

Where's the Beef? The Senate Intel Committee and Russia. Confirmation Bias, Endorses Accuracy of Intelligence Community Assessment (ACA)

How can the committee conduct “100 interviews, comprising 250 hours of testimony and resulting in 4,000 pages of transcripts” without producing a shred of evidence that Russia meddled in the elections?

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The Senate Intelligence Committee has made it clear that it is not conducting an open and independent investigation of alleged Russian hacking, but making a determined effort to support a theory that was presented in the January 6, 2017 Intelligence Community Assessment. Committee Chairman Senator Richard Burr (R-N.C.) admitted as much in a press conference last Wednesday when he said:

We feel very confident that the ICA's accuracy is going to be supported by our committee.

Burr's statement is an example of “confirmation bias” which is the tendency to interpret information in a way that confirms one's own preexisting beliefs. In this case, Burr and his co-chair, Senator Mark Warner have already accepted the findings of a hastily slapped-together Intelligence report that was the work of “hand-picked” analysts who were likely chosen to produce conclusions that jibed with a particular political agenda. In other words, the intelligence was fixed to fit the policy. Burr of course has tried to conceal his prejudice by pointing to the number of witnesses the Committee has interviewed and the volume of work that's been produced. This is from an article at The Nation:

Since January 23,... the committee and its staff have conducted more than 100 interviews, comprising 250 hours of testimony and resulting in 4,000 pages of transcripts, and reviewed more than 100,000 documents relevant to Russiagate. The staff, said Warner, has collectively spent a total of 57 hours per day, seven days a week, since the committee opened its inquiry, going through documents and transcripts, interviewing witnesses, and analyzing both classified and unclassified material.

It all sounds very impressive, but if the goal is merely to lend credibility to unverified assumptions, then what's the point?

Let's take a look at a few excerpts from the report and see whether Burr and Warner are justified in “feeling confident” in the ICA's accuracy.

From the Intelligence Community Assessment:

We assess Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election. Russia's goals were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. We further assess Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump. We have high confidence in these judgments.

This is the basic claim of Russia meddling that has yet to be proved. As you can see, the charge is mixed with liberal doses of mind-reading mumbo-jumbo that reveal the authors' lack of objectivity. There's a considerable amount of speculation about Putin's motives and preferences which are based on pure conjecture. It's a bit shocking that professional analysts- who are charged with providing our leaders with rock-solid intelligence related to matters of national security- would indulge in this type of opinionated blather and psycho-babble. It's also shocking that Burr and Warner think this gibberish should be taken seriously.

Here's more from the ICA:

Putin most likely wanted to discredit Secretary Clinton because he has publicly blamed her since 2011 for inciting mass protests against his regime in late 2011 and early 2012, and because he holds a grudge for comments he almost certainly saw as disparaging him.

More mind-reading, more groundless speculation, more guessing what Putin thinks or doesn't think. The ICA reads more like the text from a morning talk show than an Intelligence report. And what is it about this report that Burr finds so persuasive? It's beyond me. The report's greatest strength seems to be that no one has ever read it. If they had, they'd realize that it's nonsense. Also, it would have been better if the ICA's authors had avoided the amateur psychoanalysis and stuck to the point, Russia hacking. Dabbling in the former seriously impacts the report's credibility.

To their credit, however, Burr and Warner have questioned all of the analysts who contributed to the report. Check out this excerpt from The Nation:

"We have interviewed everybody who had a hand or a voice in the creation of the ICA," said Burr. "We've spent nine times the amount of time that the IC [intelligence community] spent putting the ICA together.... We have reviewed all the supporting evidence that went into it and, in addition to that, the things that went on the cutting-room floor that they may not have found appropriate for the ICA, but we may have found relevant to our investigation." Burr added that the committee's review included "highly classified intelligence reporting," and they've interviewed every official in the Obama administration who had anything to do with putting it together. ("Democrats and Republicans in Congress Agree: Russia Did It", The Nation)

That's great, but where's the beef? How can the committee conduct "100 interviews, comprising 250 hours of testimony and resulting in 4,000 pages of transcripts" without producing a shred of evidence that Russia meddled in the elections? How is that possible? The Committee's job is to prove its case not to merely pour over the minutia related to the

investigation. No one really cares how many people testified or how much paperwork was involved. What people want is proof that Russia interfered with the elections or that members of the Trump campaign colluded with Moscow. That's the whole point of this exercise. And, on the collusion matter, at least we have something new to report. In a rare moment of candor, Burr blurted out this gem:

"There are concerns that we continue to pursue. Collusion? The committee continues to look into all evidence to see if there was any hint of collusion. Now, I'm not going to even discuss any initial findings because we haven't any."

