

Episode 495

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:00] AH: Welcome to the latest installment of SpyCast. To coincide with the 20th anniversary of 911, we'd like to present to you a trilogy of interviews with intelligence officers who have found themselves on point as Presidential Daily briefers on the day of. Now the President's Daily Brief has been called the most tightly controlled daily document in the world. As a daily summary of high-level all sorts of information and analysis on national security issues produced for the president and key cabinet members and advisors. We've got three presidential daily briefers for you. First up, Mike Morell. Mike at various points in time was Acting Director and Deputy Director of CIA. But on the morning of September the 11th 2001, he was with George W. Bush in Sarasota, Florida. Then, uniquely 10 years later, he was with President Barack Obama for the Abbottabad raid. I'm just going to read out a brief part of my conversation with Mike.

"I believe that when we get to the end of the trail, we're going to find our Al Qaeda and we're going to find our Osama bin Laden. I told him that I was so confident in that judgment, that I would bet my children's future on it." If you want to hear more about what Mike had to say, please listen to the interview.

Next up is Dave Terry. Now, Dave started the job on the same day as Mike Morrell, but he was the Presidential Daily briefers for Vice President Dick Cheney. After that, he went on to be the chief of the Presidential Daily Brief. Now on the morning of September 11th, Dave recalls, "I think that for any intelligence officer, what you're doing is often overwhelming, whether you're in front of the President, or the Vice President, or an asset, or your colleagues, and the stakes are often life or death."

Next up, we have Kristin Wood. Now, Kristin was the presidential daily briefers for the Vice President's National Security Adviser, Scooter Libby. And she often briefed the vice president himself. She went on to hold a number of leadership roles at the CIA, but she recalls, "Knowing that every day you had to deliver relevant information to the nation's leaders is a feeling of enormous responsibility. All of the 1000s and 1000s of intelligence officers who have

done amazing work, you want to represent that faithfully, ask questions so that you can go a little bit deeper, but also remain a neutral balanced party.”

Joining Kristin was a special guest, Phil Mudd. He was part of a small diplomatic team that helped to piece together a new government for Afghanistan, a holy winter of 2001. He was second in command for counter terrorist analysis in the Counterterrorism Center. And his most recent book is *Takedown: Inside the Hunt for Al Qaeda*. I'm sure you'll enjoy listening to Kristin and Phil bouncing off of each other, two former colleagues and friends, as much as I did. Please consider the trilogy as a whole. Listen to them, think about them, mow them over. This is history. These are three people that were actors in it. And we are proud to present them to you. Thanks. Take care. Bye.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:03:24] AH: So I think that before we get to the day of 911, how did you find yourself in the world of intelligence and espionage, Dave?

[00:03:32] DT: Well, it's kind of a strange story. First of all, Andrew, thanks for having me here today. And it's a strange story. I was hired in 1979 to do all things monitor grain production. And in the 1970s, the Soviets had basically stolen a bunch of U.S. grain, I call it the Great Grain Robbery. They had lied about their own crops. They had lied about how much grain they wanted to buy from the US, and basically built the US out of a lot of money. So the White House decided that the intelligence community should determine how much grain the Soviets and the Chinese were going to purchase and trade. So my job, I went at it as a new hire, was to model Chinese grain production and trade.

And so with a lot of help from folks up in space, and on the ground, and so on, within a couple of years, we modeled their grain production and trade and knew what the Chinese were going to produce before they did. That really helped once the Chinese knew that we know what they were going to buy that they would stop meddling in US commodity markets. For the communist bloc, the Soviet Union, the Chinese, say hated market capitalism to try and screw up US markets was a good thing to them. So it was not a very sexy thing to start off with. And I think your listeners would probably be surprised at the very mundane things that the intelligence

community does. The community is supposed to provide insight and help and warning on decisions for US consumers. And policymakers make lots of mundane decisions on things like grain production, and trade terms. There're lots of things that are far less sexy than James Bond, the nuclear launch codes and terrorist attacks.

[00:05:08] AH: So this would have been probably before, I'm guessing, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

[00:05:12] DT: Right about the same time. They invaded in 1979.

[00:05:15] AH: Yeah, it was the December of '79, right. So like what month did you join the –

[00:05:20] DT: April of 1979.

[00:05:21] AH: April. So you find yourself in intelligence. Obviously, you must have done a lot of things between 1979 and September 11th, 2001. But give us a sense of how we get to 2001.

[00:05:34] DT: Well, I started with that and then did other economic accounts, being an economist by trade. And then basically moved on from economics to political military, S&T affairs, its own counterintelligence. And was Chief of the Africa division in 1999. And was happy doing that when I got a call late one Friday afternoon. And then they said, "Can you come up to the Deputy Director's Office?" How do you answer that call? "Yes, of course I can. You want me now? I'm on my way."

And conversation was fairly short. They said we'd like you to consider becoming a reefer for Vice President-elect Cheney. And we know you didn't apply for this. There was a vacancy notice process. You didn't wish to be this, but we'd like you to think about it. Go home. Talk to your family. Think about it over the weekend. Come back in and let us know Monday. But you need to move fairly quickly because you're starting Wednesday. Obviously, I was a bubblehead decision that I, "Yes, I'm going to do that." So I started briefing Vice President Cheney before the inauguration. And that's where I was still on 9/11.

[00:06:39] AH: How does one get selected for that? I mean, that must have been an honor. I'm assuming they don't just pick a random name out of a hat. There must have been something about you that they saw that they wanted to get to utilize.

[00:06:50] DT: I think I was foolish enough to say yes because, as you know, from your previous podcast, reefers are those unfortunate souls who come in at 0 dark 30 and prepare to help their consumers. And it's a long day. Generally starting at like 1:30 in the morning. And mine generally went till three or four in the afternoon to try and get them ready for their day. So I think part of it is they look for people they can trust, that if they mess up, they're going to say they mess up. They got to work hard. And then one comment was made that Vice President Cheney and I both wore cowboy boots, and they thought that we would mesh, not only with our boots, but with our personalities, and so on. So you do try and find people that you think in terms of personalities and interests will mesh.

[00:07:37] AH: On that point, wherever you're born and raised? Were you born and raised out west somewhere or –

[00:07:41] DT: I was born and raised on a ranch, not out in the middle of nowhere, but you could see it from there, in West Central Kansas, which also helped in terms of when they were looking for a person to help model agricultural production. One of my degrees was in agriculture. And so that gave me a leg up on that first job.

[00:07:57] AH: What was your background before you came to intelligence? You spoke about one of your degrees being in agriculture. Give us a sense of your development, so to speak, before you joined the CIA.

[00:08:07] DT: I went to Kansas State University and got a degree in economics and then in agronomy, and it was basically trying to estimate the productivity of Kansas soils, what they would yield and so on. So that's basically then what I did for China.

[00:08:21] AH: Okay. So 1979, you joined the CIA. 1999, you get up to be our presidential daily briefer. Walk us through that period. You begin briefing Vice President Cheney, or before he's

vice president-elect. And then walk us through that period leading up to the day of September 11th, 2001.

[00:08:41] DT: So my normal day, starting about 1:30, would be to go into blindly the CIA headquarters and look at the Vice President's schedule. What's he got on the calendar that day, that week, his upcoming trips, the things long-term interest to him, and also things that I thought he might not be aware of. The hardest job of being a briefer is picking what you're going to show them, because if they don't know about it, they're not going to make a decision on it. You have very limited time.

And so the hardest thing is prioritizing all that. And that's what takes the time. So it's pulling all of that together. And Vice President Cheney is scary smart, and would ask all kinds of questions. And so trying to be prepared to answer those questions so we wouldn't have to get an answer the following day. That's another difficulty of being a reefer is trying to be up on what they're interested in. So that was my one goal and focus was to try and meet his needs. And he also chose as a first vice president to do so that he wanted me to travel with him. So unless he went off on a little shortened day trip, wherever he went, I traveled with him so he could get continuous intelligence support wherever he was.

[00:09:48] AH: For a lot of our listeners, there will be some that half the background that you have, but the vast majority will be like, "Wow! That must be intimidating, waking up and having to brief the person that's one heartbeat away from the presidency." Do you feel like all of your previous experience had set you up for that so that it wasn't overwhelming? Or help our listeners understand how you kind of dealt with all of that.

