

# Intel Committee Rejects Basic Underpinning of Russiagate

The assumption underpinning Russiagate – that Vladimir Putin preferred Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton – is not supported by the facts, according to “Initial Findings” of the House Intelligence Committee, as Ray McGovern reports.

By Ray McGovern

Let’s try to make this simple: The basic rationale behind charges that Russian President Vladimir Putin interfered in the 2016 U.S. election to help candidate Donald Trump rests, of course, on the assumption that Moscow preferred Trump to Hillary Clinton. But that is wrong to assume, says the House Intelligence Committee, which has announced that it does not concur with “Putin’s supposed preference for candidate Trump.”

So, the House Intelligence Committee Republican majority, which has been pouring over the same evidence used by the “handpicked analysts” from just the CIA, FBI, and NSA to prepare the rump Intelligence Community Assessment (ICA) of Jan. 6, 2017, finds the major premise of the ICA unpersuasive. The committee’s “Initial Findings” released on Monday specifically reject the assumption that Putin favored Trump.

This puts the committee directly at odds with handpicked analysts from only the FBI, CIA, and NSA, who assessed that Putin favored Trump – using this as their major premise and then straining to prove it by cobbling together unconvincing facts and theories.

Those of us with experience in intelligence analysis strongly criticized the evidence-impoverished ICA as soon as it was released, but it went on to achieve Gospel-like respect, with penance assigned to anyone who might claim it was not divinely inspired.

Until now.

Rep. K. Michael Conway (R-Texas), who led the House Committee investigation, has told the media that the committee is preparing a separate, in-depth analysis of the ICA itself. Good.

The committee should also take names – not only of the handpicked analysts, but the hand-pickers. There is ample precedent for this. For example, those who shepherded the fraudulent National Intelligence Estimate on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq 15 years ago were named in the NIE. Without names, it is

hard to know whom to hold accountable.

Here's the key ICA judgment with which the House committee does not concur: "We assess Putin, his advisers, and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump over Secretary Clinton." Not to be picky, but if House investigators have been unable to find enough persuasive evidence to convince them that "Putin's supposed preference" was Trump, there is little reason to take seriously the ICA's adolescent observations – like Putin held a "grudge" against Clinton because she called him nasty names – and other tortured reasoning in an Intelligence Community Assessment that, frankly, is an embarrassment to the profession of intelligence analysis.

I recall reading the ICA as soon as it was published. I concluded that no special expertise in intelligence analysis was needed to see how the assessment had been cobbled together around the "given" that Putin had a distinct preference for Trump. That was a premise with which I always had serious trouble, since it assumed that a Russian President would prefer to have an unpredictable, mercurial, lash-out-at-any-grievance-real-or-perceived President with his fingers on the nuclear codes. This – not name-calling – is precisely what Russian leaders fear the most.

Be that as it may, the ICA's evidence adduced to demonstrate Russian "interference" to help Trump win the election never passed the smell test. Worse still, it was not difficult to see powerful political agendas in play. While those agendas, together with the media which shared them, conferred on the ICA the status of Holy Writ, it had clearly been "writ" to promote those agendas and, as such, amounted to rank corruption of intelligence by those analysts "handpicked" by National Intelligence Director James Clapper to come up with the "right" answer.

Traces of the bizarre ideological – even racial – views of Intelligence Dean Clapper can also be discerned between the lines of the ICA. It is a safe bet that the handpicked authors of the ICA were well aware of – and perhaps even shared – the views Clapper later expressed to NBC's Chuck Todd on May 28, 2017 about Russians: "[P]ut that in context with everything else we knew the Russians were doing to interfere with the election," he said. "And just the historical practices of the Russians, who typically, are almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever, which is a typical Russian technique. So, we were concerned."

### **Always Read the Fine Print**

What readers of the intelligence assessment might have taken more seriously was the CYA in the ICA, so to speak, the truth-in-advertising cautions wedged into

its final page. The transition from the lead paragraph to the final page – from “high confidence” to the actual definition of “high confidence” is remarkable. As a reminder, here’s how ICA starts:

“Putin Ordered Campaign To Influence US Election: We assess with high confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election, the consistent goals of which were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. ...”

But wait, the fair warning on page 13 explains: “High confidence ... does not imply that the assessment is a fact or a certainty; such judgments might be wrong. ... Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that show something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

### **Questionable Logic**

The “logic” referred to rests primarily on assumptions related to Trump’s supposed friendliness with Putin, what Clinton Campaign Manager John Podesta called in 2015 a “bromance.” It assumes that Trump has been more than willing to do the Kremlin’s bidding from the White House, whether due to financial relationships Trump has with the Russians, or because he “owes them” for helping him get elected, or whether he is being blackmailed by “the pee tape” that Christopher Steele alluded to in his “dodgy dossier.”

This is the crux of the whole “treason” aspect of the Russiagate conspiracy theory – the idea that Trump is a Manchurian (or as some clever wags among Russiagaters claim, a *Siberian*) candidate who is directly under the influence of the Kremlin.

Even as U.S.-Russian relations drop to historic lows – with tensions approaching Cuban Missile Crisis levels – amazingly, there are still those promoting this theory, including some in the supposedly “progressive” alternative media like The Young Turks (TYT). Following Putin’s announcement on developments in Russia’s nuclear program earlier this month, TYT’s Cenk Uygur slammed Trump for not being more forceful in denouncing Putin, complaining that Trump “never criticizes Putin.” Uygur even speculated: “I’m not sure that Trump represents our interests above Putin’s.”

