

Inside the White House - The Situation Room

December 18, 2009. (4 min. 49 sec.)

00:13

(music playing)

(phone rings)

00:05

(Unidentified Speaker)

Good Evening, Mr. Prime Minister, it'll be one moment for President Obama.

00:18

Introducing the Prime Minister.

00:22

(Mr. Harley)

We are here in the West Wing of the White House inside the White House Situation Room.

00:28

(Jefferey Harley – Situation Room Deputy Director)

We host about 25 conferences a day here in the Situation Room and some 250 guests attending the different meetings throughout the day.

00:36

In a month, that's over 5,000 visitors and attendees to the different meetings that we have here.

00:43

It's a state-of-the-art facility -- the ability to conduct video teleconferences with 1,700 or 1,800 entities throughout the world.

00:52

(Mr. Reed)

This is an interagency meeting on H1N 1 pandemic,

00:55

(Richard Reed: Senior Director for Resilience Policy)

so it has interagency representatives from the Executive Branch – departments and agencies.

01:00

They have the technology here and the capability to bring in other departments and agencies electronically as opposed to having folks face-to-face.

01:08

(Mr. Harley)

The White House Situation Room was created in May of 1961 by the then-National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy.

01:16

They had voracious appetite for information, particularly President Kennedy.

01:21

In response to that need, they felt the desire to create a communications center here within the White House.

01:29

In 2007, the White House Situation Room underwent a major renovation which greatly expanded the square footage and capabilities of the White House Situation Room.

01:40

It went from one principal conference room to three principal conference rooms.

01:45

This is the large conference room where the President holds the National Council Security meetings.

01:51

This is the President's chair.

01:53

He controls the video options, including the microphones.

01:58

Now, the traditional lineup of seats is based on the seniority of the different Cabinet members attending the meeting.

02:04

Tied to the Executive Conference Room is a small breakout room designed to enable the President to take one or two people into a conference room to have a small one-on-one session with them.

02:15

And all of the feel that you see here – the types of wood – are designed to replicate the other entities at which the President would participate; places like Air Force One and Camp David, so that wherever the President is, the feel is the same – having the same texture and sound around him.

02:33

(music playing)

02:38

One of the cool features of this particular room in the White House Situation Room is the opportunity to provide privacy for the President if he's making a Head of State phone call from the Situation Room itself.

02:48

And what we'll do is we'll be able to fog the windows to give him that level of privacy.

02:55

So throughout the White House Situation Room, you have a number of phone tunes – or we call them “Superman tubes”— with capability to have unclassified telephones as well as top secret telephone capability.

03:09

This is the “watch floor” of the White House Situation Room and the watch floor's commodity is situational awareness.

03:15

We're a fusion center, meaning that we fuse approximately 2,000 pieces of information every day.

03:22

We produce three daily reports directly for the President and it's basically a situation awareness update, perhaps since the last time the President had an opportunity to assimilate any additional information.

03:36

The room that you see behind me is called the "surge room" and that's where we literally surge personnel in a crisis.

03:44

We keep the phones and the computers always on so that we can provide instant access and start fusing information to provide a summary for the decision makers in the White House so that they can make decisions in response to that situation or crisis.

03:59

And hence the clever name, "Situation Room."

04:03

One-third of the personnel come from the intelligence community, one-third come from the Department of Homeland Security, and the remainder come from the U.S. military.

04:12

We are sent here because we're apolitical -- we're not Democrats, we're not Republicans; we're here to support our nation and the President of the United States and institutions of the presidency.

04:24

And all of the people who work in the White House Situation Room are

simply the best and the brightest that this nation can offer and they do the very best job that they can do.

4:35

(music playing, sound of door creaking shut)

04:42

Wolf Blitzer sits about a mile away, I think, in his Situation Room, but not the White House Situation Room.