Think about that. After "100 interviews, 250 hours of testimony, and 4000 transcript pages" there's not the slightest hint of collusion. It's mindboggling. Why isn't this front page news? Why haven't the New York Times or Washington Post run this in their headlines, after all, they've hyped every other part of this story?

Could it be that Burr's admission doesn't mesh with the media's "Russia did it" narrative so they decided to scrub the story altogether?

But it's not just collusion we're talking about here, there's also the broader issue of Russia meddling. And what was striking about the press conference is that -after all the interviews, all the testimony, and all the stacks of transcripts- the Committee has come up with nothing; no eyewitness testimony supporting the original claims, no smoking gun, no proof of domestic espionage, no evidence of Russian complicity, nothing. One big goose egg.

So here's a question for critical minded readers:

If the Senate Intelligence Committee has not found any proof that Russia hacked the 2016 elections, then why do senators' Burr and Warner still believe the ICA is reliable? It doesn't really make sense, does it? Don't they require evidence to draw their conclusions? And doesn't the burden of truth fall on the prosecution (or the investigators in this case)? Isn't a man innocent until proven guilty or doesn't that rule apply to Russia?

Let's cut to the chase: The committee is not getting to the bottom of the Russia hacking matter, because they don't want to get to the bottom of it. It's that simple. That's why they have excluded any witnesses that may upset their preconceived theory of what happened. Why, for example, would the committee chose to interview former CIA Director John Brennan rather than WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange? Brennan not only helped select the hand-picked analysts who authored the ICA, he also clearly has an animus towards Russia due to his frustrated attempt to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al Assad which was thwarted by Putin. In other words, Brennan has a motive to mislead the Committee. He's biased. He has an ax to grind. In contrast, Assange has firsthand knowledge of what actually transpired with the DNC emails because he was the recipient of those emails. Has Assange been contacted by the Committee or asked to testify via Skype?

Don't bet on it.

What about former UK ambassador Craig Murray, a WikiLeaks colleague, who has repeatedly admitted that he knows the source of the DNC emails. Murray hasn't been asked to testify nor has he even been contacted by the FBI on the matter. Apparently, the FBI has

no interest in a credible witness who can disprove the politically-motivated theory expounded in the ICA.

Then there's 30-year CIA analyst Ray McGovern and his group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPs). McGovern has done extensive research on the topic and has produced solid evidence that the DNC emails were "leaked" by an insider, not "hacked" by a foreign government. McGovern's work squares with Assange and Murray's claim that Russia did not hack the 2016 elections. Has McGovern been invited to testify?

How about Skip Folden, retired IBM Program Manager and Information Technology expert, whose excellent report titled "Non-Existent Foundation for Russian Hacking Charge" also disproves the hacking theory, as does The Nation's Patrick Lawrence whose riveting article at The Nation titled "A New Report Raises Big Questions About Last Year's DNC Hack" which thoroughly obliterates the central claims of the ICA.

Finally, there's California Congressman Dana Rohrabacher who met with Assange in August at the Ecuadorian embassy in London and who was assured that Assange would provide hard evidence (in the form of "a computer drive or other data-storage device") that the Russians were not involved in the DNC email scandal.

Wouldn't you think that senate investigators would want to talk to a trusted colleague and credible witness like Rohrabacher who said he could produce solid proof that the scandal, that has dominated the headlines and roiled Washington for the better part of a year, was bogus?

Apparently not. Apparently Burr and his colleagues would rather avoid any witness or evidence that conflicts with their increasingly-threadbare thesis.

So what conclusions can we draw from the Committee's behavior? Are Burr and Warner really conducting an open and independent investigation of alleged Russia hacking or is this just a witch hunt?

It should be obvious by now that the real intention of the briefing was not to provide the public with more information, facts or evidence of Russian hacking, but to use the prestigious setting as a platform for disseminating more disinformation aimed at vilifying an emerging rival (Russia) that has blocked Washington's aggression in Ukraine and Syria, and threatens to unite the most populous and prosperous region in the world (Eurasia) into one massive free trade zone spanning from Lisbon to Vladivostok. Reasonable people must now consider the possibility that the Russia hacking narrative is an Information Operation (IO) devoid of any real substance which is designed to poison the public's perception of Russia. It is a domestic propaganda campaign that fits perfectly with the "Full Spectrum Dominance" theory of weaponizing media in a way that best achieves one's geopolitical objectives. The American people are again being manipulated so that powerful elites can lead the country to war.

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Sources

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5. [Non-Existent Foundation for Russian Hacking Charge](#), Skip Folden

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