

How Russia's RT Became the Target of CIA, FBI and NSA's Anticlimactic 'Big Reveal'

By [Bryan Macdonald](#)

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The eagerly awaited Director Of National Intelligence's (DNI) report "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections" didn't need such a long winded title. They could have just called it: "We Really Don't Like RT."

Almost every major western news outlet splashed this story. But it was probably the New York Times' report which was the most amusing. America's "paper of record" hailed the DNI's [homework](#) as "damning and surprisingly detailed." Then a few paragraphs later admitted the analysis contained no actual evidence.

Thus, in a few column inches, the Gray Lady went from describing the DNI's release as something conclusive to conceding how it was all conjecture. "The declassified report contained no information about how the agencies had collected their data or had come to their conclusions," the reporter, one David E. Sanger, told us. He then reached further into his bag of tricks to warn how it is "bound to be attacked by skeptics."



Russia Today newsroom © Evgeny Biyatov / Sputnik

Yes, those skeptics. Aren't they awful? Like, imagine not accepting an intelligence document at face value? Especially when it warns that a nuclear armed military superpower is interfering in the American democratic process, but then offers not a smidgen of proof for its assertions. Not to mention how it appears to have been put together by a group of people with barely a clue about Russia.

For instance, RT programs such as "Breaking The Set" and "The Truthseeker" are mentioned in a submission supposed to be about how RT seemingly cost Hillary Clinton the US Presidential Election. But both of these programmes went off air around two years ago.

And, back then, Clinton wasn't even the Democratic Party candidate for the 2016 contest. Furthermore, it's deeply odd how this seems to be part of a super old report, with just a tiny disclaimer in that regard.

Official DNI report on Russia says my show Breaking the Set, that ended 2 yrs ago, helped cost Hillary the election <https://t.co/LyNZIaDxQm>
[pic.twitter.com/Ha0rWNISwV](https://t.co/LyNZIaDxQm)

— Abby Martin (@AbbyMartin) [6 January 2017](#)

The stream of obsolete information continues. Readers could be led to believe that the head of RT's Arabic Service is Aydar Aganin and the London bureau is headed by Darya Pushkova. The problem is neither of these individuals currently work at RT, nor have done for a long time. And the focus on the latter is presumably because she's defined as "*the daughter of Aleksey Pushkov, the current chair of the Duma Russian Foreign Affairs Committee.*" But even if she were employed at RT, what would be unusual about it anyway? After all, many journalists have family members who've been involved in politics at one time or another. For instance, CNN host Christiane Amanpour's husband James Rubin was an advisor to Hillary Clinton, and served as a US Assistant Secretary of State under her husband, Bill.

Plumbing the depths

So how bad is this report? You'd have to say on a scale of 1-10, it'd be eleven. The core message appears to be that having a point of view which is out of sync with the liberal popular media is considered a hostile act by US spooks. And it's specifically the liberal press' worldview they are defending here. Now, it's up to you to judge whether this support, from state actors, is justified or not. The DNI's submission is ostensibly the work of highly qualified intelligence experts, but everything you learn about RT comes from publicly available interviews and Tweets posted by this channel's own people. Yet, we are supposed to believe how the best Russia brains of three agencies – the CIA, FBI and NSA – laboured to produce this stuff? That said, the latter doesn't appear to be fully on board, offering "*moderate*" confidence, in contrast to the other's "*high confidence.*" Approximately a third of the document centers on RT. And it appears that we should swallow how RT succeeded where the combined might of CNN, NBC, CBS, The Washington Post and the New York Times and others failed in influencing the US election. Not to mention the reality where 500 US media outlets endorsed Clinton and only 25 President-elect Donald Trump. It's time to scream: "*stop the lights!*" Meanwhile, the "*background info*" on RT offered here appears to have been compiled on the basis of poorly translated decade old articles and long-obsolete stats. As a result, the only current stuff, actually relevant to the 2016 election, comes down to "*Russia hacked US election because RT criticized Clinton.*" The absurdity of the claim is evidently lost on the authors.

Fragile facts

The mistakes are myriad. Audience figures are out of date. And the general feel is of some kind of amateurish compilation from a think tank. In fact, you could argue that many lobby firms' anti-Russia reports have been more polished than this offering. But they are chancers, with faux academic sounding titles, and the DNI is supposed to boast the finest minds of US intelligence.

'They're kidding, right?' Social media unimpressed by intel report on [#Russia](#)
'[#hacking](#) <https://t.co/fGRz6c2qCn> pic.twitter.com/4WbUa10aQE

— RT (@RT_com) [7 January 2017](#)

Of course, it could also be argued that it's the inevitable result of how funding for Russian studies was choked in the US after the Soviet collapse. And many have argued this point. Because it's abundantly clear that all three agencies urgently need to hire better experts for their Russian desks. For example, people who've spent a bit of time in the country and can point to a rudimentary grasp of the language.

More outdated facts follow. When it comes to YouTube views, the report cites a figure of 800 million for RT. However, it's five times higher, at four billion, and counting. Indeed, the English language channel alone can be proud of over 1.5 billion hits at present.

The point needs to be laboured because it exposes how shoddy this submission is. The compilers plainly couldn't have been bothered to engage an intern to update their figures before publication. And it speaks volumes. So too when a Kommersant article, dated 07/04/2012 is explained as the fourth of July, as opposed to the seventh of April. Because you'd imagine Russia focused spies would be able to understand the European dating style, wouldn't you?

Then there's how the 'investigators' refer to Dmitry Kiselev and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy as somehow influential here. They allege the former's TV show was biased towards Trump's candidacy. But it's a domestic programme, in Russian, aimed at people who live in Russia and can't vote in US elections. Likewise, Zhirinovskiy's presence is bizarre (he's described as a 'Kremlin proxy') because he's an ageing clown. And, as it happens, his remark about "drinking champagne" in the event of a Trump victory is rather mild given his track record. We are talking about a man who once [predicted](#) that George Bush's soldiers would be "torn to pieces" if they invaded Iraq. So Nostradamus, he ain't. And his clout with Putin is probably somewhere between slim and none.

The DNI's report is beyond bad. And it's scary to think how outgoing President Obama has stirred up a nasty diplomatic battle with Russia based on intelligence so devoid of insight and quality. There is nothing here which suggests the authors have any special savvy or insight. In fact, you could argue how a group of students would've assembled something of similar substance by simply reading back issues of The New York Times.

But the biggest takeaway is that it's clear how the calibre of Russia expertise in America is mediocre, if not spookily sparse. And while this report might be fodder for amusement, the actual policy implications are nothing short of dangerous.

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