This line of thinking ignores a preponderance of evidence that the U.S posture against Russian interests has only hardened over the past year-plus of the Trump administration – perhaps in part as a result of Trump’s perceived need to

demonstrate that he is not in “Putin’s pocket.”

The U.S. has intensified its engagement in Syria, for one thing, reportedly killing several Russians in recent airstrikes – a dangerous escalation that could lead to all-out military confrontation with Moscow and hardly the stuff of an alleged “bromance” between Trump and Putin. Then there was the Trump administration’s recent decision to provide new lethal weapons to the Ukrainian military – a major reversal of the Obama administration’s more cautious approach and an intensification of U.S. involvement in a proxy war on Russia’s border. The Russian foreign ministry angrily denounced this decision, saying the U.S. had “crossed the line” in the Ukraine conflict and accused Washington of fomenting bloodshed.

On other major policy issues, the Trump administration has also been pushing a hard anti-Russian line, reiterating recently that it would never recognize Crimea as part of Russia, criticizing Russia for allegedly enabling chemical attacks in Syria, and identifying Moscow as one of the U.S.’s major adversaries in the global struggle for power and influence.

“China and Russia,” the administration stated in its recent National Security Strategy, “challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity.” In the recently issued Nuclear Posture Review, the U.S. identifies Russia as a “contemporary threat,” and has a chapter outlining “A Tailored Strategy for Russia.” The document warns that Russia has “decided to return to Great Power competition.”

How does this in any way indicate that Trump is representing “Putin’s interests” above “ours,” as Uygur claims?

In short, there is no evidence to back up the theory that Putin helped Trump become president in order to do the Kremlin’s bidding, and no one pushing this idea should be taken seriously. In this respect, the Republicans’ “Initial Findings” – particularly the rejection of “Putin’s supposed preference for candidate Trump” have more credibility than most of the “analysis” put out so far, including the Jan. 6, 2017 ICA that has been held up as sacrosanct.

### **Democrats Angry**

The irrepressible Congressman Adam Schiff, Ranking Member of the House Intelligence Committee, and his fellow Democrats are in high dudgeon over the release of the Committee’s “Initial Findings” after “only” one year of investigation. So, of course, is NBC’s Rachel Maddow and other Russiagate aficionados. They may even feel a need to come up with real evidence – rather than Clapperisms like “But everyone knows about the Russians, and how, for

example, they just really hated it when Mrs. Clinton called Putin Hitler.”

I had the opportunity to confront Schiff personally at a think tank in Washington, DC on January 25, 2017. President Obama, on his way out of office, had said something quite curious at his last press conference just one week earlier about inconclusive conclusions: “The conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking were not conclusive” regarding WikiLeaks. In other words, the intelligence community had no idea how the DNC emails reached WikiLeaks.

Schiff had just claimed as flat fact that the Russians hacked the DNC and Podesta emails and gave them to WikiLeaks to publish. So I asked him if he knew more than President Obama about how Russian hacking had managed to get to WikiLeaks.

Schiff used the old, “I can’t share the evidence with you; it’s classified.” OK, I’m no longer cleared for classified information, but Schiff is; and so are all his colleagues on the House Intelligence Committee. The Republican majority has taken issue with the cornerstone assumption of those who explain Russian “hacking” and other “meddling” as springing from the “obvious fact” that Putin favored Trump. The ball is in Schiff’s court.

Last but not least, the committee’s Initial Finding that caught most of the media attention was that there is “no evidence of collusion, coordination, or conspiracy between the Trump campaign and the Russians.” This, of course, poured cold water on what everyone listening to mainstream media “knows” about Russian “meddling” in the 2016 election. But, in the lack of persuasive evidence that President Putin preferred candidate Trump, why should we expect Russian “collusion, coordination, conspiracy” with the Trump campaign?

Ah, but the Russians want to “sow discord.” Sounds to me like a Clapperism.

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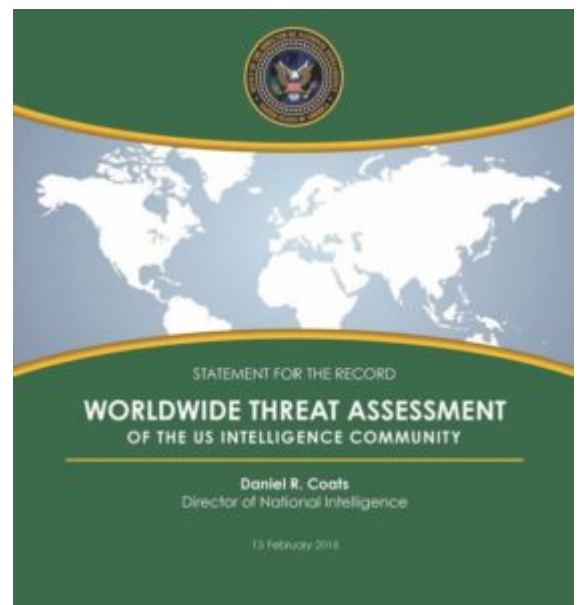
## North Korea, Iran and U.S. Intelligence that Neither Hears Nor Sees

A recent Worldwide Threat Assessment issued by the U.S. intelligence community exaggerates threats posed by North Korea and Iran, ignoring well-known realities and downplaying the U.S.'s own previous intelligence assessments, notes Ted Snider.

