

CHAPTER 6

BRIEFING GOVERNOR CLINTON IN LITTLE ROCK

During the presidential campaign of 1992, President Bush continued to receive intelligence briefings on a regular basis just as he had for the previous 12 years. When he was on the road campaigning he was sent the PDB, which informed him each morning of new developments warranting his attention and provided him in-depth analysis of sensitive international situations. When he was in Washington, he would read the PDB with the Agency's briefing officer present so that he could hear of any late updates, review and discuss supplementary materials, and ask for new or follow-up information.

Fortunately, in light of the election outcome, President Bush's background had made him uniquely mindful of the value of providing intelligence briefings to the challenger as well. He had been director of central intelligence in 1976, and in that capacity had personally provided briefings to Governor Jimmy Carter at his home in Georgia. Bush played a major role in arranging briefings for Governor Ronald Reagan in 1980, and as vice president he received briefings during the transition to his own presidency in 1988. There was no doubt that as president he would approve briefings for Governor Bill Clinton, continuing uninterrupted the practice President Truman set in motion 40 years before.

The DCI Visits Little Rock

Soon after the Democratic convention in 1992, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft contacted Washington attorney Samuel Berger to offer intelligence briefings to Governor Clinton. At that time, Berger, who subsequently became deputy national security advisor, was serving as a primary adviser to Governor Clinton on foreign policy matters. Scowcroft and Berger agreed that, as a first step, DCI Robert Gates would travel to Little Rock and provide a worldwide intelligence briefing.

In preparation for his meeting with the DCI, the candidate's staff had prepared extensive reading materials for his review. On the appointed day, the governor met over lunch with his running mate, Senator Albert Gore, and with the outgoing chairmen of the two congressional intelligence committees, Sen-

ator David Boren and Representative David McCurdy, who were to participate in the briefing session.

The DCI also had spent considerable time preparing, mindful of the governor's lack of familiarity and experience with the Intelligence Community and its products.¹ Knowing that presidential campaigns often kept candidates too busy for regular briefings, Gates also wanted to make the most of what might be the only opportunity to deal directly with the candidate before the election.

Governor Clinton was a gracious host when the DCI began his briefing in Little Rock on the afternoon of 4 September, and the session proceeded in a relaxed atmosphere. The substantive issues on which the DCI focused included the turmoil in Russia, conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and developments in Iraq, North Korea, China, and Iran. He stressed the problem of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. There was some discussion of foreign economic espionage directed against the United States and relatively brief treatment of a half-dozen Third World issues ranging from hunger in Africa to prospects for Cambodia.

The governor listened attentively and asked probing questions, primarily on proliferation, Iraq, and the situations in Bosnia and Russia. On nonsubstantive matters, which were discussed only briefly, the DCI was heartened when Governor Clinton expressed his support for a strong and capable US intelligence service. Responding to an allusion by the DCI to intelligence budget stringencies, Clinton turned to Boren and McCurdy and joked, "Is this your doing?"

The others were actively involved as well. Senator Gore, in particular, had a number of questions, and Boren and McCurdy drew on their experiences to highlight various aspects of the intelligence business.

Following that meeting, no further briefings were provided to Governor Clinton until after the election on 3 November. This was not surprising; experience with other candidates in preceding years had shown that such briefings have been difficult to arrange or politically awkward during the period of the heaviest campaigning and presidential debates.

Establishing a "Permanent" Presence

Like other Americans, Agency officials followed the campaign and watched the polls carefully but took no steps to establish a CIA presence in Little Rock until after the election had been decided. This left senior managers

¹ Robert Gates, interview by the author, McLean, Virginia, 12 April 1993. Subsequent references to the Gates briefing come from this interview.

somewhat anxious about whether a field facility could be set up in time to provide the highest quality intelligence materials to the president-elect should he want them immediately. As it turned out, this was not a problem; it was a full week before the confusion of the postelection period dissipated and Agency officers could discuss the practical aspects of intelligence briefings with the president-elect's team. In the interim, the DCI reconfirmed President Bush's approval for the establishment of an Agency outpost in Arkansas.

A team drawn from CIA's Offices of Communications, Security, Current Production and Analytic Support (CPAS), and Logistics discreetly established an Agency office in Little Rock in the days following the election. The DCI asked the author, as the Agency's deputy director for intelligence, to head the team and to elicit from Governor Clinton and his staff agreement that he should receive daily intelligence briefings from CIA. Although this was accomplished smoothly, at the time I had more than a few apprehensions. We were aware that staff members in some previous transitions, including at least a couple at very senior levels, had worked vigorously to thwart undertakings such as we were about to propose.

On 11 November, I met with Berger and Nancy Soderberg of Governor Clinton's staff to make our pitch. The meeting was held in downtown Little Rock in a hastily commandeered office in the building into which the transition team was moving that very day. Berger and Soderberg could not have been more receptive. They were not familiar with the Intelligence Community or its range of products but were interested in ascertaining what kinds of support could be provided Governor Clinton and key staffers in Little Rock and Washington.