[00:10:14] DT: It was overwhelming. And I think for any intelligence officer, what you're doing is often overwhelming, whether you're in front of a president or a vice president, or the asset that you're trying to debrief, or your colleagues, whether you're trying to explain something that you think is really important. Any the stakes often are life and death. Not always, sometimes they're markets, and sometimes they're mundane, but they're pretty high. Or the CIA, and the intelligence community wouldn't be looking at them.

But what you have to do, I think, is just focus on the mission. Why am I here? And focusing on the mission does a couple of things. First of all, it's a great motivator. And second, it helps you prioritize things, because a lot of things don't matter. Your personal reputation doesn't necessarily matter. You don't want to ruin the reputation of the intelligence community or the agency or department that you're from. But basically, your job is to help them make decisions. Provide insight to help them do their job. And that's what's most important.

The other thing that helps is you've got scores of people behind you who are experts, and who helped you prepare. So in one sense, as a briefer, I was really only delivery boy. I was picking things from some of the smartest people in the world who were packaging things trying to figure out what's going on their particular account. Why that's going on? What that means and what might be done about it. So in that sense, if you can't answer something, you can go back to the experts who can.

[00:11:34] AH: Just for our listeners that aren't familiar with the Presidential Daily Brief, can you just walk them through just the kind of cliff notes version? It's informing. It's not presenting options. Help them understand the type of product we're talking about.

[00:11:52] DT: That is somewhat of a debate among the intelligence community. Always has been and probably always will be. So it's designed for the president. And as each president changes, the President's Daily Brief will change. President Reagan, not surprising, like videos. He came from Hollywood. President Carter, because he was an engineer, like the right hand side of the page to be blank so he could take notes. And so it varies.

President Bush, that is George II, came in with Vice President Cheney, was informed by his father, George 1, who was head of the CIA, that he needed to take an intelligence briefing, and he needed to get it directly from the intelligence community. And so he told Vice President Cheney before he was Vice President, when he was head of the transition team, "Make sure my son gets a briefing. Make sure he gets it directly from the intelligence community." And that is a real advantage when a president sits down directly with their briefer, because you get to hear their response, and you get to discuss it with them. And I think much better for them.

So imagine, Andrew, if you sat down and read the Washington Post today. You would get a lot out of that. If you sat down and disgusted with the editor of The Washington Post, who had talked to all the stringers and all the authors and so on, you'd get a lot more out of it. And you'd get something different than if you sat down and talk with one of the political pundits who had an axe to grind and a particular line to push. That's why he wanted the PDB presented by the intelligence community, not by the National Security Adviser, who has kind of a bent toward making sure the policies that he's promoting gets there. I'm not saying it's bad, but it's just a different, perhaps less objective view of the world than the intelligence community would get.

So the PDB is designed as a personal document for the President. So often, the Vice President, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State will see all of the things that the presidencies and as the President's prerogative as to who he wants to see President's Daily Brief. But generally, those briefers will add additional things.

So I would add things for Vice President Cheney in terms of his upcoming trips, things that he was interested in that the President wasn't interested in. He kind of took the point in the war on terrorism. So I would often give him more counterterrorist things than the President got. So it's really a customized thing to help them make decisions for their particular account.

[00:14:08] AH: And just in terms of the information that gets presented to them, I guess the question is do you do more like, say, Google or some other browser that is anticipating the site should normally go to and the things that you like? You present the customer with their interests. And to what extent as a –Do you now what this is not something that the Vice President is interested in, but it's important and he needs to know it. So it has to go in. Help us understand that trade off.

[00:14:40] DT: So knowing them and what they're interested in is key. But the analysts, who are the real experts, are fed by the operators who are also experts. The analysts will submit articles for presentation to all the senior consumers. So the briefer the – In those days, they didn't show the same thing. So briefer of the Secretary of State might pick a piece the Secretary of State was interested the Secretary of Defense briefer wouldn't. And so you customize and pick pieces written by the experts that you think will resonate.

And the debate on those often is we refer to the debate about option and so on. You certainly want to tell them what's going on, what's going on and what it means. What does it mean economically, politically, military, for our enemies, our allies? What does it mean for the future? That's all fair game. The real debate comes with do you also then provide them options or recommendations?

Well, everybody agrees, not recommendations. So options are the tricky part. A lot of people say, "Well, we shouldn't present options, because, A, we're not good at it. B, they're very hard." Because these issues, many of them, are almost intractable issues. If they were easy, the policymakers would have solved them on their own. It wouldn't be needing the intelligence.

But I will give you my personal bias. And the idea is we should give recommendations. We should give options. Excuse me. Not recommendations. But give options. So for example, if you went to your doctor, the doctor would be very useful if they said, "If we don't treat this, this is what will happen. If we give you this medication, Andrew, this will be the result. If we do surgery, this will likely be the result." And you still get to decide whether you're going to take the surgery, or the medicine, or nothing. But getting those options really helps. In the same way, giving policymakers options, if we leave them alone, this will be what that country likely will do. If we sit down on the negotiating table, this will likely be the outcome. If we go to war, this will likely be the outcome.

What you don't want to do is, "Therefore, you need to nuke it, Mr. President." You won't get the recommendations, because you're not elected. You're not hired to do that. You need to be objective and give the information. But I found, particularly in the war on terror, that providing options was very useful. Because sometimes you provide options they had not thought of. And the intelligence community, particularly CIA, became very tactical in the war against terrorism. And often the options would have been carried out by the CIA. And so talking to the operators and asking, "Could you do this? Could you not do that?" and so on, became very useful to layout to the consumers, "Here are some options." And the operators think they can do this. They think they might be able to do that, and so on. So I believe that options are a good thing. Yes, doctors don't give great options sometimes on some diseases because they're very hard, and then have very good at curing it. That said, I still want options.

[00:17:32] AH: So you would provide options regularly for the vice president?

[00:17:35] DT: Correct.

[00:17:37] AH: And so you started in 1999. When did you start briefing Vice President Cheney?

[00:17:41] DT: For about 18 months.

[00:17:43] AH: 18 months? And is that one of those things where you hear about these jobs in Washington where people say you just do this for 18 months, two years, and then you collapse in a heap. And then someone comes along and does it. Like you can only do it for a certain amount of time?

[00:17:57] DT: That's one of those jobs. And that basically, you set your personal life aside for that period of time, because you're getting six, or sometimes seven days a week. You're starting at 1:30 in the morning and going till 3:30 or 4:00 in the afternoon. So you go to bed at seven at night or whatever. It gets tiring after a while.

[00:18:15] AH: I mean, it struck me that for the people that are delivering the presidential daily brief to the vice president and the president, those are really obviously two of the most high profile positions in the CIA. To what extent either with you, or historically, do you get micromanaging directors of central intelligence that are like, "Tell me what you're going to present to the face president today and make sure that you do this." Or as someone leaning over your shoulder trying to push you in one way or another? Or someone speaking your copy? Or do you have autonomy? Or is it a little bit of both?

[00:18:52] DT: Generally, you had great autonomy in what you presented. Once in a while, someone would come in and try and influence, because they knew I would go directly to the desk. For example, one day, late in the day someone came in and said, "The vice president asked for this." And so I said, "Okay, I'll deliver it tomorrow." So I delivered it. And he read it. And I said, "You'd ask for this." And he read it. And he said, "Well, I didn't ask for it, but I think I know who did." Someone asked for it saying that he tasked it because it was their pet issue. And they wanted to get their political issue in front of him. That was someone from downtown.

And occasionally, you'd get people who one operator once said, "Well, we need to write a piece of the PDB that says this so the President will authorize these operations." And of course, that is way off the table. Occasionally, you get people to try to use them for political, or career, or empire building purposes, but it never worked while I was there.

[00:19:46] AH: And just fought on the logistics of it. How does it normally go? There's the person that's given the PDB to the vice president, does the agency like get them a place up near the Naval Observatory. Or do just live where you normally lived and commute in?

[00:20:01] DT: Live where you normally live. Yeah, I'll come in. And then you are driven. You have a car and a driver who takes you down there because you – Well, just for security reasons and because sometimes you will end up having to go with them wherever they go.