By Ted Snider

On February 13, the American intelligence community issued its Worldwide Threat Assessment for 2018. It is a frightening document to read, but perhaps not for the reasons you would expect. It is not frightening for the threat to America or the world that it reveals, but rather for its failure to hear or see what U.S. adversaries say or do.

On North Korea, for example, the agencies that hear everything cannot seem to hear anything North Korea has said; on Iran, the agencies that see everything cannot seem to see what they have long known.



The Worldwide Threat Assessment is a regular ritual of the intelligence community in which it shares a declassified summary of threats to U.S. national security with Congress. The current assessment is published under the name of Daniel R. Coats, Director of National Intelligence. In theory, the assessment is the result of input from all of America's sixteen intelligence agencies.

Worldwide Threat Assessments, according to Ray McGovern, are not as important as National Intelligence Estimates, but they are not unimportant. McGovern, a former CIA analyst who prepared and briefed the President's Daily Brief for Nixon, Ford, and Reagan, explained to me that, though they are less important for shaping policy, they are no less important for shaping public perception.

When it comes to North Korea and Iran, Congress exaggerates the truth, and, according to McGovern, Worldwide Threat Assessments serves the interests of those who benefit from exaggerating the truth. When Congress misleads the public

on North Korea and Iran, it can claim support from the intelligence community by referencing the Threat Assessment. Neocons and irresponsible journalists can all quote its exaggerated and unsupported claims.

## North Korea

North Korea receives a scant three paragraphs. North Korea is identified as “a complex and increasing threat to U.S. national security and interests.” That threat cannot be removed by negotiations, it is always said, because North Korea is not willing to negotiate away their nuclear weapons program. That is the Trump administration’s justification for bypassing diplomacy or even talking with North Korea. That premise is asserted when the Worldwide Threat Analysis insists that “repeatedly stating that nuclear weapons are the basis for its survival, suggests that the regime does not intend to negotiate them away.”

But the intelligence community that can hear everything you say apparently cannot hear anything North Korea is saying. The North Koreans do say that their nuclear weapons program is the basis of its survival—a deterrent—but they have repeated many versions of the formulation that if the threat to its survival were removed, the deterrent to the threat would be removed.

North Korea’s position is not a refusal, it’s a conditional: North Korea is not saying it will not negotiate over its nuclear program; it is saying it will not negotiate away the deterrent until there are guarantees that they no longer need the deterrent. To change North Korea’s undesirable behaviour, America has to change its undesirable behaviour.

It is well known – or would be well known if the essential role assigned to historians and journalists in a democratic society had not been appropriated by propagandists – that both times the United States seriously engaged in diplomatic discussions with North Korea – in 1994 and in 2005 – when the U.S. promised to stop threatening to attack North Korea, North Korea promised to stop its nuclear weapons program.

But, it is not necessary to appeal to distant history or to previous North Korean leaders. The same conditional formulation of abandoning the deterrent when the need for the deterrent is abandoned has been articulated repeatedly in very recent history.

North Korea’s Deputy Ambassador Kim In-ryong put it this way to UN Secretary-General António Guterres in August of 2017: “As long as the U.S. hostile policy and nuclear threat continue, the DPRK, no matter who may say what, will never place its self-defensive nuclear deterrence on the negotiating table.” Ju Yong Chol, a North Korean diplomat, expressed the formulation exactly the same way.

The same conditional North Korean formulation was expressed by Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho in August of 2017. Ri said "We will, under no circumstances, put the nukes and ballistic rockets on the negotiating table. . . . unless the hostile policy and nuclear threat of the U.S. against the DPRK are fundamentally eliminated." The next month, RI Yong-ho explained to the U.N. that its nuclear program is "to all intents and purposes, a war deterrent for putting an end to nuclear threat of the U.S. and for preventing its military invasion, and our ultimate goal is to establish the balance of power with the U.S.."

Most importantly, Kim Jong Un, himself, has also expressed this conditional formulation. Kim has stated that "Our final goal is to establish the equilibrium of real force with the U.S. and make the U.S. rulers dare not talk about military options."

And despite the Worldwide Threat Assessment's assurance that "the regime does not intend to negotiate [its nuclear weapons] away," North Korea has not ceased to assure the world that it would. Investigative journalist Gareth Porter has recently reported on the possibility of an "intra-Korean" agreement between North and South Korea.

Porter says that in a South Korean proposal that has never been reported by the U.S. media, the U.S. and South Korea would "discuss reducing the South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises if North Korea suspends its nuclear weapons and missile activities." South Korean President Moon Jae-in has further suggested that the U.S. and South Korea could refrain from including aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines during their joint military exercises."

Kim Jong Un has responded in a way that suggests that this proposal satisfies the conditional formulation of North Korea's terms. He called for a détente with South Korea and requested that South Korea "discontinue all the nuclear drills they have staged with outside forces," meaning the U.S., and "refrain from bringing in nuclear armaments and aggressive forces of the United States." Separating nuclear cooperation with the U.S. during the drills from the mere existence of drills, suggests, as Porter points out, "that Kim was signaling [his] interest in negotiating an agreement along the lines that [South Korea] had raised."