The PDB Briefing Process

During the presidencies of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, the Agency's practice was to print the PDB in the early morning hours and have briefers present it personally to presidentially designated recipients at the opening of business. Having the briefer present when the PDB was read allowed Agency officers to answer a large proportion of questions on the spot. More involved questions and requests for additional information were brought back to analysts at Headquarters, with written or oral answers provided the following day. This system provided the Agency a firsthand and timely method of keeping abreast of policymakers' interests and a reliable means of protecting the security of the PDB.

We described the functions of the various agencies and the products normally provided to the president. Our discussion naturally focused on the PDB, including an explanation of how the president received it from an Agency briefer each day and how the Agency responded to follow-up questions. We recommended that the Agency also provide the governor a daily supplement to the PDB, inasmuch as the regular publication would still reflect the interests of President Bush and its focus would not necessarily correspond with the needs of Governor Clinton.

Berger and Soderberg were shown copies of that day's PDB and a proposed supplemental current intelligence publication. We also showed them the *National Intelligence Daily* and other selected materials, noting that the publications they had before them had been printed earlier that morning in a hotel room in Little Rock. They were clearly impressed with the quality of the books; the installation in Little Rock of secure communications equipment for receiving high-quality color computer graphics from CIA Headquarters proved well worth the effort.

Berger undertook to discuss the issues related to intelligence briefings with Governor Clinton and promised to get back to us promptly. In fact, the next day Soderberg called our advance command post to indicate that Governor Clinton did indeed want to receive the PDB and a briefer, at least for a trial period, to see what kinds of information it contained and what his schedule permitted.

On 13 November, 10 days following the election, we had our first session with Governor Clinton in the book-lined study of the Governor's Mansion. Senator Gore was at the Mansion for other meetings and joined us. Our introductory exchange was a bit awkward as we all fumbled around deciding where best to sit to go over the materials we had brought. We settled on a large round table in the corner of the study. After offering a brief but friendly welcome, our two new customers immediately read every word of that day's PDB, obviously intrigued to see what it contained.

Much of the discussion concerned procedures related to the PDB. The president-elect wanted to be sure he could receive briefings whenever they could be fitted into his schedule. We assured him that he could but suggested a fixed time, preferably an early morning session, as the most likely to be satisfactory on an ongoing basis. We informed the governor that the PDB in the recent past had been provided also to the vice president, the national security advisor and his deputy, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the White House chief of staff, and the secretaries of state and defense, but that in the future the distribution list would be his to control. Governor Clinton replied that he wanted Senator Gore to begin receiving the PDB immediately and asked that we pro-

vide it to other cabinet-level recipients once they were named, assuming this was agreeable to President Bush. I took the opportunity to wonder aloud whether it would not make sense to provide the PDB also to the secretary of the treasury, given the steadily growing importance of economic issues. The president-elect thought for only a moment, declared this to be a very good idea and ordered that immediately after the inauguration we should begin regular briefings of the secretary of the treasury as well.

The governor was interested in our suggestion that he receive a personalized supplement. After some discussion, he indicated he would accept in it some material chosen by us to elaborate items discussed in the main PDB. However, he underscored that he wanted the supplement to focus primarily on specific issues requiring early policy action. He opined off the cuff that his list of topics would surely include proliferation issues, Haiti, Bosnia, and Somalia. Senator Gore suggested we include items on global environmental issues.

Berger was charged with drawing up a list of topics to be covered in the supplement. In fact, such a list proved unnecessary, because the staff quickly observed that the issues the governor had identified received virtually daily treatment in the regular PDB. Occasionally, in the weeks to come, the staff was to request that a specific topic be treated in the supplement, and we readily complied.

The discussion of our preparing materials directly related to policy decisions prompted me to volunteer at the first meeting that CIA saw its proper role as providing intelligence reports and analysis, including exploration of the likely ramifications for the United States of pursuing given courses of action. Experience had shown, however, that we should not be in the business of formulating or advocating policy options. In the back of my mind were memories of the policy buzz saws—particularly regarding Latin America and the Persian Gulf—the Agency had walked into during the 1980s. To our relief, Governor Clinton and Senator Gore both understood immediately and agreed with our understanding of the proper role of intelligence. At no time were we to have any problem avoiding policy entanglements.

On the substantive side, both Clinton and Gore had comments on many of the items in the PDB that first day. Various pieces prompted stories of world leaders they had met and countries they had visited. Like all of our readers, they found the graphics—the maps, charts, and imagery—to be especially useful. The fact that the session went on for approximately an hour was flattering but prompted well-founded fears on our side that our chief problem in Little Rock would be scheduling our briefings. It was a continuing challenge to fit the intelligence briefings into the governor's always-hectic schedule.