[00:20:13] AH: Okay, that's good. You don't need to pay for such pricing on Uber or something, right? I mean, that's really interesting. I think it's a little bit further on, but to what extent was Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, Afghanistan on your radar? As someone that studied a lot of this Soviet Afghan war, you hear people saying talking about Afghanistanism, where it's kind of an obscure thing that a lot of people don't pay a lot of attention to. It's very esoteric. And I remember a few years ago, interviewing the person that was on the Afghan desk, and they said to me, "No one was more surprised than me to suddenly find myself at the center of all of these events, because this was the place where your career went to die." This was the graveyard of CIA career. So help us understand, what was your radar like in the lead up to those events.

[00:21:08] DT: We knew that bin Laden was after the United States. And we knew that he wanted to strike the United States. In fact, the one PDB that has been declassified was the August 6th, 2001 PDB. And the title was something like Bin Laden determined to strike in the US. So we knew he was coming. I think that was the 36th PDB that the president and vice president saw in 2001. The difficulty was we didn't know who, or how, or where he was coming.

So analyzing counterterrorist plots, and I later managed the analysts doing all the counterterrorism analysis at CIA, it's very difficult, because you get little pieces. It's like here's a financing. The terrorists are doing financing on this. And here are buying some explosives. Is

that the same plot? Or is it a different plot? It's like somebody took puzzle pieces from several different jigsaw puzzles. Took a few of them out of each of the box and put them all in one box for you to sort out. Well, you know you don't have most of the pieces of any of the pictures. And you know that some of the pieces are changing, because the plots are changing, and you know that some of the plots will be dropped. So a lot of the pieces in the box don't even matter. And some of the pieces may be infested with disinformation for you. So it's very difficult to put together all of those plots. And that was where we stood before 9/11.

And you couldn't shut down the entire United States, because we could have stopped airplanes. But we did also want to stop trucks, and trains, and ships. It's kind of like the discussions that have been held in the last year about COVID-19. Which parts of the economy do you shut down at great cost to try and defend things?

And so one of the senior officials said once, "Okay, I've got it. I know they're coming. But what do I do?" And so counterterrorism analysis, I think, is extremely difficult. I've managed all types of analysis. I think counterterrorism is the most difficult because a lot of its intentions. Al Qaeda was very good about communication security. They had very few people who knew everything. They were very compartmented. They allowed the field commanders to determine when the attacks were to occur. And our old saying was, if we were listening to the plot, we would probably be the third person in the room. And so that's why it was very difficult. And, in fact, it was a surprise to me how effective it was just in terms of it was cruel, but effective. But I was not surprised that they were coming after us.

[00:23:34] AH: I never realized that you were also the director for Africa. And I'm just thinking now, when you took over that job in 1999, not long beforehand, Osama Bin Laden had been in Sudan and will have the embassy bombings, USS Cole.

[00:23:53] DT: That was really the Africa division when the embassy –

[00:23:56] AH: Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda we're on your radar then. Yeah, yeah. Well, that's quite interesting. Can you tell us any more about that about your time, Chief of the African division? I guess the role that you were in then informed formed what you went on to do afterwards? Because you were there when the embassy bombings happened and so forth. I

mean, what was it like to be the head of Africa division when the embassy bombings took place?

[00:24:22] DT: Well, Africa in the 1990s, not only in Tanzania and Kenya was just a hectic continent. And there was a lot going on. There was a nation imploding or exploding about every other day. So I did learn a lot about crisis management, about dealing with disasters and so on, because we would have embassies that were under fire or having to evacuate, a lot of those things. And Africa was very difficult, because sometimes I had more countries than I had analysts to watch it. It was a difficult target and a different target. But when the embassies were struck, it was very difficult. I still remember calling a family saying we couldn't find their child, and still hunting for them. And it was just a very difficult time

[00:25:06] AH: What was it like to be the head of the Africa division. You have one analyst that works on one country and you try to cover as many of the countries as you can, or is it thematic, or as a little bit of both? Well, Nigeria and Egypt are huge in importance. I've got three analysts on them each, but there's one that does Senegal and Benin and a bunch of other places. How does it all shake out?

[00:25:31] DT: Very good. That's exactly the way it works. So the big countries like South Africa and Nigeria, they would have more than one analyst on them. For the little countries where there will less U.S. policy issues, then you have one analyst with several others always with another analyst backing them up, in case they were on leave, or sick, or whatever. But yeah, it was basically global coverage is much different than counterterrorism where you have many people working on an issue. Similar the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

[00:26:02] AH: Let's walk up to the day of 9/11. So helplessness put themselves in your shoes that morning, Dave. Where were you? How did you first hear the news? What were your emotions like as an American, as a family member, as a patriot? Yeah, help us understand what it was like to be Dave Terry on the morning of September 11th, 2001?

[00:26:24] DT: Well, I must admit, when you first asked if you could interview me about 9/11, I said yes with mixed emotions, because there were a lot of emotions that day, and they were not mixed. It was an ugly day. I started the briefing at 7:00 when the vice president mentioned, as I

did all days. And I had to get done by 7:40 in order to get him in the limo so the Secret Service could get him to the White House, where he had the intelligence briefing with the president at 8:00. So I was already done with the Vice President, by the time the first plane went in, which I think was at about 8:46. And I was already back at Langley. And I don't think one of the things we've covered in previous podcast is what briefers do after the briefing, which is also important. The briefers get back and they type up what it was that they showed their principal and their reactions just for their own edification. And often then they will give guidance. Well, the vice president was very interested in this piece that covered topic A for this country. I think you should do a piece that covers B and C. That would play well. Or the briefers sit down and say, "Well, three of our principals got confused. And the third paragraph is pieced. We need to get another piece that sorts it out."

The other big thing you do is the taskings and the questions that they ask. Vice president asked a lot of penetrating questions. He was hard to keep up with. So if he would ask a question, I would look up the answer. And more likely I would talk to the expert, so we're in the intelligence community who would give me an oral answer or a written reply that I would deliver the next day. So I was in the midst of writing all of that up when the first plane went in. I stepped out of my office. So I remember standing there with the other briefers in common area watching it on TV. Everyone assumed that it may have been an accident. And that was what they were assuming on the TV as well. But it was a bunch of intelligence officers standing around scratching their head. And how often does this happen? Where did this flight come from? And at that point in time, they didn't know that one of the stewardess has called down and said they had been hijacked and didn't know any of that.

But intelligence officers, as you know, Andrew, look at the world through dark lenses. And it's not just because they're wearing sunglasses. They always look for mal-intent, mal-intentions everywhere. Why would this nation do that? Why would that leader say that? And so that's the way they look at things. The glass is always half empty. Just a little advice for your listeners too. Never date and certainly never marry anyone from the intelligence community, because that negativity carries over in their personal life as well. You'll be sitting there, "My significant other told me twice today that they love me. That seems a little too hard. What's going wrong?" And so anyway, they're just very questioning people.

And so the briefers are sitting around kind of scratching their heads. This doesn't look like an accident. But went back and continued to do their feedback, and their tasking. And then about, if I remember correctly, 9:03 when the second plane went in. Obviously, it was an attack. And I must give the CIA leadership credit for thinking quickly and acting quickly. Because shortly after the second plane went out and a guy came down to my office and said, "Okay, we're obviously under attack." So, shut down. Don't do any more taskings and feedback. Take what you need. Go down the stairs, because we were on the seventh floor, and go home. Pack a bag and wait for further instructions. And he told me to pack a bag because the assumption was for continuity of government reasons. If we were under attack, not all the principles wanted to be in the same town in case it was attacked.

And so I packed a bag. And the rest of the day was very frustrating. As I left the headquarters going down the stairs, I tried to call, when I got on the building, my family locally. Couldn't reach them. Finally got ahold of my parents in the Midwest, for somehow, those phone connections work, but they were overloaded in the Washington area. And I went home, spent the rest of the day trying to sleep, but unable to do so. I kept being drawn to the television. And I just sat there feeling so helpless, because I couldn't do anything. And I would check out, and our headquarters will check in with me periodically to give me updates on where I thought I would be operating during the briefing from the following day. And it was just a very, very long, frustrating day. And then long about, I think, 11:15 or so on the night of September 11th, I headed back into the office to begin preparing for the briefing on September 12th, knowing it was going to be a very tough briefing and trying to sort out all of what happened, who the perpetrators were, what our allies are doing? What our enemies are doing? And the other thing that happens occasionally is you try and also figure out what other US agencies and departments are doing. Now, that is not within the intelligence community's purview. And we don't spy and collect intelligence on it. But if you're supporting a decision maker, they need to know what else is going on in the USG as well. So if at an extent you can, you try and figure that out and put that in there as well, because that helps them make decisions. You're not designed to be an information service. You're designed to help people make decisions.