The Worldwide Threat Assessment's position on North Korea is not based on real world intelligence. An intelligence community that can hear everything cannot seem to hear anything that North Korea is saying. Or it can but is using its Worldwide Threat Assessment to shape public perception in a way that serves the way the U.S. government wants the public to perceive North Korea.

**Iran**



Iran receives a lot more space in the Worldwide Threat Assessment than North Korea. And, although there are a number of incredible claims made in the Iran section, the most incredible claims about Iran are made in the section on terrorism. In that section, two unsupportable claims are stated as accepted fact. The first reverberates out of the Washington echo chamber: "Iran remains the most prominent state sponsor of terrorism." The second is that "Lebanese Hizballah" – which is lumped together with Iran – "has demonstrated its intent to foment regional instability by deploying thousands of fighters to Syria"

The American intelligence agencies that can see everything apparently cannot see what they have long known. They know Iran is not "the most prominent state sponsor of terrorism" for two reasons: they know it's not Iran, and they know who it really is.

This is not only because all of the recent attempts to link Iran to terrorism have failed, but because their own reports on terrorism don't list Iran as the leading state sponsor of terrorism. The State Department's Patterns of Global Terrorisms rarely identifies terrorist incidents as carried out on behalf of Iran. And, the most recent Global Terrorism Index from the Department of Homeland Security clearly states that, not Iran, but "ISIL, Boko Haram, the Taliban and al-Qa'ida" are the biggest terrorist threats. None of these four groups is Shiite and none is aligned with Iran, but combined they are "responsible for 74 per cent of all deaths from terrorism." The Index also clearly identifies "ISIL," not Iran "as the deadliest terrorist group."

The intelligence community also knows that Iran is not the leading state sponsor of terrorism because it knows that Iran's enemy, Saudi Arabia, is. As early as December of 2009, the State Department already knew that "Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for al-Qaeda, the Taliban . . . and other terrorist groups." A 2012 classified Defense Intelligence Agency Information Intelligence Report that made the rounds through the US intelligence community identified the "supporting powers" of ISIS to be "Western countries, the Gulf States and Turkey."

In 2014, Vice President Biden admitted that "[O]ur allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria. . . . They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad except that the people who were being supplied were Al Nusra and al-Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis."

Point 4 of a memo written by Hillary Clinton on September 17, of the same year confesses that based on "western intelligence, US intelligence and sources in the region," the U.S. knew that "the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia . . . [were] providing clandestine financial and logistic support to Isis and other

radical groups in the region.” And, in 2015, President “Obama and other US officials urged Gulf leaders who are funding the opposition to keep control of their clients, so that a post-Assad regime isn’t controlled by extremists from the Islamic State or al-Qaeda.”

In other words, the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the American intelligence community does not reflect what the American intelligence community has known for at least eight years: Iran is not the leading state sponsor of terrorism, Saudi Arabia is.

As the intelligence community cannot see what it has long been shown about terrorism, so it cannot see what it has long known about Iran’s role in the region. Iran and Hezbollah are not “foment[ing] regional instability by deploying thousands of fighters to Syria.” Iran is in Syria to fight the Islamic State and al-Qa’ida. According to the very same Worldwide Threat Assessment, “Sunni violent extremists – most notably ISIS and al-Qa’ida – pose continuing terrorist threats to US interests and partners worldwide.”

So, Iran is fomenting, not regional instability, but regional stability by playing a leading role in the fight against the most destabilizing terrorist organizations in the region. The Worldwide Threat Assessment identifies al-Qu’aida and the Islamic State as destabilizing forces in the region but simultaneously identifies Iran—whose role in the region is to combat those destabilizing forces—as destabilizing.

Ever since Iran tried and failed to mediate the dispute in Syria in an attempt to avoid the conflict, Iran and Hezbollah have backed Assad against the Islamic State, al-Qa’ida and the other rebel forces. Iran’s role against destabilizing forces in the region has not been a trivial one. Iran and Hezbollah have played a crucial role in defeating the rebels. For many people who are being threatened by al-Qa’ida and the Islamic State, Iran has surpassed the United States as their most important ally.

And it is not like the authors of the Worldwide Threat Assessment don’t know this. Ayatollah Khamenei has authorized his top commander to coordinate military operations with the U.S., and the Israeli media reported in 2014 that Iranian F-4 Phantoms that have bombed Islamic State targets were “most likely” working in “coordination with the U.S. military.” Patrick Cockburn has suggested that advances by Iranian-controlled Shia militias against the Islamic State on the ground have been made possible by coordination with U.S. airstrikes on Islamic State positions.

On both Iran and North Korea, the Worldwide Threat Assessment is a terrifying document to read – terrifying for the incompetence it reveals. The best briefing

that the U.S. intelligence community can offer Congress is an assessment based on incomplete information and logical inconsistency. The ears of America cannot hear what North Korea is saying; the eyes of America cannot see what Iran is doing.

**Ted Snider writes on analyzing patterns in U.S. foreign policy and history. This article originally appeared at [Antiwar.com](http://Antiwar.com). Reprinted with permission.**

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## My First Day as CIA Director

Former CIA analyst and founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity Ray McGovern, in this tongue-in-cheek article, outlines steps he would take on Day One as CIA Director to get to the bottom of Russiagate.

By Ray McGovern

Now that I have been nominated again – this time by author Paul Craig Roberts – to be CIA director, I am preparing to hit the ground running.

