

MARK THIESSEN: MORE IMPORTANT TO HEAR-NOT READ-DAILY BRIEF THAN ACTUALLY RESPOND TO IT

Yesterday, Mark Thiessen made a what amounts to a complaint that, half the time, President Obama reads his daily brief rather than receives it from a briefer directly. Here's Obama's response.

I figured, as Thiessen's bleatings often are, it was meant to distract from the incompetence of his Bush people, but it was not yet clear what he was distracting from.

Now it is.

On April 10, 2004, the Bush White House declassified [the August 6, 2001 PDB that warned "Bin Laden determined to strike in US"] – and only that daily brief – in response to pressure from the 9/11 Commission, which was investigating the events leading to the attack. Administration officials dismissed the document's significance, saying that, despite the jaw-dropping headline, it was only an assessment of Al Qaeda's history, not a warning of the impending attack. While some critics considered that claim absurd, a close reading of the brief showed that the argument had some validity.

That is, unless it was read in conjunction with the daily briefs preceding Aug. 6, the ones the Bush administration would not release. While those documents are still not public, I have read excerpts from many of them, along with other recently declassified records, and come to an inescapable

conclusion: the administration's reaction to what Mr. Bush was told in the weeks before that infamous briefing reflected significantly more negligence than has been disclosed. In other words, the Aug. 6 document, for all of the controversy it provoked, is not nearly as shocking as the briefs that came before it.

The direct warnings to Mr. Bush about the possibility of a Qaeda attack began in the spring of 2001. By May 1, the Central Intelligence Agency told the White House of a report that "a group presently in the United States" was planning a terrorist operation. Weeks later, on June 22, the daily brief reported that Qaeda strikes could be "imminent," although intelligence suggested the time frame was flexible.

But some in the administration considered the warning to be just bluster.

All that's not to mean Obama's not missing similarly grave threats: threats to the financial system and to the climate.

But this op-ed—and presumably the Kurt Eichenwald book it is based on—seems to confirm that the Bush Administration very arrogantly refused to listen to the warnings they were getting in their President's (and Vice President's) Daily Briefings.

And because they failed to heed that warning, they responded with all-out, Constitution eroding war, and not with the policing that might have prevented 9/11 in the first place.