

Former US Envoy to Moscow Calls Intelligence Report on Alleged Russian Interference ‘Politically Motivated’

Prominent journalists and politicians seized upon a shabby, politically motivated, “intelligence” report as proof of “Russian interference” in the U.S. election without the pretense of due diligence, argues Jack Matlock, a former U.S. ambassador in Moscow.

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Did the U.S. “intelligence community” judge that Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election?

Most commentators seem to think so. Every news report I have read of the planned meeting of Presidents Trump and Putin in July refers to “Russian interference” as a fact and asks whether the matter will be discussed. Reports that President Putin denied involvement in the election are scoffed at, usually with a claim that the U.S. “intelligence community” proved Russian interference. In fact, the U.S. “intelligence community” has not done so. The intelligence community as a whole has not been tasked to make a judgment and some key members of that community did not participate in the report that is routinely cited as “proof” of “Russian interference.”

I spent the 35 years of my government service with a “top secret” clearance. When I reached the rank of ambassador and also worked as Special Assistant to the President for National Security, I also had clearances for “codeword” material. At that time, intelligence reports to the president relating to Soviet and European affairs were routed through me for comment. I developed at that time a “feel” for the strengths and weaknesses of the various American intelligence agencies. It is with that background that I read the January 6, 2017 [report](#) of three intelligence agencies: the CIA, FBI, and NSA.

This report is labeled “Intelligence Community Assessment,” but in fact *it is not that*. A report of the intelligence community in my day would include the input of all the relevant intelligence agencies and would reveal whether all agreed with the conclusions. Individual agencies did not hesitate to “take a footnote” or explain their position if they disagreed with a particular assessment. A report would not claim to be that of the “intelligence community” if any relevant agency was omitted.

The report states that it represents the findings of three intelligence agencies: CIA, FBI, and NSA, but *even that is misleading* in that it implies that there was a consensus of relevant analysts in these three agencies. In fact, the report was prepared by a group of analysts from the three agencies pre-selected by their directors, with the selection process generally overseen by James Clapper, then Director of National Intelligence (DNI). Clapper told the

Senate in testimony May 8, 2017, that it was prepared by “two dozen or so analysts—hand-picked, seasoned experts from each of the contributing agencies.” If you can hand-pick the analysts, you can hand-pick the conclusions. The analysts selected would have understood what Director Clapper wanted since he made no secret of his views. Why would they endanger their careers by not delivering?

What should have struck any congressperson or reporter was that the procedure Clapper followed was the same as that used in 2003 to produce the report falsely claiming that Saddam Hussein had retained stocks of weapons of mass destruction. That should be worrisome enough to inspire questions, but that is not the only anomaly.

The DNI has under his aegis a National Intelligence Council whose officers can call any intelligence agency with relevant expertise to draft community assessments. It was created by Congress after 9/11 specifically to correct some of the flaws in intelligence collection revealed by 9/11. Director Clapper chose not to call on the NIC, which is curious since its duty is “to act as a bridge between the intelligence and policy communities.”



Clapper (far right): Picked who he wanted. (Office of Director of National Intelligence)

Unusual FBI Participation

During my time in government, a judgment regarding national security would include reports from, as a minimum, the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) of the State Department. The FBI was rarely, if ever, included unless the principal question concerned law enforcement within the United States. NSA might have provided some of the intelligence used by the other agencies but normally did not express an opinion regarding the substance of reports.

What did I notice when I read the January report? There was no mention of INR or DIA! The exclusion of DIA might be understandable since its mandate deals primarily with military forces, except that the report attributes some of the Russian activity to the GRU, Russian military intelligence. DIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, is the U.S. intelligence organ

most expert on the GRU. Did it concur with this attribution? The report doesn't say.

The omission of INR is more glaring since a report on foreign political activity could not have been that of the U.S. intelligence community without its participation. After all, when it comes to assessments of foreign intentions and foreign political activity, the State Department's intelligence service is by far the most knowledgeable and competent. In my day, it reported accurately on Gorbachev's reforms when the CIA leaders were advising that Gorbachev had the same aims as his predecessors.

This is where due diligence comes in. The first question responsible journalists and politicians should have asked is "Why is INR not represented? Does it have a different opinion? If so, what is that opinion? Most likely the official answer would have been that this is "classified information." But why should it be classified? If some agency heads come to a conclusion and choose (or are directed) to announce it publicly, doesn't the public deserve to know that one of the key agencies has a different opinion?

The second question should have been directed at the CIA, NSA, and FBI: did all their analysts agree with these conclusions or were they divided in their conclusions? What was the reason behind hand-picking analysts and departing from the customary practice of enlisting analysts already in place and already responsible for following the issues involved?