Last time my name was offered in nomination for the position – by *The Nation* publisher Katrina vanden Heuvel – I did not hold my breath waiting for a call from the White House. Her nomination came in the afterglow of my fortuitous, four-minute debate with then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, when I confronted him on his lies about the attack on Iraq, on May 4, 2006 on national TV. Since it was abundantly clear that Rumsfeld and I would not get along, I felt confident I had royally disqualified myself.

This time around, on the off-chance I do get the nod, I have taken the time to prepare the agenda for my first few days as CIA director. Here's how Day One looks so far:

Get former National Security Agency Technical Director William Binney back to CIA to join me and the “handpicked” CIA analysts who, with other “handpicked” analysts (as described by former National Intelligence Director James Clapper on May 8, 2017) from the FBI and NSA, prepared the so-called Intelligence Community Assessment (ICA) of Jan. 6, 2017. That evidence-impooverished assessment argued the case that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his minions “to help President-elect Trump’s election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton.”

When my predecessor, CIA Director Mike Pompeo invited Binney to his office on

Oct. 24, 2017 to discuss cyber-attacks, he told Pompeo that he had been fed a pack of lies on “Russian hacking” and that he could prove it. Why Pompeo left that hanging is puzzling, but I believe this is the kind of low-hanging fruit we should pick pronto.

The low-calorie Jan. 6 ICA was clumsily cobbled together:

“We assess with high confidence that Russian military intelligence ... used the Guccifer 2.0 persona and DCLeaks.com to release US victim data obtained in cyber operations publicly and in exclusives to media outlets and relayed material to WikiLeaks.”

Binney and other highly experienced NSA alumni, as well as other members of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), drawing on their intimate familiarity with how the technical systems and hacking work, have been saying for a year and a half that this CIA/FBI/NSA conclusion is a red herring, so to speak. Last summer, the results of forensic investigation enabled VIPS to apply the principles of physics and the known capacity of the internet to confirm that conclusion.

Oddly, the FBI chose not to do forensics on the so-called “Russian hack” of the Democratic National Committee computers and, by all appearances, neither did the drafters of the ICA.

Again, Binney says that the main conclusions he and his VIPS colleagues reached are based largely on principles of physics – simple ones like fluid dynamics. I want to hear what that’s all about, how that applies to the “Russian hack,” and hear what my own CIA analysts have to say about that.

I will have Binney’s clearances updated to remove any unnecessary barriers to a no-holds-barred discussion at a highly classified level. After which I shall have a transcript prepared, sanitized to protect sources and methods, and promptly released to the media.

### **Like Sisyphus Up the Media Mountain**

At that point things are bound to get very interesting. Far too few people realize that they get a very warped view on such issues from the *New York Times*. And, no doubt, it would take some time, for the Times and other outlets to get used to some candor from the CIA, instead of the far more common tendentious leaks. In any event, we will try to speak truth to the media – as well as to power.

I happen to share the view of the handful of my predecessor directors who believed we have an important secondary obligation to do what we possibly can to

inform/educate the public as well as the rest of the government – especially on such volatile and contentious issues like “Russian hacking.”

What troubles me greatly is that the NYT and other mainstream print and TV media seem to be bloated with the thin gruel-cum-Kool Aid they have been slurping at our CIA trough for a year and a half; and then treating the meager fare consumed as some sort of holy sacrament. That goes in spades for media handling of the celebrated ICA of Jan. 6, 2017 cobbled together by those “handpicked” analysts from CIA, FBI, and NSA. It is, in all candor, an embarrassment to the profession of intelligence analysis and yet, for political reasons, it has attained the status of Holy Writ.

### **The Paper of (Dubious) Record**

I recall the banner headline spanning the top of the entire front page of the NYT on Jan. 7, 2017: “Putin Led Scheme to Aid Trump, Report Says;” and the electronic version headed “Putin Led a Complex Cyberattack Scheme to Aid Trump, Report Finds.” I said to myself sarcastically, “Well there you go! That’s exactly what Mrs. Clinton – not to mention the NY Times, the Washington Post and The Establishment – have been saying for many months.”

Buried in that same edition of the Times was a short paragraph by Scott Shane: “What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. That is a significant omission.”

Omission? No hard evidence? No problem. The publication of the Jan. 6, 2017 assessment got the ball rolling. And Democrats like Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, were kicking the ball hard down the streets of Washington. On Jan. 25, 2017, I had a chance to confront Schiff personally about the lack of evidence – something that even Obama had acknowledged just before slipping out the door. I think our two-minute conversation speaks volumes.

Now I absolutely look forward to dealing with Adam Schiff from my new position as CIA director. I will ask him to show me the evidence of “Russian hacking” that he said he could not show me on Jan. 25, 2017 – on the chance his evidence includes more than reports from the *New York Times*.

### **Sources**

Intelligence analysts put great weight, of course, on sources. The authors of the lede, banner-headlined NYT article of Jan. 7, 2017 were Michael D. Shear and David E. Sanger; Sanger has had a particularly checkered career, while always landing on his feet. Despite his record of parroting CIA handouts (or perhaps

partly because of it), Sanger is now the NYT's chief Washington correspondent.

Those whose memories go back more than 15 years may recall his promoting weapons of mass destruction in Iraq as flat fact. In a July 29, 2002 article co-written with Thom Shanker, for example, Iraq's (non-existent) "weapons of mass destruction" appear no fewer than seven times as flat fact.

