the White House as to the President's interests and concerns.

What to do about this will depend on what you decide to do about the PDB.
3. Problems in Preparing the Situation Room Product

Lack of Feedback. -- There is no way for most NSC staff people preparing inputs to know whether the President reads their items, what his reaction was, how their inputs could be improved, etc. Clearly the position of people on the NSC staff is better than of those preparing the PDB. They get a lot of indirect signals about what is of interest to the President and what you feel is of interest to him. But the process of preparing the morning reading package does not involve any direct feedback from the President. Occasionally there are marginal comments. But a survey showed relatively few Presidential comments; about one in six of the packages have any marginal comments in them. Frequency of comment seems to fluctuate considerably over time. In the sample period covered, there was a clustering of the comments in a period of one week, suggesting that for some reason the President was reading the material more closely and/or was more disposed during that week to make comments. Comments by several of the staff have indicated that they are not sufficiently aware of the low frequency of the Presidential comments. Some may feel they are being cut off from a more plentiful supply of Presidential marginal notes and comments that does not exist.

It's hard to say what to do about this general feedback problem. Your style of work and that of the President, perhaps, are not conducive to a lot of feedback. Moreover, most of the people who work most actively with you and are in the best position to give feedback to the NSC staff and Situation Room people are themselves very busy. Others are reluctant to impose upon them. I know it is hard for you to find time to provide feedback and guidance. The staff meetings when you attended, everyone agrees, were very fruitful. Even if held infrequently, they are worth considering again.

A totally different sort of solution is discussed below and in Tab C. This involves a major shift in the way in which intelligence and other news items are transmitted to you, and perhaps eventually, to the President. It is something that could, perhaps, be available in
about 18 months when the Situation Room addition is completed and the new computer facilities are installed.

Need for Guidance to the NSC Staff. — Interviews I have had with all of the major NSC staff contributors convince me that they have not had enough guidance and general information about the President's morning intelligence package. They may not have an adequate framework within which to prepare their own materials. I found that many of the NSC staff people do have a clear idea of what is in the package, how the Situation Room product is related to the CIA PDB, and what overlap exists between them. Several were concerned that they did not know whether in covering an article or an issue they were the only ones covering it for the day or whether it was also in the PDB. I might add that probably they have made no effort to find out. The most organized and active group supplying input are informed on PDB content and use this information both substantively and to avoid undue overlap. Most have no feeling for what is read, whether the Situation Room product and/or the PDB. (See Tab B for a summary of the interviews with NSC staff members.)

In discussing how they went about preparing their input, one or two expressed their concern that they felt they didn't have a good basis for judging how important it was to prepare their items; that is, whether they should spend a lot of effort or not very much. They are reminded daily of the need for product, by phone calls from the Situation Room; but some are left with an ambiguous sense of how important it really is.

One result of this situation is that there is great variability in the amount of effort spent in different subparts of the NSC staff in preparing input. Some groups are very well organized and think of preparing the input as being an important part of their job. These devote considerable time and energy throughout the day. One of these is the Saunders/Hoskinson team that produce almost 50% of the input currently received from the NSC staff. They have the advantage, perhaps, of covering a very active and high interest area, but they are perhaps the most systematically organized to produce input. At the other extreme there are people who have not
organized systematically at all and who pass in an item if they think of it as being of interest. These tend to put much less effort into melding an item of information and policy analysis.

I believe that if there were more guidance to the staff concerning the importance of the Situation Room product, a little more information conveyed about the total package, there might be more uniformity of effort and an improved response by the staff. Such guidance could be conveyed in a staff meeting or by a memo. After discussion with you, I would be glad to draft such a memo.