At this session Governor Clinton was again a gracious host, as he had been when the DCI visited, welcoming us and inquiring about our arrangements in Little Rock. On learning the Agency had set up its operation in a modest motel near the airport, the governor expressed surprise. I half-jokingly responded that we thought it important to impress a new president with our frugality given CIA's limited budget. He took this in good humor, and after laughing appreciatively sat back and said, "Well, I am impressed."

Following the session with the governor, we had an opportunity to talk with Mrs. Clinton as we were departing the Mansion. When she remarked that she was aware of substantial adjustments being made at CIA to deal with the changing international situation, we volunteered that the Agency occasionally had provided support to her predecessors and would be pleased to provide her also with written material and/or briefings to prepare for foreign trips or visitors. She expressed gratitude for the offer and indicated she would follow up through the national security advisor.

Substance of Discussions

The daily intelligence briefings continued almost without interruption from 13 November to 16 January 1993, when both the governor and the briefing process relocated to Washington. Throughout that period, we made a point to provide Governor Clinton exactly the same material that was being shown to President Bush in Washington. This included, in addition to the PDB itself, drafts of national intelligence estimates and selected raw intelligence traffic—including Directorate of Operations reports, State Department cables, and NSA traffic. However, it quickly became apparent that the governor's primary interest was in studying the PDB.

Three subjects were addressed with great frequency in the PDB. First among these was Russia. At the time, the United States and Russia were still putting the finishing touches on the START II agreement. Debate was under way in the press and the Congress about how much additional aid the United States should provide Russia, and there was much discussion of a possible Russian-American summit, possibly one that would include president-elect Clinton. As background to these issues, there were the worrisome daily developments in Moscow as President Yel'tsin and the Russian Congress fought over their conflicting visions of Russia's political and economic future. Coverage of these subjects resulted in the publication of more than 50 PDB articles on Russia that the governor studied during the transition period.

The other two topics that received extensive treatment were Somalia and Yugoslavia. Our policy-level readers had a great appetite for understanding

events on the ground in Somalia while discussions proceeded in the executive branch, the press, and the Congress about whether and how the United States should become involved. Clinton obviously knew that he would inherit the Somalia problem whether or not President Bush introduced US forces. Similarly, there were numerous intelligence items reporting on the situation in the former Yugoslavia, and here, too, the governor read with special care, aware that he would be called on to make decisions concerning the level of any US involvement in the conflict there. Clinton seemed throughout to value our efforts to keep him abreast of these developments, and he came to them already well informed. These were two foreign policy problems he had raised in the campaign; he had obviously done his homework, particularly regarding the policy aspects of each.

The next tier of items in terms of the frequency with which they were addressed in the PDB included Iraq, GATT talks in Europe, Haiti, and the Israel-Lebanon situation. During this period, Iraq was relatively calm, although Washington and Baghdad were still jockeying over what was acceptable behavior in terms of the placement of Iraqi air-defense weapons and US overflights. This testing continued throughout the period, and we all were mindful that Iraq's actions might be designed in part to elicit some statement or sign of the attitudes of the incoming Clinton administration.

Concerning Europe, the United States was in the process of negotiating certain intractable agricultural issues with the European Community (EC)—particularly France. This discussion was all but certain to be incomplete at inauguration time. In Haiti, a ragtag fleet of new boats was being built as Haitians prepared to flee their country in the belief the new US president would be more welcoming than the outgoing Bush administration. And in the Middle East, Israeli, Palestinian, and Lebanese leaders were conducting an angry war of words over the fate of the Palestinian expellees then camped on the Lebanese border.

Of these second-tier problems, Governor Clinton clearly was most interested in Haiti. It, too, had been among the foreign policy issues he had highlighted during the campaign. The Iraqi, European, and Israeli issues all were of interest but were fundamentally different in the sense that Governor Clinton obviously did not believe they would require fundamental policy decisions immediately.

A few items in the PDB led to interesting discussions about the relationship between intelligence reporting and appropriate follow-up in the policymaking and law enforcement communities. Sometimes this included discussion of actions that might be taken by the president himself. When he read one piece on the possible transfer of missiles between two countries, for example, the

governor initiated a discussion about actions a president might take in response to such a report. Such occasions permitted us to explain the mechanisms through which the acquisition of intelligence information results in concrete operational accomplishments in the areas of proliferation, narcotics, or other sanctions enforcement.

Unlike the situation in some previous presidential transitions, there was in 1992 a very close congruence between the subject matter presented in the intelligence reporting and the international developments receiving the most attention in the US press. With minor variations, the same issues received the most prominence during the campaign and, to a lesser extent, in the presidential debates.