More instructive still, in May 2005, when first-hand documentary evidence from the now-famous "Downing Street Memorandum" showed that President George W. Bush had decided by early summer 2002 to attack Iraq, the NYT ignored it for six weeks until David Sanger rose to the occasion with a tortured report claiming just the opposite. The title given his article of June 13 2005 was "Prewar British Memo Says War Decision Wasn't Made."

Against this peculiar reporting record, I was not inclined to take at face value the Jan. 7, 2017 report he co-authored with Michael D. Shear – "Putin Led a Complex Cyberattack Scheme to Aid Trump, Report Finds."

Nor am I inclined to take seriously former National Intelligence Director James Clapper's stated views on the proclivity of Russians to be, well, just really bad people – like it's in their genes. I plan to avail myself of the opportunity to discover whether intelligence analysts who labored under his "aegis" were infected by his quaint view of the Russians.

I shall ask any of the "handpicked" analysts who specialize in analysis of Russia (and, hopefully, there are at least a few): Do you share Clapper's view, as he explained it to NBC's Meet the Press on May 30, 2017, that Russians are "typically, almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever"? I truly do not know what to expect by way of reply.

### **End of Day One**

In sum, my priority for Day One is to hear both sides of the story regarding "Russian hacking" with all cards on the table. All cards. That means no questions are out of order, including what, if any, role the "Steele dossier" may have played in the preparation of the Jan. 6, 2017 assessment.

I may decide to seek some independent, disinterested technical input, as well. But it should not take me very long to figure out which of the two interpretations of alleged "Russian hacking" is more straight-up fact-based and unbiased. That done, in the following days I shall brief both the Chair, Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) and ranking member Schiff of the House Intelligence Committee, as well as the Chair and ranking member of its counterpart in the Senate. I will then personally brief the NYT's David Sanger and follow closely what he and his masters decide to do with the facts I present.

On the chance that the Times and other media might decide to play it straight, and that the “straight” diverges from the prevailing, Clapperesque narrative of Russian perfidy, the various mainstream outlets will face a formidable problem of their own making. Mark Twain put it this way: “It is easier to fool people than it is to convince them they have been fooled.”

And that will probably be enough for Day One.

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## Intel-for-Hire Undermines U.S. Intelligence (Part 2)

Intel-for-Hire is a multilayered phenomenon that’s undermining the integrity of U.S. intelligence, argues George Eliason. In this installment, he looks at the second tier of this system. ([Click here for part one.](#) [Part three is here.](#))

By George Eliason

In [part one of this series](#), we looked at the top level of the privatized intelligence community showing that large for-profit companies and individual actors have other interests in mind than the public good. Work that was previously considered inherently governmental is routinely contracted out to people who only serve their own self-interest, which may be at odds with what most people might expect from intelligence – for example, unbiased information to guide sensible policy-making decisions.

Now we’ll look at the next level down – the smaller companies, specialty companies, and practitioners that service the top level. We’ll see how they fit in the picture and work in real life.



In 2016, Tim Shorrock wrote an article describing the five intelligence giants that control domestic policy, foreign policy, military, and civilian leaders with the products they sell. They create the information, analyze the information, and decide who the President of the United States will see as an enemy and who as a friend.

The smaller companies provide the resources for them to work with and base their reports on. In the digital age intelligence has become a buyer's market. If the larger company profits more by finding Russian influence at work at a grammar school Christmas play, then that's the conclusion that will be drawn. If you aren't up to the task, someone else will provide the "proof." After all, that's where the money is.

One of the main players in this process is the Chertoff Group, founded by former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff. From the Chertoff Group, through the Alliance for Securing Democracy, through the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and through the Hamilton 68 Dashboard – which purports to track "Russian influence operations on Twitter" – the information is distilled and passed down to the mid-level players.

Michael Chertoff from 2005-2009 ran the massive Department of Homeland Security, where he was criticized for exempting the DHS from following laws on everything from the environment to religious freedom. A report issued by the Congressional Research Service said at the time that the delegation of unchecked powers to Chertoff was unprecedented. He was also known for railing against international law, warning that treaties such as the Geneva Conventions were placing undue constraints on U.S. actions abroad.

As a long-time insider – in both the public and private sector – he is one of the top figures in the U.S. intelligence-security complex.

### **U.S. (and Foreign) Government Contractors**

Private sector services mirror what they do for government including Intel-for-Hire, espionage, information operations, direct action, and state-sized propaganda operations. This is work that the government has stated on many occasions needs to remain with the agencies that can be held responsible to the public – and not to private companies that aren't.

The contractors and companies work both inside and outside U.S. government circles. They sometimes work for foreign governments. When they are in the private sector, they have no problem attacking and harassing U.S. citizens as well as the rest of the global community. Wherever their clients point, they fire.



This is the part some of the worst offenders take very seriously. In their world, they are James Bond and destroying the reputations of innocent people is a service to their country, and keeps their bank accounts flush with money. In their minds, they are this generation's super-patriots, when in fact, as soon as what they do is opened to inspection, they are common criminals.

People with no security clearances and radical political agendas have state-sized cyber tools at their disposal and can use them for their own political agendas, private business, and personal vendettas the same way they use CIA's Vault 7 hacking tools for state projects. And this has been going on for years.

