

“Salacious Accusations” against the President-elect: Pulling a J. Edgar Hoover on Trump

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Global Research, January 13, 2017

[Consortiumnews](#) 12 January 2017

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

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The decision by the U.S. intelligence community to include in an official report some unverified and salacious accusations against President-elect Donald Trump resembles a tactic out of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's playbook on government-style blackmail: I have some very derogatory information about you that I'd sure hate to see end up in the press.



Legendary FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover

In this case, as leaders of the U.S. intelligence community were pressing Trump to accept their assessment that the Russian government had tried to bolster Trump's campaign by stealing and leaking actual emails harmful to Hillary Clinton's campaign, Trump was confronted with this classified "appendix" describing claims about him cavorting with prostitutes in a Moscow hotel room.

Supposedly, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and CIA Director John Brennan included the unproven allegations in the report under the rationale that the Russian government might have videotaped Trump's misbehavior and thus could use it to blackmail him. But the U.S. intelligence community also had reasons to want to threaten Trump who has been critical of its performance and who has expressed doubts about its analysis of the Russian "hacking."

After the briefing last Friday, Trump and his incoming administration did shift their position, accepting the intelligence community's assessment that the Russian government hacked the emails of the Democratic National Committee and Clinton's campaign chief John Podesta. But I'm told Trump saw no evidence that Russia then leaked the material to WikiLeaks and has avoided making that concession.

Still, Trump's change in tone was noted by the mainstream media and was treated as an admission that he was abandoning his earlier skepticism. In other words, he was finally

getting onboard the intelligence community's Russia-did-it bandwagon. Now, however, we know that Trump simultaneously had been confronted with the possibility that the unproven stories about him engaging in unorthodox sex acts with prostitutes could be released, embarrassing him barely a week before his inauguration.

The classified report, with the explosive appendix, was also given to President Obama and the so-called "Gang of Eight," bipartisan senior members of Congress responsible for oversight of the intelligence community, which increased chances that the Trump accusations would be leaked to the press, which indeed did happen.

Circulating Rumors

The stories about Russian intelligence supposedly filming Trump in a high-end Moscow hotel with prostitutes have been [circulating around Washington](#) for months. I was briefed about them by a Hillary Clinton associate who was clearly hopeful that the accusations would be released before the election and thus further damage Trump's chances. But the alleged video never seemed to surface and the claims had all the earmarks of a campaign dirty trick.



President-elect Donald Trump. (Photo credit: donaldjtrump.com)

However, now the tales of illicit frolic have been elevated to another level. They have been inserted into an official U.S. intelligence report, the details of which were leaked first to CNN and then to other mainstream U.S. news media outlets.

Trump has denounced the story as "fake news" and it is certainly true that the juicy details – reportedly assembled by a former British MI-6 spy named Christopher Steele – have yet to check out. But the placement of the rumors in a U.S. government document gave the mainstream media an excuse to publicize the material.

It's also allowed the media to again trot out the Russian word "kompromat" as if the Russians invented the game of assembling derogatory information about someone and then using it to discredit or blackmail the person.

In American history, legendary FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was infamous for using his agency to develop negative information on a political figure and then letting the person know that the FBI had the dirt and certainly would not want it to become public – if only the person would do what the FBI wanted, whether that was to reappoint Hoover to another term or to boost the FBI's budget or – in the infamous case of civil rights leader Martin

Luther King – perhaps to commit suicide.

However, in this case, it is not even known whether the Russians have any dirt on Trump. It could just be rumors concocted in the middle of a hard-fought campaign, first among Republicans battling Trump for the nomination (this opposition research was reportedly initiated by backers of Sen. Marco Rubio in the GOP race) before being picked up by Clinton supporters for use in the general election.

Still, perhaps the more troubling issue is whether the U.S. intelligence community has entered a new phase of politicization in which its leadership feels that it has the responsibility to weed out “unfit” contenders for the presidency. During the general election campaign, a well-placed intelligence source told me that the intelligence community disdained both Clinton and Trump and hoped to discredit both of them with the hope that a more “acceptable” person could move into the White House for the next four years.

Hurting Both Candidates

Though I was skeptical of that information, it did turn out that FBI Director James Comey, one of the top officials in the intelligence community, badly damaged Clinton’s campaign by deeming her handling of her emails as Secretary of State “extremely careless” but deciding not to prosecute her – and then in the last week of the campaign briefly reopening and then re-closing the investigation.



FBI Director James Comey

Then, after the election, President Obama’s CIA began leaking allegations that Russian President Vladimir Putin had orchestrated the hacking of Democratic emails and provided them to WikiLeaks to reveal how the DNC undermined Sen. Bernie Sanders’s campaign and what Clinton had told Wall Street bigwigs in paid speeches that she had sought to keep secret from the American people.

The intelligence community’s assessment set the stage for what could have been a revolt by the Electoral College in which enough Trump delegates could have refused to vote for him to send the election into the House of Representatives, where the states would choose the President from one of the top three vote-getters in the Electoral College. The third-place

finisher turned out to be former Secretary of State Colin Powell who got four votes from Clinton delegates in Washington State. But the Electoral College ploy failed when Trump's delegates proved overwhelmingly faithful to the GOP candidate.

Now, we are seeing what looks like a new phase in this "stop (or damage) Trump" strategy, the inclusion of anti-Trump dirt in an official intelligence report that was then leaked to the major media.

Whether this move was meant to soften up Trump or whether the intelligence community genuinely thought that the accusations might be true and deserved inclusion in a report on alleged Russian interference in U.S. politics or whether it was some combination of the two, we are witnessing a historic moment when the U.S. intelligence community has deployed its extraordinary powers within the domain of U.S. politics. J. Edgar Hoover would be proud.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, America's Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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