In fact, during the presidential debates of 1992 there was very little focus on international events. The first debate, held in St. Louis on 11 October, had included some discussion of three high-priority issues: Bosnia, Iraq, and Somalia. The governor's interest obviously continued at a high level as these subjects were discussed subsequently in the intelligence reporting. There were, however, certain other issues raised in the St. Louis debate that turned out to receive almost no coverage and were of little day-to-day interest, including the international politics surrounding the question of US defense commitments and troop levels in Western Europe and the next steps in arms control.

The subsequent two presidential debates, held in Richmond on 15 October and in East Lansing on 19 October, included almost no discussion of foreign affairs. There were some exchanges on global economic issues and the new world order, including the opening of foreign markets to US exports. In East Lansing there was a brief exchange on Iraq. These discussions, however, concerned overall policy direction and did not translate into concrete interest on the governor's part in follow-up intelligence reporting.

To our pleasure, and occasionally to our embarrassment, Governor Clinton read the PDB carefully no matter what might be next on his schedule. We frequently made suggestions that he might want to concentrate on certain items and skip others if he was in a hurry, but he seldom accepted these invitations. On one memorable day the hurried governor was busy putting on his necktie and drinking a Diet Coke when we met for our session. He said he would not have time to read the book and asked that I simply tell him what was important. I gave him two-sentence summaries of a half-dozen items and one longer article in the PDB. When I finished this staccato account I expected him to depart, but he said, "Well, that sounds interesting," seized the book, and sat down and read the whole thing. He had tied his necktie.

Certain aspects of the PDB grabbed the attention of Governor Clinton as they had captured the attention of previous readers over the years. As men-

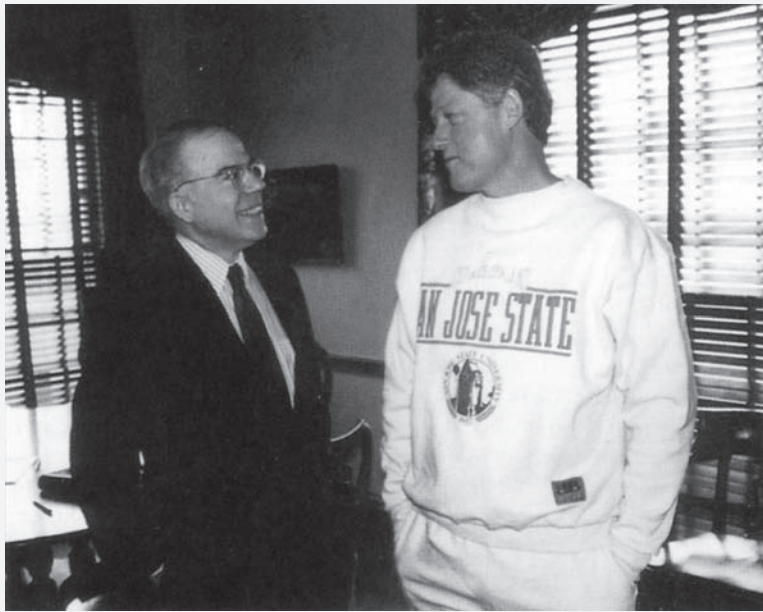
tioned earlier, chief among these were the graphics, which he always looked at first. Also, he was obviously interested in the “Weekly Leadership Notes,” a feature of the PDB at that time that described briefly what the president’s counterparts around the world would be doing during the coming week. Finally, like his predecessors, Governor Clinton reacted well (charitably, actually) to our occasional attempts at humor; he, too, suggested that more humor would be welcome.

Not everything worked. One item that President Bush had found useful, for example, had been a looseleaf notebook the Agency had assembled containing page-size maps of virtually every place of interest in the world. President Bush would regularly open his desk drawer, pull out this collection of maps and refer to it while reading or discussing the PDB. In one of our early sessions with Governor Clinton, we presented such a map notebook to him. He received it with thanks, but that was the last we ever saw or heard of it.

Similarly, we were a bit discouraged, although not altogether surprised, to find that the supplement was only a limited success. I thought analysts in the Agency did a fine job of preparing perceptive background articles pegged to issues treated briefly in the PDB and in providing in-depth material on issues we knew to be high on the Clinton agenda. The first of the supplements, for example, included articles on reform in Russia, the economic outlook for East Asia, the crisis in Angola, and Bosnian Serb flight activity. The second supplement addressed the politically charged issue of detention camps in Bosnia, included biographic material on the three presidential candidates in South Korea, and discussed the background on the fighting in Lebanon. Such material was made available to the governor for a period of days, but it was clear that, while he was interested in principle, he simply did not have time to go through this material unless it was related to a high-priority issue that had to be addressed immediately.

When it became clear that the supplement was not being read and we found ourselves holding it over from one day to the next, we experimented with a much reduced version in which we provided a single page of material on only one or two background issues. These, too, proved of limited utility.