In a Sept. 2013 Reuters article, Jameel Jaffer, deputy legal director at the American Civil Liberties Union, said the reported incidents of NSA employees' violations of the law are likely "the tip of the iceberg" of lax data safeguards. The laws guiding the NSA's spying authority in the first place are a bigger issue, he said. "If you only focus on instances in which the NSA violated those laws, you're missing the forest for the trees," Jaffer said. "The bigger concern is not with willful violations of the law but rather with what the law itself allows."

The companies and individual actors sell information. For some, this is the basis of how they market their services. They spy on other companies – on regular people – commit espionage and run legally dubious information operations against civilians.

But because of the work they do for both the U.S. government and private corporations, few restrictions are placed on them. Where they are supposed to be supervised by the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), in some cases they are supervising themselves and other companies and training DNI agencies to act like them.

Anything marked as "intelligence" is also designated top secret by the all of the DNI agencies, so even something that is originally open-source information becomes "top secret" once it is earmarked for an agency. This is being done on a regular basis at different levels.

### **Legal Gray Zones**

Although some laws are in place restricting these activities, there are legal gray zones that these intelligence players skirt around and operate in when committing acts against the American people. They have identified the key areas of the law and made sure there are built-in loopholes, which Congress keeps in place following hearings at which these people often testify as expert witnesses.

In some cases, they wear their chutzpah on their sleeves.

On September 21, 2015, Joel Harding, who describes himself as an “Information Warfare and IO expert, Strategic Communications, Cyberwar, Ex-Special Forces,” posted an advertisement making clear the brazenness with which these privatized spooks operate.

“Ladies, Gentlemen, and everyone in between,” he wrote. “I am building a database of planners, operators, logisticians, hackers, and anyone wanting to be involved with special activities I will call ‘inform and influence activities’.”

He noted that he had received various suggestions to help organize operations against “anti-Western elements.”

“No government approval, assistance or funding,” he claimed. “This skirts legalities. This is not explicitly illegal and it may not even be legal, at this point. That grey area extends a long way.” In soliciting resumes, he told prospective partners that if they “have hands on experience of a less than legal nature, you might not want to admit illegal work.”

The first industry hotshot to jump up to help was Andrew Weisburd.

Together with Clint Watts and J.M. Berger, Weisburd has testified to Congress as an expert from the intelligence and security industry. To advance their industry’s profitability, they work with friendly lawmakers to widen those legal gray areas.

Lawmakers, in turn, collect hefty campaign contributions from the industry. In addition, they sometimes get to hear and see intelligence that they may not be authorized to hear and see. Since senators and congressmen are not permitted to look at classified intelligence outside of their mandates on particular intelligence committees, the system of Intel-for-Hire enables privately gathered intelligence to make it to congressional eyes before it is classified.

### **Outsourcing Intelligence**

Despite lacking professional credentials, a commitment to public service, or the minimum amount of vetting that would go into a security clearance background check, these private-sector spies collect intelligence that is passed along and ultimately may be included in the President’s Daily Briefing.

In other words, consultants and “public affairs professionals” with little actual experience in the professional intelligence community – some of whom may have an axe to grind or are just trying to make a buck – can help decide who is an enemy of the state. That’s the reality we are left with even though it sounds

like a surreal B-grade movie.

If Weisburd or his partner Clint Watts sound familiar it's because it is their work testifying in front of Congress in the spring of 2017 on Russian influence on the 2016 election and in social media that is pushing policy and leading us into a new Cold War.

Weisburd and Watts have also established much of the groundwork on which every other Russian menace story – attacking Ukraine, hacking elections, etc. – is based on. Their idea of countering Russian influence has been to take out American, Canadian, and European English language websites owned by citizens of those countries. As Joel Harding's slogan makes clear, it is a strategy based on information warfare: "To Inform is to Influence."

Here's how the parts tie together.

These experts are the "small players" that developed the Hamilton 68 Dashboard for the German Marshall Fund, which is part of the Alliance for Securing Democracy that Michael Chertoff advises.

The dashboard is "an interactive dashboard displaying the near-real-time output of Russian Influence Operations on Twitter—or RIOT, if you're a fan of on-the-nose acronyms," according to J.M. Berger. He says that it's the product of a research collaboration that includes himself, Clint Watts, Andrew Weisburd, Jonathon Morgan and the German Marshall Fund.

So now we have Michael Chertoff advising and supporting the work of Weisburd, Watts, Berger, and possibly Weisburd partner Joel Harding.

It's just a fact of life at some point, somehow, somewhere, someone is going to take a look at the quality of the work you do and decide if it was worth hiring you or if you are just another scam story trying to stay on the federal dole.

This is that day for the Hamilton 68 Dashboard crew.

Upon closer inspection, it's a safe bet that many of the people called "Russian trolls" that are allegedly destroying American democracy aren't Russian or on Russian payrolls at all. They are Americans expressing political views and sharing articles.

The sampling that Clint Watt's and Andrew Weisburd's failed Hamilton 68 Dashboard uses is tiny and easily skewed. If a handful of people can generate the second highest hash tag position, the "real time" tracking of Russian propaganda is totally undermined.

More troubling, in recent years more of these Intel-for-Hire contractors have

gone offline working with direct action units in other countries that are committing murder. More on this in a later installment.

**George Eliason is an American journalist who lives and works in the Donbass region of Ukraine. For part three of this series, please [click here](#).**

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## Why the Truth Might Get You Fired

The tension between intelligence analysts and political policymakers has always been between honest assessments and desired results, with the latter often overwhelming the former, as in the Iraq War, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

For those who might wonder why foreign policy makers repeatedly make bad choices, some insight might be drawn from the following analysis. The action here plays out in the United States, but the lessons are probably universal.