So I've tried to fit all that together. And often the biggest intelligence gap we have is what's going on in our own government. So putting that together for September 12th, vice president came down early, as I thought he would. And I asked for my car and drive early. He came down before

seven. We went through the briefing as much as we could. And I got him in the limo. Actually, he asked me to come in the limo with him. Because if we weren't done with the briefing, the standard practice was to get in a limo with him. That would give us another 9 to 11 minutes of time together, depending on which way the Secret Service would go .

That day, unfortunately, they went much faster than nine to 11 minutes, because they blocked off all the roads. When Vice President Cheney came into office, he told them that he didn't want the standard practice of all the streets closed for the Vice President. You know, the police, motorcycle cops going ahead and cutting off the traffic and all that. He said, Washington traffic is bad enough. He's a relatively self-effacing guy. And don't do this for me, just take it normally.

But on the September 12th trip, the Secret Service told him as we got to the limos, "Sir, with all due respect to your request not to have streets blocked off. For security reasons, we're blocking off the streets from today and from now on." And so we were flying down Massachusetts Avenue. And that trip down Massachusetts Avenue, it was to me one of the emotional times of 9/11, surprisingly. Because as we're going down the street, people obviously knew who it was that was coming in this big motorcade, and people are getting out of their cars and cheering for him and giving him the thumbs up. People were coming over to the edge of the sidewalk to cheer him on. And I was used to protesters and people on the side of the motorcades. Generally, they were holding placards. In fact, I think it was just a few days earlier. We were out west somewhere. And I remember a big placard that someone was protesting US policy on human rights or something in Venezuela, and they misspelled the word Venezuela. So I remember asking the vice president if he wanted to stop and go over and talk to this person to get some good advice about foreign policy in Venezuela.

So people along these sides were not uncommon, but cheering like that. And since I had not had much sleep and was in the midst of emotional events there myself, I could feel myself starting to choke up there in the back of the limo. And I thought this is probably not the time I should get overly emotional while I'm sitting here and he'll be the vice president bought the beginning steps and then salvos in the war on terrorism. So I thought I'm going to focus my eyes on the intelligence here. And I'm going to ignore the personal aspects of 9/11.

2977 innocent people died that day. And I did not have the luxury of thinking about those families, thinking about those people. So if it wasn't Washington Post article on the individuals, I wouldn't read it. I would turn off the TV. There's a lady in my church whose husband died on the plane going into the Pentagon. When she got up at church to speak about it, I walked out. I just didn't think I had the luxury of being emotional. So a lot of intelligence officers have to look for ways, I think, to maintain their objectivity and not become emotional. So that was an emotional event for me.

Then after 9/11, they decided that for continuity of government reasons, the president and vice president should not both be in Washington. In fact, I think President Bush decided that. It was more dangerous to be in Washington. He was the president. He would take the first watch in Washington. So that meant the vice president needed to leave town. So we quickly stage out of Camp David. Camp David is up in the mountains in Maryland. It's actually a military base. So it was secure. And so we all went there. And needed to fly by helicopter from Camp David to Air Force 2, which was parked at Andrews Air Force Base.

So we got on the helicopter, it's one of these big twin rotor military helicopters and we were all nervously chatting about what did you bring? How many days clothes did you bring? Did you bring a charger for your laptop because I didn't bring mine?" And kind of nervously chatting about all the things and were we ready for deploying outside the Washington Metropolitan Area.

And the halo flew us low from Camp David to Andrews right over the Pentagon. I'll never forget the Pentagon with smokes still rising. And the helicopter just got silent from then on. And the several hour flight from Andrews out of town just was completely silent. And then that flight, I had a window seat in the second row. And I remember seeing a plane way off our wing flying parallel to us being a little antsy about planes that bothered me. And then I noticed it got closer and closer to us and got close, and it was a fighter. And I noticed down that several 1000 feet below us another plane went in the opposite direction. And after it passes, the fighter went off our way again. Obviously it would come over. If that plane tried to strike Air Force 2, it was there to defense Air Force 2.

And after that, the president and vice president always had an air cap over them. And that was a little problematic in our first stop. We stopped out in the boonies. And the first day after we

arrived there, I went into town to get food and other things we'd forgotten and so on. And driving back out toward where the vice president was, I saw this helicopter just circling and circling and circling. I went back until the Secret Service, "This is probably not a good idea to have a helicopter in air cap. You're kind of drawing a bull's eye around the vice president." And so they stopped using helicopters and just started using a jet fighter solely.

[00:37:08] AH: One of the things that I was thinking was, and this is a job purpose question. Like for that briefing for September 12th, how does a PDB briefer bring it all together? Do you get all of these items like, say, you get 50 items from 50 analysts, and you sift through them and you say here are the half a dozen ones that I want to present to the president? And then you maybe put them in bullet points or on a record card and you brief on them or something. I know it depends on the customer? Or is it like writing an essay every single day where you have to cut and paste sections and write in your own words. And yeah, help us understand like, A, the process. And then B, the process through the vehicle of that September the 12th briefing. How did you bring it all together?

[00:38:02] DT: Yes, as I alluded to earlier, what you show the principle, and choosing and prioritizing that is one of the hardest parts of being a briefer because you come in with a stack three inches tall and you have to end up with just 20 to 40 minutes worth of information. So generally, you prioritize it by putting what you consider to be the most important piece first. And so obvious on September 12th, everything was going to be about Osama Bin Laden and what was going on around the world. And so you had to prioritize on that particular topic. Because if they get interrupted, if they have questions, whatever, you want to make sure they see the most important pieces.

What I told my briefers later when I manage all of the briefers was to prioritize things show the entire piece, but do two things. Highlight the essential parts that you think they need to read. So if they don't have time to read the entire thing, they will at least read the highlight. Secondly, orally summarize each piece as you give it. Here's a piece Mr. Vice President that shows that the Italians are doing this, but not willing to do that. That way, they will at least get it orally, because time is the most valuable thing in Washington. And they will often flip. And as they flip that page, because if they think it's not an important piece you want to mainly tell, this is a really important piece because it says X. And you may want to take a look at the third paragraph that

I've highlighted. So your job is to kind of prioritize their information and highlight the pieces or the parts of the pieces that you think will best maximize their time.

[00:39:39] AH: I think one of the other questions that I have is, and this is something that we can address in other places, because it could go off in all different types of directions. But in that process of summarizing either as a PDB brief or as a manager of analysts or of the people that give the PDB, I mean, it seems like from the outside anyway, that process of summarizing, it's necessary because there's only so many hours in the day, and policymakers only have a limited bandwidth. But I've never done a PDB. But I've taught undergraduates or graduate students difficult material and I have to summarize and boil it down. And if they get it wrong in an essay, because they've don't have all the nuance and all the context and all the other stuff that can complicate three bullet points, the worst that can happen there is as they get a C or a B minus or something. But for policymakers, the consequences are huge, right? I mean, if they take something away and they're like, "Oh, okay, that's what I need to take away from this." But if I'm not really getting all the nuance and all the context, the consequences are big. So I just wonder, as someone that has spent a long time analyzing and thinking about information and where it gets pushed to and how it gets boiled down or expanded out? Help us understand some of those dynamics, the summarizing versus losing the information.