State Department Intel Silenced

As I was recently informed by a senior official, *the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence Research did, in fact, have a different opinion but was not allowed to express it.* So the January report was not one of the "intelligence community," but rather of three intelligence agencies, two of which have no responsibility or necessarily any competence to judge foreign intentions. The job of the FBI is to enforce federal law. The job of NSA is to intercept the communications of others and to protect ours. It is not staffed to assess the content of what is intercepted; that task is assumed by others, particularly the CIA, the DIA (if it is military) or the State Department's INR (if it is political).

The second thing to remember is that reports of the intelligence agencies reflect the views of the heads of the agencies and are not necessarily a consensus of their analysts' views. The heads of both the CIA and FBI are political appointments, while the NSA chief is a military officer; his agency is a collector of intelligence rather than an analyst of its import, except in the fields of cryptography and communications security.

One striking thing about the press coverage and Congressional discussion of the January report, and of subsequent statements by CIA, FBI, and NSA heads is that questions were never posed regarding the position of the State Department's INR, or whether the analysts in the agencies cited were in total agreement with the conclusions.

Let's put these questions aside for the moment and look at the report itself. On the first page of text, the following statement leapt to my attention:

"We did not make an assessment of the impact that Russian activities had on the outcome of the 2016 election. The US Intelligence Community is charged with monitoring and assessing the intentions, capabilities, and actions of foreign actors; it does not analyze US political processes or US public opinion."

Now, how can one judge whether activity “interfered” with an election without assessing its impact? After all, if the activity had no impact on the outcome of the election, it could not be properly termed interference. This disclaimer, however, has not prevented journalists and politicians from citing the report as proof that “Russia interfered” in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

As for particulars, the report is full of assertion, innuendo, and description of “capabilities” but largely devoid of any evidence to substantiate its assertions. This is “explained” by claiming that much of the evidence is classified and cannot be disclosed without revealing sources and methods. The assertions are made with “high confidence” or occasionally, “moderate confidence.” Having read many intelligence reports I can tell you that if there is irrefutable evidence of something it will be stated as a fact. The use of the term “high confidence” is what most normal people would call “our best guess.” “Moderate confidence” means “some of our analysts think this might be true.”

Guccifer 2.0: A Fabrication

Among the assertions are that a persona calling itself “Guccifer 2.0” is an instrument of the GRU, and that it hacked the emails on the Democratic National Committee’s computer and conveyed them to Wikileaks. What the report does not explain is that it is easy for a hacker or foreign intelligence service to leave a false trail. In fact, a program developed by CIA with NSA assistance to do just that has been leaked and published.



Retired senior NSA technical experts have examined the “Guccifer 2.0” data on the web and have concluded that “Guccifer 2.0’s” data did not involve a hack across the web but was locally downloaded. Further, the data had been tampered with and manipulated, leading to the conclusion that “Guccifer 2.0” is a total fabrication.

The report’s assertions regarding the supply of the DNC emails to Wikileaks are dubious, but its final statement in this regard is important: *“Disclosures through WikiLeaks did not contain any evident forgeries.”* In other words, what was disclosed was the truth! So, Russians are accused of “degrading our democracy” by revealing that the DNC was trying to fix the nomination of a particular candidate rather than allowing the primaries and state caucuses to run their course. I had always thought that transparency is consistent with democratic values. Apparently those who think that the truth can degrade democracy have a rather bizarre—to put it mildly—concept of democracy.

Most people, hearing that it is a “fact” that “Russia” interfered in our election must think that Russian government agents hacked into vote counting machines and switched votes to favor a particular candidate. This, indeed, would be scary, and would justify the most painful sanctions. But this is the one thing that the “intelligence” report of January 6, 2017, states did not happen. Here is what it said:

“DHS [the Department of Homeland Security] assesses that the types of systems Russian actors targeted or compromised were not involved in vote tallying.”

This is an important statement by an agency that is empowered to assess the impact of foreign activity on the United States. Why was it not consulted regarding other aspects of

the study? Or—was it in fact consulted and refused to endorse the findings? Another obvious question any responsible journalist or competent politician should have asked.

Prominent American journalists and politicians seized upon this shabby, politically motivated, report as proof of “Russian interference” in the U.S. election without even the pretense of due diligence. They have objectively acted as co-conspirators in an effort to block any improvement in relations with Russia, even though cooperation with Russia to deal with common dangers is vital to both countries.

This is only part of the story of how, without good reason, U.S.-Russian relations have become dangerously confrontational. God willin and the crick don’t rise, I’ll be musing about other aspects soon.

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This article was originally published on JackMatlock.com.

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