Back in the early spring of 2003, George W. Bush initiated the invasion of Iraq. One of his key public reasons for doing so was the claim that the country's dictator, Saddam Hussein, was on the verge of developing nuclear weapons and was hiding other weapons of mass destruction. The real reason went beyond that charge and included a long-range plan for "regime change" in the Middle East.

For our purposes, we will concentrate on the belief that Iraq was about to become a hostile nuclear power. Why did President Bush and his close associates accept this scenario so readily?

The short answer is *Bush wanted, indeed needed, to believe it as a rationale for invading Iraq*. At first he had tried to connect Saddam Hussein to the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. Though he never gave up on that stratagem, the lack of evidence made it difficult to rally an American people, already fixated on Afghanistan, to support a war against Baghdad.

But the nuclear weapons gambit proved more fruitful, not because there was any hard evidence for the charge, but because supposedly reliable witnesses, in the persons of [exiled anti-Saddam Iraqis \(many on the U.S. government's payroll\)](#), kept telling Bush and his advisers that the nuclear story was true.

What we had was a U.S. leadership cadre whose worldview literally demanded a mortally dangerous Iraq, and informants who, in order to precipitate the overthrow of Saddam, were willing to tell the tale of pending atomic weapons.

The strong desire to believe the tale of a nuclear Iraq *lowered the threshold for proof*. Likewise, the repeated assertions by assumed dependable Iraqi sources underpinned a nationwide U.S. campaign generating both fear and war fever.

So the U.S. and its allies insisted that the United Nations send in weapons inspectors to scour Iraq for evidence of a nuclear weapons program (as well as chemical and biological weapons). That the inspectors could find no convincing evidence only frustrated the Bush administration and soon forced its hand.

On March 19, 2003, Bush launched the invasion of Iraq with the expectation was that, once in occupation of the country, U.S. inspectors would surely find evidence of those nukes (or at least stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons). They did not. Their Iraqi informants had systematically lied to them.

### **Social and Behavioral Sciences to the Rescue?**

The various U.S. intelligence agencies were thoroughly shaken by this affair, and today, 13 years later, their directors and managers are still trying to sort it out – specifically, how to tell when they are getting “true” intelligence and when they are being lied to. Or, as one intelligence worker has put it, we need “help to protect us against armies of snake oil salesmen.” To that end the CIA et al. are in the market for academic assistance.

A “partnership” is being forged between the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), which serves as the coordinating center for the sixteen independent U.S. intelligence agencies, and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. The result of this collaboration will be a “permanent Intelligence Community Studies Board” to coordinate programs in “social and behavioral science research [that] might strengthen national security.”

Despite this effort, it is almost certain that the “social and behavioral sciences” cannot give the spy agencies what they want – a way of detecting lies that is better than their present standard procedures of polygraph tests and interrogations. But even if they could, it might well make no difference, *because the real problem is not to be found with the liars. It is to be found with the believers.*

### **The Believers**

It is simply not true, as the ODNI leaders seem to assert, that U.S. intelligence agency personnel cannot tell, more often than not, that they are being lied to. This is the case because there are thousands of middle-echelon intelligence workers, desk officers, and specialists who know something closely approaching the truth – that is, they know pretty well what is going on in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Israel, Palestine and elsewhere.

Therefore, if someone feeds them “snake oil,” they usually know it. However, having an accurate grasp of things is often to no avail because their superiors – those who got their appointments by accepting a pre-structured worldview – have different criterion for what is “true” than do the analysts.

Listen to Charles Gaukel, of the National Intelligence Council – yet another organization that acts as a meeting ground for the 16 intelligence agencies. Referring to the search for a way to avoid getting taken in by lies, Gaukel has declared, “We’re looking for truth. But we’re particularly looking for truth that works.” Now what might that mean?

I can certainly tell you what it means historically. It means that for the power brokers, “truth” must match up, fit with, their worldview – their political and ideological precepts. If it does not fit, it does not “work.” So the intelligence specialists who send their usually accurate assessments up the line to the policy makers often hit a roadblock caused by “group think,” ideological blinkers, and a “we know better” attitude.

On the other hand, as long as what you’re selling the leadership matches up with what they want to believe, you can peddle them anything: imaginary Iraqi nukes, Israel as a Western-style democracy, Saudi Arabia as an indispensable ally, Libya as a liberated country, Bashar al-Assad as the real roadblock to peace in Syria, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) aka Star Wars, a world that is getting colder and not warmer, American exceptionalism in all its glory – the list is almost endless.

What does this sad tale tell us? If you want to spend millions of dollars on social and behavioral science research to improve the assessment and use of intelligence, forget about the liars. What you want to look for is an antidote to the narrow-mindedness of the believers – the policymakers who seem not to be able to rise above the ideological presumptions of their class – presumptions that underpin their self-confidence as they lead us all down slippery slopes.

It has happened this way so often, and in so many places, that it is the source of Shakespeare’s determination that “what is past, is prelude.” Our elites play out *our* destinies as if they have no free will – no capacity to break with structured ways of seeing. Yet the middle-echelon specialists keep sending their relatively accurate assessments up the ladder of power. Hope springs eternal.

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America’s National Interest; America’s Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism.**

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