[00:41:13] DT: That's excellent question. Packaging is really important. And the way the information is presented, and the order in which it's presented is really important. Graphics and visuals are really important. Every time you can, you try and put something in a picture, because it cognitively communicates more rapidly. A picture is worth 1000 words. And there's a reason that old ties around. And the organization of the title, so what summarize it well, and the first topic sentence. You want basically the topic sentence, the first sentence, the topic sentence a piece of the topic sentences of each paragraph should convey 75% of what's in the piece. Because senior consumers are really not readers, they're skimmers. And they will look at a piece, look at the title. Is this something I'm interested in. If they're not interested in that day and don't see a value for it, they'll flip. That's why you want to perhaps call them back sometimes, or given the oral summary. Because they're very busy. And they don't have time to read everything. And in fact, we had one principle consumer that would not read pieces if they had text that fell on the third page. And there's a very important – Anyway, it's not for me. It's on three pages. I don't have time for that this was – My undersecretaries can read this. My deputy assistant

secretary. So this obviously wasn't for me. So packaging was really important. In fact, watching the senior consumers digest information and managing the papers, I came up with a conceptualization process to organize a piece and to organize a decision making process. And since retiring from the government, I've helped several U.S. departments and agencies and some of our allies do that. So packaging, to me is a real challenge. And very interesting, I'm still challenged and feel rewarded by doing it.

[00:42:56] AH: Help us understand how you've done that conceptualization of the packaging that you just spoke about.

[00:43:02] DT: So it's organizing the information, prioritizing it. And generally, the best way to organize a piece is saying what's going on? Why that's going on? What the implications are? And what might be done about it. Because that's the way people think. So if you get stuck in traffic tonight in a place where you usually haven't been stuck in traffic, the first thing that comes to your mind is what's going on here. And the second thing is why is this going on? Is there a traffic accident? Is there road construction user? Usually all that. And then the third thing you think is what does this mean? And do I need to call my significant other I'm going to be late for dinner? Do I need to look for a different route? And what do I do about it?

And so those four questions in that order are the way people naturally think. And so if you organize your piece, this is what's going on. This is why they're doing it. This is what the implications are. Here's some things you might be able to do to counteract that. You're organizing your peace in the way that people most naturally absorb information. And so for a skimmer, they're more likely to catch it if it's packaged that way.

[00:44:04] AH: And what kind of Vice President Cheney did you encounter on the morning of September 12th, 2001? That's the first time that you had saw him since the attack. And what kind of vice president did you encounter?

[00:44:17] DT: He had been kind of the point person working on counterterrorist issues. And he was always very serious and very businesslike. And kind of surprised to me, he was kind of like he was every other day. He was focused. He was just asking questions. He was trying to get through as much as he could. Surprisingly, it was on September 12th, like he was almost every

other day. He's just a scary smart guy with a lot of ability to recall things. For example, throughout the Bush presidency, every once in a while, he would say, "I think you guys, or maybe it was DIA, did a paper back in '78. Maybe it was the summer on this topic." Every time he could recall things from back when he was Secretary of Defense are on the hill. Every time they went and found that paper. So I just a scary smart guy with a steel trap memory.

[00:45:09] AH: Wow!

[00:45:10] DT: Intimidating to try and brief.

[00:45:12] AH: I was going to say, he sounds like a tough guy. And so and the days and weeks afterwards, what kind of things were you doing? Are there any instance that stuck in your mind, a vignette, a conversation, something you encountered?

[00:45:26] DT: So when we went out of town, we were basically working 24/7. And I often would brief him multiple times a day giving follow up or getting things to his staff so they could get it to him. But we decided, if you're going to go out of town, you might as well go to interesting places. And Vice President cheney was an avid sportsman. He grew up out in Wyoming. And so a lot of his remote undisclosed locations were duck hunting in Maryland, quail hunting in Georgia and Texas, pheasant hunting in South Dakota, fishing in Wyoming and so on.

Vice President Cheney would occasionally go out and go hunting. And he has an excellent shot. He had a double barrel shotgun that when he was shooting clay pigeons, he would always hit the clay pigeon with the first barrel. And then if there were any large pieces of the clay pigeon, he would hit it with the second barrel before it hit the ground. In fact, the Secret Service and I discussed that if we were ever attacked by Al Qaeda, perhaps the best plan would be you have the vice president and a shotgun, and let him defend himself. So we were around out of town. And that was very useful for me, because I kind of became one of them in terms of sitting down and having breakfast, or at least lunch and dinner with the Vice President and his staff and sitting around their meetings and so on. It helped gave me a much better feel for the way they looked at intelligence, the way they used intelligence. So in similar to sitting with the principal, when you give a briefing in the morning, rather than just handing them something, actually working with them was very useful. The difficulty of getting too close to a policymaker is you

don't want to lose your objectivity. You don't want to start pandering to their political agendas. You want to give balanced information. But it was very useful for me to go on those trips and travel with them.

[00:47:10] AH: From what you picked up speaking to other people that had delivered the PDB, was he typical, or was he atypical? Did other policymakers pushback more pushback less or asked different types of questions you have. Give us a sense of how he could be placed in relation to other people that you have spoken to.

[00:47:31] DT: He and President Bush asked lots of questions. They were avid and demanding intelligence consumers. And I once thought that they're running companies before they came to Washington, they ran a company and people weren't performing. They thought it was part of their duty to help those people perform. And they kind of brought that mentality to government. Okay, if this agency isn't delivering the intelligence ought to be delivering, it's my job to have them deliver. And so they would occasionally push for more intelligence, more insight, whatever. Both of them were demanding. And both of them were consumers at a time when the agency was looking to know exactly to – I don't know exactly how to say this. I think reconfirm its role.

This is something that the Intelligence Committee doesn't talk much about in the previous administration, the Clinton Administration, we lost the president as a consumer. President Clinton stopped taking intelligence briefings from the intelligence community. That's not something that they want to talk about, because it's embarrassing. When your job is supporting the Oval Office on the Oval Office isn't getting a briefing from you, that's really embarrassing. And you can read elsewhere, “Oh, President Clinton continued to get the PDB.” He continued to get it. But it was delivered to him directly or through national security adviser. And I remember the game was let's look at it when it comes back and look like if the pages have been folded. So it looks like if he read it that day.

And so the agency wanted to win back senior consumers. So when I was called up that Friday afternoon and was told, “We want you to become a briefer for President, Vice President-elect Cheney.” They told the briefer for President-elect Bush the same thing. We want you to hook them on intelligence. Do everything you can to make sure you provide a service to them that they see as essential, because they don't have to take an intelligence briefing. There's no law

that says they have to take intelligence. And if you don't provide them intelligence, then you'll get off their schedule.”

The presidents and vice presidents schedules and days are planned in five minute increments. And they don't have a lot of extra time. And so our goal was, particularly early on in the Bush and Cheney Administration, to try and hook them on intelligence. And I'm not blaming President Clinton for stopping, getting briefings. I think part of that was our fault as an intelligence community, ourselves. I was Chief the Africa Division during four years of his term. And I prided myself and my unit. And we produced more PDBs per capita than any other element of the intelligence community. Did he care about all those? No, not necessarily. We thought they were interesting.

And so at their worst, a collector collects things that are interesting to them, and are easy to collect. At their worst, an analyst produces things that are easy to understand and that are of interest to them. And that doesn't work very well with a senior consumer. And so we really tried hard with Vice President-elect Cheney and with President Bush to provide them things that would really be worth their time, that would help them on the tough decisions that they had to warn them on things we thought might be coming up. So it was an interesting time for the agency, try to win back the White House, both the President and Vice. Vice President Gore and the Clinton Administration remained an avid consumer of intelligence and took daily briefings.

[00:50:59] AH: That's interesting. Yeah. When you were talking about President Clinton there, it reminded me of that joke about the guy that landed the plane in the White House groans. And the joke was that that was James trying to get face time with the president, right? Just briefly, what's like the chain of command like for our presidential daily briefer? Who do you report to?

[00:51:22] DT: When I started, there were no managers for the briefers. They took relatively senior officers, unusually senior officers, because we wanted to win back the senior consumers. And they said it's your job to support them. So you will decide what they see. You can accept or reject what we send you. And that was unusual for that era.

But a couple years into the administration, they decided that they probably didn't need somebody to manage the briefers, the production, the planning, the delivery of it. And so I was

tapped, unfortunately, to do that. But knowing what the Vice President and President were looking at, it was relatively easy role to go in. And so I tried to provide more uniformity in directing the planning and production of the PDB. And planning the PDB, a lot of that is done by the local levels, because it's every analyst job to decide what should my consumers be asking.