What did turn out to be of use was an art form created in Little Rock by John McLaughlin, CIA’s director of Slavic and Eurasian analysis, who spelled me for two-week periods in delivering the briefings. McLaughlin was in Little Rock during a period when the governor’s schedule forced postponement of several briefings until noon or even afternoon. By this time, the wheel of international events had turned enough that the morning PDB was lagging behind press reports that were by then available to us and the governor. As a result, McLaughlin began typing up one-page summaries of developments since the



John McLaughlin and President-elect Clinton relax after one of the briefings during the pre-inaugural period.

PDB was published, and we found that these were of interest to governor Clinton. His interest derived from the fact that he was using the briefing process as a useful supplement in preparing for his frequent press conferences. Whenever the PDB briefing was delayed well into the day, we prepared these updates and used them instead of the formal supplement, which was gradually phased out.

Unlike some of his predecessors, Governor Clinton during the transition did not receive any comprehensive briefings on the organization of the Intelligence Community or on sensitive collection programs involving human assets or technical collection techniques. Neither did he receive a comprehensive briefing on covert action programs before the inauguration. As a result, we found ourselves during the PDB briefings occasionally providing explanations of Intelligence Community programs that grew naturally out of the substantive issues discussed in the PDB. This gave us, for example, opportunities to brief on US imaging systems and to describe NSA and its product. On a couple of occasions we provided brief accounts of specific covert action programs, an awareness of which was essential to make sense of the day's PDB.

In retrospect, this probably was a good way to introduce a new president to sensitive covert action and collection programs; that is, tying the fact of a program to its intelligence payoff. Earlier experience had shown that comprehensive briefings on these programs sometimes were overwhelming and did not stick with the recipient. Obviously, after inauguration, any president should still receive a general overview briefing from the DCI and/or the deputy director for operations. In expressing his views on this subject, former President Bush was decidedly of the opinion that a president-elect needed to be briefed on any sensitive programs that had the potential to blow up on him, but otherwise should be spared the details until in office.²

Other Opportunities To Help

To underscore the unique relationship between the United States and Mexico, several presidents-elect have made a point of meeting with the president of Mexico during the transition period before holding meetings with any other foreign leader. Governor Clinton was no exception and scheduled a meeting with President Carlos Salinas in Austin, Texas, on 8 January 1993. We had assumed such a session would occur and had prepared a fair amount of material on economic issues—especially the North American Free Trade Agreement—as well as Mexico’s political situation and bilateral narcotics cooperation. As it turned out, the governor’s own staff had prepared him extremely well on NAFTA, so our material on that subject was largely unneeded.

The day or two before Governor Clinton’s departure for Texas to see President Salinas proved to be most hectic. Fearing this, we had worked with his staff to prepare a package of one-page pieces that supplemented the briefing books he had already received. In the discussion in the Mansion before departure on 8 January it was clear he had read the Agency’s material carefully. This included specifically the material on the narcotics problem, which obviously was high on the governor’s agenda.

The biographies the Agency had prepared of Mexican leaders with whom the governor would be meeting were also of high interest. CIA had found that high-level policymakers welcomed short videos on foreign leaders. In addition to passing along factual information, the videos effectively showed speaking style, body language, emotional intensity, and so on. The Agency had produced a video on President Salinas, and the day before the departure

² George H. W. Bush, interview by the author, Kennebunkport, Maine, 6 May 1993. Subsequent references to Bush’s comments come from this interview.

for Texas we had an opportunity to show it to Senator Gore, who in turn recommended it enthusiastically to Governor Clinton.

Having no confidence we would find an opportunity for Governor Clinton to watch this video in traditional VCR format, we had acquired a minivideo machine, a Sony Watchman, and created a small tape version. Time ran out in our briefing, so Governor Clinton and his traveling companions took the video machine with them so that he could watch it en route to Austin. Berger jokingly remarked that he had heard each new administration receives a free video machine from the CIA. It was returned the next day.

The meeting with President Salinas gave us a welcome opportunity to demonstrate how the Agency could be useful in preparing a president for meetings with foreign leaders. To our satisfaction, when we saw Governor Clinton the next day following his return from Texas, he volunteered that he had found President Salinas and the Mexican approach at the meeting to be "exactly as you had predicted."

We also provided material for use during the many telephone calls the president-elect made to world leaders. The first such instance involved Korean President Roh Tae Woo whom, by coincidence, Governor Clinton was to telephone the first day we saw him in Little Rock. Agency officers provided similar information to assist the governor in making contact with perhaps a dozen other world leaders as well.

The most interesting conversation for which we were able to support Governor Clinton was the one he had with President Boris Yel'tsin on 4 January 1993. Before the call, the governor's aides and we had discussed with him what Yel'tsin presumably wanted from him and the points he was likely to raise during the call. In fact, there were no surprises. The items discussed, as were later reported to the press, included START II and its ratification, Ukrainian support for the treaty, issues of economic reform in Russia, cooperation between the United States and Russia on Bosnia, and the timing of a future meeting between Presidents Yel'tsin and Clinton.