Changes in the Product. -- I have one change to suggest for your consideration, the switch to a two-part format. Several people questioned whether the total package was not becoming too big; perhaps even the Situation Room product was too long and had too many items involving policy discussion and analysis. You are in the best situation to judge if the size of the package is now excessive, even if the President only reads the Situation Room product. Might not a changed format with fewer analytic items in one section and a second section devoted to a number of short information items be better? Again you are in the best position to judge. I remind you that such a change might be a part of a solution to the PDB problem.

Samples could be prepared of this alternative format by the Situation Room people if you wish to see them.

Need for Secure Telephones. -- As you can see in Tab B, several of the NSC staff check regularly with CIA and State Department contacts when preparing input to the Situation Room product. This interaction would probably be more frequent and more informative if a limited number of secure telephones were available to the NSC staff. Only Frank Chapin, not a contributor to the Situation Room product, has such a phone. The other available secure phone is in the Situation Room. Neither of these two phones is a real alternative to having a few (8 to 12) secure phones in staff members' offices.

A preliminary look at the cost and likely availability of the appropriate equipment suggests that obtaining a limited number of secure
phones (so-called green phones) turned up no major problems. Cost could be limited by having only two or three lines, a switching system, and 8 to 12 phones. I recommend that this possibility be looked into more thoroughly unless you feel there is some reason why the staff should not have such phones. I believe it is a good idea. Discussion with sources of intelligence input can be freer and more frequent. Some discussion undoubtedly now goes on over unsecure phone lines that ought not to; the secure phones would help to reduce this somewhat.

A More Radical Suggestion for the Future. -- In the course of my investigations I had a number of discussions with Charlie Joyce about the many problems in supplying well selected intelligence information to the President. Out of these developed a proposal for a radical change in the way in which intelligence and other information materials are presented to you, and perhaps could be presented to the President at a later date. This proposed change could significantly alter the whole process of preparing the President's morning reading package; indeed, it might eventually eliminate it altogether as a separate hard-copy item. At present the cost and feasibility of the proposal are unevaluated, but they are under study. Your reactions would be valuable; a lot depends upon how you feel about the proposal. If you definitely don't see yourself liking it, we should drop the idea.

Attached at Tab C are two memoranda that Charlie Joyce wrote to sum up the results of our discussions. In summary, the notion is that the use of available computer technology might allow the development of a very flexible on-line reading program for you and/or the President. The reading program would be available on a TV screen at all times, with controls allowing the reader to pick subjects that he wants to read about, to start reading at a very summary level, to select the areas in which he wants to read in more detail, to stop reading any subject when he is satisfied, and to move on to another. The system could automatically provide feedback on what you and/or the President reads, and how much attention is paid to particular subject areas in the reading program.

A button could also be supplied for the reader to indicate his desire
for more material, whether he liked the presentation or not. A microphone could be supplied for dictation of comments and critique.

The essential objective of this system is to supply you and/or the President with a good deal more control over what you read, and to supply feedback to the organizations attempting to supply you with information so they can do a better job. The role of the machinery is simply to make this feedback more available, more effective, and also to allow you to have a richer, more flexible reading program that you can easily reach by the manipulation of a few buttons.

We would favor developing such a system for you, leaving it open as to whether at a later stage the President is supplied with a similar system. Experience with executives in business has shown that their willingness to obtain information from TV consoles and through machinery of one sort or another is highly sensitive to their personal tastes. Some people want nothing to do with such contraptions, others are quite willing to use them. On the whole, the balance of experience has been that top-level executives don't like gadgets. It would undoubtedly be very chancy to try the thing directly on the President. It may be very chancy trying it on you.

If this kind of a system pleased you, in the sense that you found it useful and easy to live with, you might invite the President down to see the information system you had for yourself. He could try it in your office and see how it worked. If he liked it, a duplicate could be provided in his office.

I think you ought to give consideration to this system and discuss it fully, especially with Charlie Joyce, to see whether it seems attractive enough to you to go forward with more detailed system design. Let me say that our notion is that one should keep the size of the system and the complexity of the hardware limited. We believe this need not be a big, fancy system.