The job of an intelligence analyst is not necessarily just to answer the questions consumers ask. A good analyst answers the questions they ought to be asking, but haven't thought to ask. They never think to ask. That's part of warning. That's part of the innovation in terms of telling them things they won't think about otherwise. So they will submit things up there. So as the chief of PASS, which was my position, chief of the President's Analytics Support Staff, manage the briefers and the planning and production of the book. Then that would go to a deputy director or one of a few people who was a senior reviewer. And I was also one of the seniors reviewers. You who would sign off on the pieces before they went down to the President. The director was sitting on it now, the Director of National Intelligence sits in. But they don't always chop off on the book.

[00:53:04] AH: And what is your communication like with the person that's giving the PDB to the president? Is that like a daily communication? I believe it was Mike Morrell at the time? Is that something like the person that briefing the President and the Vice President? They regularly sync up or compare notes?

[00:53:24] DT: Yeah. Michael was the other unfortunate soul who was called up that Friday afternoon.

[00:53:27] AH: Oh, he was? You started the same day?

[00:53:29] DT: Yes. Yeah, he would brief President-elect Bush. And so Michael and I would come in, and we would independently go through all the pieces that were submitted for the president and vice president and any other traffic. And then before we went downtown, we always touched base, and gave comments about the piece. Well, I think the difficulty with this piece is Z. And it's not only the pieces you have, but you also have background notes. The analysts will provide you another document that goes with it that provides more context.

And so what you want to do is get from the analysts all the answers you think your principal is going to need for the questions they're likely to ask. And so sometimes you anticipate different questions from President Bush than you were going to get from Vice President Cheney, and so on. But we'd always compare notes in terms of what we were going to present. I had the advantage that I had 40 minutes with the vice president. And he only had 30 minutes with the President. So I could actually show the vice president more. But we always touched base to make sure that the vice president saw everything that President was going to see, because that's what the President asked for, plus some extra things that would be of use to the vice president. On weekends, I would go over basically things that we had missed during the week that I thought the vice president should see. So sometimes we'd go hour, hour and a half on Saturdays to try and catch up from the week.

[00:54:53] AH: Just briefly, getting a position as a presidential daily briefer, after that, is that seen as a – I'm assuming it's seen as a career boost. How does that shake out in terms of your career?

[00:55:05] DT: Well, assuming you're not screw up.

[00:55:07] AH: Assuming that.

[00:55:09] DT: In fact, I used to tell my new briefers when they were arriving that this is a great job. You get a chance to blow your career and the agency's reputation every day. But generally, you become known then and hopefully trusted if you didn't screw up. So after I got to know the vice president, when he was probably already in the way, he and the president digest an intelligence. I then manage the PDB. And then knowing what the President was looking for in counterterrorism, I was directed to manage counterterrorism analysis before years. And the analysis and counterterrorist center also supported operations and targeting and so on. So knowing analysis and operations together, then I was asked by the DNI, to chair the National Intelligence Collection Board and to stand up the National Intelligence Coordination Center, which no longer exists, but it was the first nationwide attempt to coordinate all the collection across all the organizations so we could act more efficiently and make sure it was all driven by the needs of analysts, which were driven by the needs of consumers.

So basically, one job kind of led to another. And I didn't apply for any of those jobs. It was just once you've done something, then they – Here's a sucker who is willing to work hard and long hours without going home on weekends. That's having to do that.

[00:56:29] AH: And just one final question on the PDB briefer more generally? How much does the delivery of the product depend on that variable of the briefer? Obviously, you delivered PDBs. Mike Morrell delivered PDBs. Is the consumer going to end up with more or less the same product regardless of who it is? Or is it kind of really important that there's someone there that can bring it all together and knows what they're doing? I guess my question is, could me or Memphis be trained up and do one of those fake it for TV type thing? We're going to train this guy up and pass them off as an intelligence officer is going to brief the president? Or, yeah, help us understand the variable as the PDB briefer.

[00:57:16] DT: For seminal pieces, the analyst would actually come up and sometimes a team of analysts and brief the briefers. And I always like that, particularly if they do it the day before, because I can ask all the questions of the experts that I thought the vice president was likely to ask. And even if they didn't come up to brief all the briefers, if it was a piece that I thought the vice president would engage in, I would call up or go down and visit the authors to ask them to make sure I understood what it was.

So between that oral exchange with them, their written background note, which is going to be longer than the piece itself, the pieces tend to be fairly short, a page, a page and a half, because they don't have a lot of time. And so you read the four or five page background note that goes into more depth about the sources, about the implications, and so on. And then he talked to them on some specific pieces.

So if it's a seminal piece, all the briefers will have talked to the analysts and should all have exactly the same message. Other times, the briefer for the Secretary of Defense may have a slightly different presentation of the piece than the briefer the Secretary of State, because it's got political and military facets to it. And they need to present it differently.

[00:58:25] AH: That's interesting.

[00:58:26] DT: But when you don't produce well, generally, the feedback comes back. And sometimes, just to be honest, the principals kind of asked for different briefers.

[00:58:35] AH: So let's keep walking forward with the days and weeks afterwards. What was it like to be the person that was briefing the Vice President and the run up the war?

[00:58:47] DT: It was difficult, because there were a lot of moving parts going on with the war on terror. What our allies were doing, and our enemies were doing. And the war against terrorism really was a global coalition. And working with a lot of countries who are traditionally not allied with us, we found common ground on terrorism. And in terms of going to into Afghanistan, there were also a lot of moving parts in terms of the military part, making diplomatic initiatives and entres in other governments that were trying to get them ally and be on their side. And often before a major engagement, there would be a high-level, if not trip, initiative in to try and get people on board.

So for example, after 9/11, I went with the Vice President to 12 countries in 10 days, and he was trying to gather the coalition to fight the war against terrorism. Same thing was done on Afghanistan and before going into Iraq. And it was difficult because there was a lot of dissension within the government about what to do, what not to do. And as a breifer, the dissension doesn't make any difference. You basically answer their questions and try and push them to get the answers that they want. You push the people, the analysts and the collectors to get the information that the consumers want. So a wartime is particularly difficult because things move so quickly.

And you get a lot of US military engagement. And so the military knows things that you don't necessarily know. And so you have to make kind of informal connections with people in the Pentagon, or with the command to inform you so you can inform the president, vice president. Because the military have channels, but it's often not as good as the intelligence channel. So if your job is to inform them in making decisions, as I said earlier, it's sometimes useful to know what the US government itself is doing. And that's the hard part of being a breifer.

One of the things I would do is I would start every day in the Afghanistan war showing vice president clips of US military operations, particularly striking terrorists, I used to call the greatest

hits. And he liked that because it gave him an idea of where we were doing, how the war was progressing, and so on and then move to the larger picture.

And later there were two briefers for the president after Mike Morrell left, and after I left briefing the Vice President. Two briefers replaced us, because it's very difficult to always travel with them. And if they want to briefings seven days a week, they get a briefing seven days a week. And so they would get two briefly. I wanted to do it myself, because that way I was always with him. I knew what his responsible was to every piece. And I just thought it was more efficient. Went from being the briever to managing the briefers.

[01:01:46] AH: As I understand it, setting up that possession as the manager of the briefers, you're setting that up from nothing, because it doesn't exist previously. What are the things where you're like, "This is something we need to get handle on." Or, "Here's my main objectives." Or, "Here are the sorts of things I think we need to do." Help us understand setting up that enterprise.

[01:02:07] DT: I wanted to pay more attention to the planning of pieces and go for a calendar for two weeks out. So we would have a good idea to be able to know when a piece was coming from an office or to request a piece from an office. So we know if the President is traveling in three weeks, we're going to have a series of pieces. And we want to make sure that we deliver them on time and not too early, not too late. I mean, everybody knows you can deliver a piece too late. You can also deliver a piece too early for a senior consumer if they haven't focused on it yet. That's two weeks from now, it's going to change. I don't have time for that today.

So trying to sync the intelligence production of the analysis, which requires collection before that, getting all of those wheels moving in advance required more planning than I think we'd been doing. And also it was making sure that we had picked the right people. And they didn't have the right mesh with their consumers. You didn't have to like their policies. You didn't have to delight necessarily all the decisions they were making. But if you didn't like them, that was not a good marriage, because you were putting your personal life on hold to do this job. And we needed people who were totally devoted to making sure they were providing wise intelligence.

[01:03:24] AH: And did you ever wear your cowboy boots when you briefed the vice president?