Although it is hardly satisfying to hear only one side of a conversation, particularly one that is conducted through an interpreter, it appeared to be helpful that we were able to sit in the room with the president-elect during his discussion with Yel'tsin. Following that fairly lengthy conversation we were able immediately to go over some of the points Yel'tsin had made. Our discussion served, I believe, to clarify certain of the inherently ambiguous points that had come up. In fact, during that immediate follow-on session and over the next two days, we continued to furnish Agency materials that provided context to the points Yel'tsin had made, especially those related to arms control issues.

McLaughlin had the sad task of helping Governor Clinton with some other telephone calls as well. These were the ones he made to the families of US personnel who were casualties in Somalia. McLaughlin acquired the facts needed to place the calls and, at the governor's request, coordinated with the White House to be sure that calls from the president-elect did not interfere in any way with calls being made by President Bush.

We had been asked to provide substantive and logistic support of a different nature at an earlier point when the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had visited Little Rock. On 4 December, Adm. David Jeremiah, accompanied by Assistant Secretary of State for Political/Military Affairs Robert Gallucci, visited Little Rock to explain the plan for US involvement in Somalia. This visit had been expected but was firmly scheduled only at the last minute. The afternoon before, the White House, through the DCI, had contacted us requesting that the CIA team in Little Rock make the supporting arrangements for Admiral Jeremiah's visit.

The visit went very well, although with much less elaborate logistic support than is usually provided for a flag-rank officer. Agency personnel from the Office of Communications and the Office of Security handled all the arrangements and served as escort officers. They rented a van to transport the expected large number of briefing boards, cleared the military team with the Secret Service, and transferred the admiral and his supporting staff to the Governor's Mansion and back to the airport. Once at the Mansion, they introduced Admiral Jeremiah and his team to the Clinton staff.

The briefing itself was attended not only by Governor Clinton but also by Senator Gore and by Warren Christopher, who had not yet been designated secretary of state. Other Clinton aides were also present. Inasmuch as we had spent almost a month at that point briefing Clinton daily on the situation on the ground in Somalia—and as I had just finished the morning PDB update—Dave Jeremiah devoted relatively little time to describing the current situation and turned instead to a discussion of planned US actions.

As always, Jeremiah provided an informal and to-the-point briefing, which Governor Clinton and the others obviously appreciated. I was relieved to have it occur, because a certain amount of frustration was building among the Clinton staff, who sensibly wanted to know what Somalia operation they would inherit. Gallucci clarified issues related to the policy side of the US involvement. Knowing he would assume responsibility for an ongoing project, Governor Clinton asked about the expected duration of the operation, the conditions under which US forces would be withdrawn, and where things stood regarding the formation of a UN-controlled follow-on force that would relieve the US

units. Governor Clinton's own predictions about how long US forces would be required to stay in Somalia ultimately proved to be right on the mark.

Later in December, McLaughlin and the rest of the group then in Little Rock had a full and exciting day when Governor Clinton named his national security team. While McLaughlin was waiting for his late-morning appointment on 22 December, the national security appointees entered the Mansion's reception area. This gave him and the governor's aides an opportunity to caucus with the appointees in an informal roundtable discussion of the latest events in Serbia, Russia, and the Middle East in preparation for the day's press conference.

During the press conference, the appointments of Warren Christopher, Les Aspin, Tony Lake, Madeleine Albright, Jim Woolsey, and Sandy Berger were announced. Following the press conference, Agency officers had a welcome opportunity to meet the DCI-designate, brief him on the international situation, and show him quickly around the facility that had been established in Little Rock.

As luck would have it, about the time the personnel announcements were made, Little Rock Airport became completely fogged in and none of the appointees was able to depart the city as anticipated. The stranded group all assembled for dinner that evening with one exception—the DCI-designate. Christopher indicated the next day that the group had been curious about Woolsey's whereabouts, joking that "those CIA folks" must have spirited him away. We dispelled the mystery surrounding the DCI-designate's disappearance. It had been important for him to get to California the next day, so one of our communications officers had rented a car—at Woolsey's expense—and driven him to Dallas so he could catch an early morning flight to California.

Great Support Made It Work

Immediately after the election, two representatives of the Office of Communications had been sent to Little Rock to find office space for our support operation. They quickly located what turned out to be a perfect setup in the Comfort Inn, a modest motel approximately a mile from Little Rock Airport. There was an even more modest restaurant, a Waffle House, adjacent. The location facilitated the regular turnover of personnel and provided convenient access to the Governor's Mansion, which was a five- to ten-minute drive from there.

