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Obama alone: This president does not need intel briefers

By [Marc A. Thiessen](#), Published: September 13

How long had it been since President Obama attended his daily intelligence meeting in the lead-up to the Sept. 11 attacks on [U.S. diplomatic facilities in Egypt and Libya](#)? After all, our adversaries are known to use the anniversary of 9/11 to target the United States.

According to the public schedule of the president, the last time the Obama attended his daily intelligence meeting was Sept. 5 — a week before Islamist radicals stormed our embassy in Cairo and terrorists killed our ambassador to Tripoli. The president was scheduled to hold the intelligence meeting at 10:50 a.m. Wednesday, the day after the attacks, but it was canceled so that he could comfort grieving employees at the State Department — as well he should. But instead of rescheduling the intelligence briefing for later in the day, [Obama apparently chose to skip it altogether](#) and attend a Las Vegas fundraiser for his re-election campaign. One day after a terrorist attack.

When I asked National Security Council spokesman Tommy Vietor if the president had attended any meetings to discuss the Presidential Daily Brief (PDB) since Sept. 5, he repeatedly refused to answer. He noted that Obama had attended a principals meeting of the National Security Council on Sept. 10 and reiterated that he reads the PDB. “As I’ve told you every time you ask, the President gets his PDB every day,” Vietor told me by e-mail, adding this swipe at Obama’s predecessor, George W. Bush: “Unlike your former boss, he has it delivered to his residence in the morning and not briefed to him.” (This new line of defense was echoed this morning by my Post colleague, Dana Milbank, who writes that [Bush was briefed every day](#) by his intelligence advisers because he “decided he would prefer to read less.”)

Vietor’s reply is quite revealing. It is apparently a point of pride in the White House that Obama’s PDB is “not briefed to him.” In the eyes of this administration, it is a virtue that the president does not meet every day with senior intelligence officials. This president, you see, does not *need* briefers. He can forgo his daily intelligence meeting because he is, in Vietor’s words, “among the most sophisticated consumers of intelligence on the planet.”

Truly sophisticated consumers of intelligence don’t see it as a sign of weakness to “be briefed” by the experts. Most of us, if we subscribed to a daily report on, say, astrophysics, would probably need some help interpreting it. But when it comes to intelligence, Obama is apparently so brilliant he can absorb the most complicated topics by himself in his study. He does not need to sit down for up to an hour a day with top intelligence officials, or hold more than 100 “deep dives” in which he invites CIA analysts into the Oval Office and gives them direct access to the commander in chief to discuss their areas of expertise. Such meetings are crutches this president does not need. Written briefings, questions and comments are enough. Obama has more important things to do — such as attend Las Vegas fundraisers.

No doubt the intelligence community has adapted to its diminished access to the commander in chief and is finding a way to get the president the intelligence he needs. Members of the community have endured a lot these past 3 1/2 years — accusations of torture from the Oval Office; more than 100 criminal investigations from the Obama Justice Department that resulted in zero — zero — criminal charges being filed; a president who is quick to claim credit for killing Osama bin Laden while denying credit to the CIA interrogators who made the mission possible. They’ll survive not being invited more frequently into the Oval Office.

But the hubris of a president who believes he does not need to meet regularly *with them* is astounding. When [President John F. Kennedy](#) gathered every living American Nobel laureate for dinner at the White House in 1962, he declared it “the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.” Apparently, in this administration’s view, Kennedy had it wrong — the most extraordinary collection of talent and knowledge ever gathered in the White House is when Barack Obama reads his daily intelligence brief alone.

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