[01:03:29] DT: I did not.

[01:03:31] AH: But he wore them a few times I'm assuming.

[01:03:33] DT: He often wore the boots. Yeah.

[01:03:35] AH: I think another one of the things that interests me is I don't know how it normally works, but do you say, "You know what, Hammond, you're going to be the briefer, but we're not going to announce, and we're going to put you in there for a week. And if the president doesn't like you, we're going to quietly move you on and put someone else." Or is it just you're getting this person. This is the way it's going to be? Or, yeah.

[01:04:01] DT: Generally, reefers were selected by a senior intelligence community official. But there were a few, and Vice President Cheney was one of the exceptions. He wanted to preview his briefers, at least after he accepted me. Let down after me, he wanted to always preview his briefers after that. So every year or so, generally, they would change briefers for all the principles not at the same time, but after about a year, it was no longer fun to do, as I said earlier. And so they would basically sometimes have the interview with the Vice President and then he would pick the one that he wanted.

[01:04:38] AH: And I never thought about this before. Your vantage point is fascinating, because you're the briefer to the vice president during 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan breaking out. But then you oversee the briefers after that. So you're kind of at the crossroads of all of the information that's going to all of the most important policy makers and decision makers in the country. But is that something you've ever spoke about before?

[01:05:05] DT: No, not a lot. Because the policy side, even when you were doing it, you didn't want to say an awful lot about it. In fact, there would be things that the vice president would tell me, "Well, and we're considering doing this." And he was telling me that so I would guide intelligence on those topics to him and provide more insight on that. But I couldn't go back until the Director of Central Intelligence, because that's a policy initiative.

And part of the deal, if you want to gain the trust of your principal, is you don't talk about their policies, or the policies that they're thinking about adopting. So the policy side was something we tried not to talk about even within the intelligence community. But yeah, as a briefer, as producing the PDB, you saw everything. In fact, the calendar of the PDB pieces, we had as a control department a document, because, basically, if you read a few weeks of the PDB calendar of what the President was seeing, you knew what the White House's agenda was around the globe.

[01:06:07] AH: And how long did you manage the PDB for when you start being able to for yourself, and then you're managing the unit and setting it up? How long was that?

[01:06:17] DT: That was about a year and a half, two years. My day switched to going from eight in the morning till midnight or so. I put the book to bed. And the hours were about the same as much later in the day. In fact, one time, the briefer for Secretary of State, Colin Powell, got sick. And they didn't get sick until late in the evening. And I was head of the PDB at the time. And so I briefed before, and I know everything that's in the book, because I've put it together and edited it, and so on. So it's not a big deal. I will just go home shower, come back and brief Secretary Powell.

[01:06:56] AH: I guess, there must be a lot of stuff inside your head that you maybe hear people talking about 9/11, or the war in Afghanistan, or Iraq, and you must think to yourself, "I've got some stuff that you don't know that's kind of really interesting and provides additional information. Just as a human being, I guess, like how do you keep control of that information? I mean, I think we've all had that experience of you tell your wife or your husband something as if they've never heard it before. And they say to you, "You've told me those three things before." Or you maybe say something that you're not meant to say, someone confided a U.S. secret, and you swore you take it to the grave. And then you unwittingly told it to someone else. As a human being, how do you put up guardrails for the information that's not meant to go anywhere else?

[01:07:53] DT: I think just practice. And that's one of the things that led you to being selected as a briefer, was you improved over time that you discipline yourself to remember what was a secret and what wasn't? It's basically just always remembering where that information came from. And you read a lot of things then and even today, and see them on movies, on TV and

documentaries, and so on that you know are false, because you were there. But there's just nothing you can do about that. History is not perfect.

[01:08:23] AH: Moving on to the period after that, how do you think that these events, 9/11, the war on terror, how do you think it affected the agency that you worked for? So here we're talking about the Central Intelligence Agency, or the intelligence community more generally. Help us take stock of how that affected the IC.

[01:08:44] DT: I think the agency and the intelligence community moved very quickly to go into a war footing. In fact, one of the deputy directors that day said the world has changed today. And it's never going to be the same. And we need to change quickly. And so they started moving people, in some cases, units, that day, to move toward the fight against terrorism. And then for a lot of people, that was good, because they wanted to be in the fight.

For some people, quite frankly, personally, it was a disappointment. If you were an expert on, say, Japan's economy because you got your PhD and that you'd written two books in that and you went to graduate school in Japan and so on, to all of a sudden be moved to doing terrorist renounces. That was not that exciting. But everybody, more or less, got on board. And from putting people out on the field in Afghanistan, to support the Northern Alliance, to moving analysts in Washington, to creating targets, I think they did a great job.

For a lot of people, there was a lot of stress associated with that the guys in the field not knowing exactly who is their friend and who was not their friend in Afghanistan, and then they literally risked their lives every day. And I was also surprised even back here in Washington, this rests on the analyst. As I later managed counterterrorism analysts, I had folks with ulcers, people who had nightmare, people who had their arms shaking and so on from the stress. Because as you sit there and read the transcripts, or listen to the transcripts of the terrorists and look at their plots and trying to figure out, people's lives are at stake. And you take that personally. And it was very stressful.

In fact, once I pulled together a number of my analysts. And, in fact, probably too many to take offline at once for them to talk to a bunch of shrinks. I had this shrinks come in and say, psychologically, these are ways that you can manage some of this pressure. And all the people I

took offline that day took a test in terms of measuring stress. And the psychologist said, “Look, we average the stress test that we gave you. And for the average analyst in this room, you're at about the stress level one would expect someone going through a messy divorce.” And they all kind of look at each other, “Wow! I don't feel that stress.” Well, that's because you've been feeling it every day.

And so just looking for ways for the managers to manage that stress. So we didn't lose people, because we were basically burning out our expertise about as fast as we were building it, and they didn't lose objectivity and become too emotional, all those things. We took a number of steps, basically ordering people to go home at night sometimes, ordering them to take a day off, looking for ways to make sure that would that operationally and analytically we could continue this for the long run, because we started with a very small core of people who really understood terrorism analysis and operations.

[01:11:35] AH: Just thinking back, after 9/11, there was lots of talk about this as the new way of war. This is the new way of doing things. The major threats now are going to be the new security challenges, terrorism, climate change, all those sorts of things. But now we seem to be shifting back to, well, actually, Russia and China and great powers are important. So maybe all of that kind of new security challenges, stuff was a bit of a – Not a distraction, but the whole thing has been reset. Do you get that sense for the intelligence community? It was all about great powers. Okay, it's actually about tribes and being often far flung corners of the world. Okay, now, that's over. And now it's by the great powers. Is that your sense for the agency analytically?

[01:12:27] DT: Yeah, I think the war on terrorism, because it was so tactical and was so intelligence-focused, that was hopefully an unusual period of history for the intelligence community to be that tactical. And now we're talking to my colleagues still back in the intelligence world, they're moving toward more nation state level analysis and issues. But that's part of the difficulty of being a global service, is basically you have to support everything. And so part of the game as a manager there is betting on the future in terms of where you need to have the expertise now, where you're going to have to be developing it for the future. But yeah, I do sense that shift.

[01:13:06] AH: That's interesting. Sometimes I've thought about this almost like being a manager at CIA. It's almost like managing a big portfolio where you're investing in certain stocks. And there're no guarantees about where anything's going. But you're trying to get as many indicators as you can that suggests that maybe this is the way things are going to go, and you're trying to make sure that your fund grows in profitable ways, a lot of kind of reading between the lines or trying to anticipate things. I mean that must be so difficult with the CIA, like strategic intelligence, shift into this very tactical war. And then, okay, we need to get back to strategic intelligence again. Help us understand that someone that's been through the system.

[01:13:55] DT: It's very difficult in analysis to make those investments. It's even more so having managed collection at the national levels, even for more so for collectors, because it takes a long time to cultivate and recruit a human asset. Just don't turn them off and on, and to have bugs in the right places to hear the right conversations. To have satellites in the right places with the right sensors to find things. So there are a lot of people who are looking over the horizon. These are today's issues. But what are tomorrow's? And how will we be ready for those? Because I think that's part of the intelligence community's job.