From a security point of view it was an ideal arrangement; we were able to rent a group of rooms that allowed us to control the space above, below and on each side of our command post. The center of our operation was an apartment formerly used by the motel manager, who had earlier installed a "panic alarm" hooked directly into police headquarters. The apartment contained a large liv-

ing/dining room, which we converted into office space, and two bedrooms, one of which was used as an office for the senior briefer and the other as a refuge for the person who caught the overnight shift. Finally, the facility had a kitchenette that made it much more habitable for all concerned. Coming from Washington, we were impressed that the cost of our individual rooms was \$38.50 per night. We paid twice that for the apartment. The motel staff could not have been more supportive or discreet. Initially, they presumed that we were with the Secret Service, an impression we soon corrected.

Our security officers took pains to get to know the Secret Service detail in Little Rock. This was time well spent; its members were eager to give us any backup security assistance we might need at the command post and were most helpful in facilitating our access to the Governor's Mansion. Their help was all the more necessary when we accompanied the Clintons to California and South Carolina.

At the time we established our operation, the press in Little Rock was eager for news of the president-elect's every activity. This made us apprehensive that press attention to our presence could force our relocation to secure quarters. As a result, we investigated the possibility of operating from Little Rock Air Force Base. The commanding officer was eager to have us locate there and was prepared to offer every assistance. Our security and communications officers visited the base and were given a tour of the proposed facilities. Secure storage, office space, and communications were available to us.

The problem was that the air base was several miles beyond the city of North Little Rock on the other side of the Arkansas River; the drive to the Governor's Mansion would have been considerably longer. Moreover, although some quarters might have been available, we would not have been able to stay nearly as close to our command center. In the motel we could simply walk out of one room and into another to receive secure calls, faxes, and so forth. With this convenience in mind, we kept the air base as a fallback possibility, but we were never forced to use it.

It was three weeks before the press became aware of, or at least paid any attention to, the fact that the CIA was present in Little Rock and was providing intelligence briefings to the president-elect. In the early days of our operation the governor's staff had been happy to follow our suggestion that we simply make no public announcement about our operation. At a later stage, however, there was discussion in the press about how Governor Clinton was preparing to take on the international responsibilities of the presidency. At that point, the governor's team confirmed publicly that he was receiving regular briefings from the Agency and was seeing all intelligence material available to President Bush.

It took a few days for the press to get the story straight. Initial inquiries came from the *Los Angeles Times* on the first of December. On the second, the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* made reference to “daily written briefings from the Administration and briefings by telephone.” A day later, the *New York Times* came closer, reporting that “the Central Intelligence Agency has set up an office in Little Rock from which to deliver a copy of the *National Intelligence Daily* to Mr. Clinton. Mr. Clinton also receives a fifteen-minute oral briefing on security matters every day that aides say is the same one that Mr. Bush gets at the White House.” Later, on NBC’s morning news program, the governor’s spokesman, George Stephanopoulos, explained that the president-elect was fully informed about foreign policy issues because the “CIA briefs him daily.”

The press kept a vigil on the side street from which all traffic entered and exited the Governor’s Mansion and on many occasions filmed our comings and goings. Nevertheless, we were not pursued or otherwise bothered and were successful throughout in protecting our identities and location. Keeping a low profile, however, meant we made little use of the bar in the Capital Hotel downtown; it was the gathering place for visiting politicians, but was also the hangout for all the reporters.

If the Office of Communications had found it easy to acquire a secure and inexpensive location from which to operate, they were challenged a good deal more in establishing the communications links to Washington. The problem came from the fact that we needed to install in Little Rock an unusually capable system that allowed us to transmit a quantity and quality of material significantly greater than anything we had previously done for VIP support on the road. In normal circumstances, traveling PDB recipients in 1992 received a black and white document transmitted via a rather basic secure fax system. As a result of work that was already under way in Washington, it was clear that we had the hardware and software capability to deliver a very high quality version of the PDB to Governor Clinton in Little Rock. The system had never been field-tested, however, so we needed to be sure we had a reliable and redundant capability. The equipment that was installed allowed us to input text at Headquarters and immediately receive and edit it at the other end. It also allowed us to transmit very high quality color graphics, maps, and imagery.

Over and above the PDB operation, we were able with this capable communications system to send large numbers of documents in both directions to support the briefing operation on a real-time basis. This capability was invaluable in enabling us to answer questions and provide background material to Governor Clinton and his aides. Over time the Agency team became sufficiently adept at using the new equipment that it could replicate the process in California when Governor Clinton traveled there over the Thanksgiving holiday and at Hilton Head, South Carolina, where he spent several days after Christmas.

In large part because of the hard work of our people at Headquarters, we were able to publish a book indistinguishable from the one published by the Agency's printing plant. Personnel in Washington put in countless hours of overtime to provide 24-hour support of all kinds. Their mastery of the digitized color graphics process was but one critical contribution. All who participated in this operation thought it set a standard for future VIP on-the-road support.