President Reagan, when he left office, came out to Langley to thank the intelligence community for all the support. And he uses a phrase that stuck with me when he said, "I consider you the tripwire of American defense." And in order to be that tripwire, you're going to be the first person to see what's coming. And so that's looking over the horizon. So they talk about national intelligence priorities, and they try and draw those up. Those are useful for today and a little bit for resource planning, but good managers really are visionaries looking at what will the next issue be even for the next administration, because each administration comes in, and they've got a different set of agendas. Different agenda, rather a different policy agenda, which already require different intelligence on different topics, which is going to require different intelligence sources. So it's always a game that you trying to find things that the other countries are trying to hide, because they see things coming at a new administration, and we're going to have different priorities. And it's a very difficult business.

[01:15:33] AH: And very small question here. How do you think it affected the country? How do you think it affected United States? Or how do you think it affected America's role in the world?

[01:15:44] DT: I guess, Andrew, maybe I'm looking for a silver lining on a very big dark cloud here. But I do think 9/11 brought us together as a nation. And for one brief shining moment, we all had a singular goal and a singular focus. And we got a lot done. I mean, a lot done, because everybody in the U.S government, by and large, had at the same goals. There are a few people I think there were building personal or organizational empires and a few things that were done just to say the US government was doing something, but those were pretty few and far between. Everybody was on the same sheet of music, and there, for a period of time, we really were red, white, and blue, not just red and blue.

[01:16:26] AH: I've heard you mentioned previously about America losing its citizens. Could you speak a little bit more about that?

[01:16:32] DT: Yeah, just more philosophically perhaps. I do think that 9/11 brought America into what the rest of the world is already fighting. That's terrorism. Traveling around the world to see liaison services before 9/11. It amazed me to see policeman standing in front of police stations with submachine guns to protect the police station, or soldiers with dogs patrolling civilian airports because of terrorism. And we didn't have to deal with any of that before 9/11. So in one sense, it kind of brought us in to the rest of the world. In one sense, I think we kind of lost our innocence kind of the same way Pearl Harbor brought us into World War II and we lost our innocence there.

And maybe there was some value for that. Since World War II, we've had a low threshold for people becoming dictators, like Hitler. And since World War II, we've had a low threshold for terrorism. And I'm amazed quite frankly that we haven't been struck again, to be blunt. I mean, you saw the zeal and hundreds of people pledging their lives to attack the United States. They're motivated. They were exceptionally motivated to strike the United States. And I am surprised that they have not been successful. As the old saw goes, the terrorists only have to get lucky once, whereas the intelligence community has to be perfect every time.

I'm surprised. There're a lot of dedication among United States intelligence and military folks. There's a lot of dedication to our allied services. We were not that good. In terms of the god blessing America, in terms of just the ability to have gone nearly 20 years, we've had another major terrorism strike. I'm surprised.

[01:18:26] AH: We've touched on what I'm sure are some rather painful memories for years. Just in closing, is there anything that you think our listeners would find quite interesting?

[01:18:36] DT: Well, they're interesting to me, because it happened to me. I'm not sure the listeners will find them interesting. I think a couple of stories come to mind. One is dodging a bullet in Iraq and the other one is dodging a mark from the vice president here. When the Iraq war started, I had numerous analysts over there going after Al Qaeda in Iraq. So I went over one Christmas to the thank them for being there and what they were doing and also to thank them for being out there doing it rather than being with their families on Christmas. And I was talking to them one night and having dinner, and gunfire started erupting all over Baghdad. And we were used to hearing little firefights here and there. And we were used to having a mortar shell drop it every now and then. But this was like city wide. So, "Oh my gosh! It must be a coordinated attack going on or something big is happening."

So over our communications devices they crack, "Seek cover. Seek cover immediately." So we all go away from the table. I dove in one direction, because I was on one side of the table toward one bunker. They dove toward another bunker. I got in my bunker and I recognize I need to call back in to let them know I was okay. Because they reassured me that I was senior enough that if I called back in, they wouldn't send out security teams to track me down and rescue me. So I was safe from the bunker, and I couldn't get my device to work. It wouldn't transmit to other bunkers. So I talked to all the other people there. They didn't have different devices. They didn't know who I was calling. So what do I do here?

Well, one of my less brilliant moves, I decided I better get out of the bunker to call in because I don't want these guys going out in the middle of a city wide firefight to try and come rescue me when I'm actually safe. So I got outside and called in to let them know I was safe. Right about the time I was finishing this very short conversation, a bullet ricocheted off a wall about three feet from my head, head high, as I dove back into the bunker. Well, eventually, after a few minutes, the fighting stopped and we were given the all clear signal we could get out.

What had happened was that evidently there had been a very close and important soccer match that the Iraqi national team had just one. So every faction everybody with a firearm throughout

Baghdad emptied their firearm in the air and continued to reload and fired for several minutes, like 10 minutes. Everyone was firing up into the air. Well, what goes up must come down. So all these 10s of 1000s of rounds the bullets were falling back on the city. That's what had hit the wall near me. I have no idea how many people and goats died in Baghdad that night from all of this lead coming back down.

But to me, that would have been the worst time to have gotten shot. I'd been on the lead end of a gun a couple of other times before, but that one would have been very embarrassing. Writing the cable back to headquarters explaining what happened. Well, you see headquarters, I was in the bunker, but I had to get out into the gunfire to let them know I was safe. And I got hit by silhouette toward gunfire from a soccer game. I would have never traveled for the CIA again.

The other time was not as deadly, but more embarrassing. As I said, I briefed Vice President Cheney in the Vice President's mansion. A very nice mansion, three floors down on the Naval Observatory. And he would always come down from the top two floors where they lived. And I was his first appointment of the day. He liked to be briefed reef in the Florida room, which I guess from his vantage point was nice. It's on the east side. The sun comes up. You can see it going over the flower gardens, and very nice. But as a venue for intelligence briefing, I did not like it. You can imagine sitting there, Andrew, on a sofa with the nation's most sensitive secrets on the coffee table in front of you surrounded by glass on three sides. I mean, occasionally two feed behind me on the other side of that glass would walk the Secret Service agent or a gardener, who knows who, and by the end of the lawn over and what I consider to fairly short bounce was Massachusetts Avenue with all of its hustle and bustle. And I was just always concerned about what's going on behind me.

So one day and I sitting there waiting for him to come down, as the Secret Service always let me in early, and in walks this little puppy. I never seen this little puppy before. And the little puppy was coming over to me and was trying to come up over the coffee table rather than around it. Well, two intelligence breaking books, fresh flowers with water. Even I can see this was a disaster waiting to happen. This little puppy, I grabbed it, stood up, grabbed it before it or I spilled the water on the intelligence briefing books.

What I didn't know was the Cheney's had gone out the night before and purchased this little puppy. It spent the night in their bedroom. So when he opened the door and was coming down, the puppy was running in front of him. I didn't see him. I only saw the puppy. So as I was standing up to grab the puppy, he sticks his head in the Florida room door and yells, "Get down, Dave!" So I ducked assuming bin laden with an AK-47 was on the other side of the glass wall. And I looked up and he was just laughing. He said, "Dog's name Dave too. I named it after you."

[01:23:34] AH: And if you could choose one object to be a lens through which we could enter into the story of Dave Terry, what object would it be?

[01:23:44] DT: I guess the object that comes to mind was a big canvas bag with its white bag with the blue vice presidential seal that we were all issued shortly after 9/11 to basically put our office supplies in as we move from remote undisclosed location to another. That was kind of our portable office. And to me it kind of symbolize is kind of a simple thing. But we need to get to working and we need to keep working and do whatever it takes to get the job done. And that just kind of symbolize to me the whole spirit of 9/11 and moving on to the war on terror. And that bag actually is in the display case on the ground floor of CIA headquarters.

[01:24:25] AH: And have you ever been up to New York to look at Ground Zero?

[01:24:31] DT: Interesting question. When the Vice President Cheney went up there to speak after 9/11, I stayed back at a security checkpoint, because I was trying to shield myself from the personal side just to remain emotionally objective. And so I did not go then. Later when I managed counterterrorism analysis, I did go up there. I was touching for me though.

[01:24:53] AH: Well, thanks ever so much for your time. It's been fascinating to hear your story.

[01:24:58] DT: Thank you very much, Andrew?

[01:24:59] AH: Thank you.

[END]