Looking back, we flinched to discover that our undertaking in Little Rock was by no means inexpensive, even though the cost of hotel rooms was a modest \$38.50 per night. Substantial expenditures were made for personnel rotation and accommodations, computer equipment and communications lines, and per diem expenses. By inauguration day, we had incurred expenses in excess of a quarter million dollars.

What Was Accomplished

By any quantitative measure, the Agency succeeded in the primary purpose of providing intelligence briefings to help the president-elect become well informed about international developments. President-elect Clinton read hundreds of intelligence reports on current developments relating to US interests. A large proportion of these reports addressed subjects that were of high priority to him personally, including Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti. One cannot know precisely how valuable this intelligence reporting may have been, but we did observe with satisfaction that he read the material daily and carefully.

Beyond the PDB briefings, the Agency provided a great deal of ad hoc support. This material was used to prepare for meetings and telephone calls to foreign leaders and in other policy deliberations. On a more pedestrian level, the Clinton team turned to the CIA for help with such things as acquiring safes for secure storage and arranging for the establishment of secure communications between Little Rock and Washington. At varying times we functioned not only as representatives of the Intelligence Community but as surrogates for the State Department, the Joint Chiefs, the Department of Defense, and the General Services Administration.

At no time did we seek or receive any systematic feedback from Governor Clinton on the assistance we were providing, but he was appreciative throughout the transition period. And we have some independent accounts of his reactions. Former President Bush recalls, for example, that when the Clintons visited the White House after the election, the governor "went out of his way to tell me the briefings were useful and he planned to continue them." Bush added that Governor Clinton "told me the CIA information made a big differ-

ence on Haiti. He said that the Agency's intelligence made an impact on him and was influential in the decisions he subsequently took."

Immediately after the election, Bush had delegated to Scowcroft the job of dealing with the Clinton team regarding the intelligence briefings. During the Clintons' visit to the White House, however, Bush underscored how useful CIA's daily briefings had been to him and urged the president-elect to continue to receive them when in office. Bush says he also stressed the need to limit the distribution of the PDB. "I told him you had to control and limit access so that the Agency could put everything in the book."

From the Agency's institutional point of view, establishing the practice of regular briefings of the president and senior national security officials met an important goal of the Little Rock operation. However, once he was in office, President Clinton after a few months discontinued the practice of receiving daily PDB briefings. After US forces were killed in Somalia in the Black Hawk Down incident, the briefings were restored and over the years were often attended by the DCI. Throughout Clinton's two-term presidency, intelligence reports regularly reached National Security Advisors Tony Lake and Sandy Berger, and the president. The products of the Intelligence Community may have had more impact than the briefers themselves.

CIA employees felt their efforts rewarded when President Clinton spoke of this briefing process during a visit to the Agency's Headquarters in Virginia on 4 January 1994, after almost a full year in office. The president observed:

Intelligence is a unique mission. Nobody knows that better than those of us who have the honor to serve in the Oval Office. When President Truman autographed the photo of himself that hangs in this building, he wrote, "To the CIA, a necessity to the president of the United States, from one who knows." Every morning, the president begins the day asking what happened overnight. What do we know? How do we know it? Like my predecessors, I have to look to the intelligence community for those answers to those questions. I look to you to warn me and, through me, our nation of the threats, to spotlight the important trends in the world, to describe dynamics that could affect our interests around the world.

The Little Rock undertaking also enabled Agency personnel to meet a large proportion of the people who were to become prominent in the Clinton administration. Senior Agency briefers established at least some relationship with all those who later became key White House figures. We had an opportunity to meet all of those appointed to the top national security posts and the majority of other cabinet-level appointees. Each of the new appointees was exposed to the Agency's role in supporting the president-elect. On one occasion a new cabinet

appointee was clearly surprised to see Agency briefers waiting to see the governor and inquired about the frequency with which such briefings were given, asking if they occurred weekly or on some other basis. The questioner was obviously surprised and impressed when told that the Agency briefed each day.

All Agency personnel involved in the Little Rock operation—in Arkansas and at Headquarters—came to have a sense of satisfaction and pride in what they were able to accomplish. Each was also aware, however, of the unique opportunity they had been given and of their good luck that the operation worked out as well as it did.³



³ Senator Robert Dole, Clinton's challenger in the 1996 election, was not provided a worldwide intelligence briefing. Following the Republican convention, CIA's deputy director for intelligence at the time, John Gannon, proposed in writing to Director John Deutch that Dole should be offered the customary overview briefing. The author contacted Deutch and his chief of staff, Michael O'Neil, both of whom presume the Agency surely would have offered a briefing, but neither of whom remembers having taken any action to arrange it. Deutch and O'Neil both said they had a vague memory that Dole declined a briefing. Senator Dole has no recollection of having been offered an intelligence briefing.