

Obama's Trump-Russia collusion report was corrupt from start: CIA review

By

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A [bombshell new CIA review](#) of the Obama administration's spy agencies' assessment that Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election to help Donald Trump was deliberately corrupted by then-CIA Director John Brennan, FBI Director James Comey and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, who were "excessively involved" in its drafting, and rushed its completion in a "chaotic," "atypical" and "markedly unconventional" process that raised questions of a "potential political motive."

Further, Brennan's decision to include the discredited Steele dossier, over the objections of the CIA's most senior Russia experts, "undermined the credibility" of the assessment.

The "Tradecraft Review of the 2016 Intelligence Community Assessment [ICA] on Russian Election Interference" was conducted by career professionals at the CIA's Directorate of Analysis and was commissioned by CIA Director John Ratcliffe in May.

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The "lessons-learned review" found that, on December 6, 2016, six weeks before his presidency ended, Barack Obama ordered the assessment, which concluded that Russian President Vladimir Putin "aspired" to help Trump win the election.

The review identified "multiple procedural anomalies" that undermined the credibility of the ICA, including "a highly compressed production timeline, stringent compartmentation, and excessive involvement of agency heads."

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It also questioned the exclusion of key intelligence agencies and said media leaks may have influenced analysts to conform to a false narrative of Trump-Russia collusion.

“The rushed timeline to publish both classified and unclassified versions before the presidential transition raised questions about a potential political motive behind the White House tasking and timeline.”

The review found that Brennan directed the compilation of the ICA, and that his, Comey’s and Clapper’s “direct engagement in the ICA’s development was highly unusual in both scope and intensity” and “risked stifling analytic debate.”



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AP

Brennan handpicked the CIA analysts to compile the ICA and involved only the ODNI, CIA, FBI and NSA, excluding 13 of the then-17 intelligence agencies.

He sidelined the National Intelligence Council and forced the inclusion of the discredited Steele dossier despite objections of the authors and senior CIA Russia experts, so as to push a false narrative that Russia secured Trump's 2016 victory.

"This was Obama, Comey, Clapper and Brennan deciding 'We're going to screw Trump,'" said Ratcliffe in an exclusive interview.

“It was, ‘We’re going to create this and put the imprimatur of an IC assessment in a way that nobody can question it.’ They stamped it as Russian collusion and then classified it so nobody could see it.

“This led to Mueller [special counsel Robert Mueller’s inquiry, which concluded after two years that there was no Trump-Russia collusion]. It put the seal of approval of the intelligence community that Russia was helping Trump and that the Steele dossier was the scandal of our lifetime. It ate up the first two years of his [Trump’s first] presidency.

“You see how Brennan and Clapper and Comey manipulated [and] silenced all the career professionals and railroaded the process.”



The CIA review notes that, before work even began on the ICA, “media leaks suggesting that the Intelligence Community had already reached definitive conclusions risked creating an anchoring.” The term “anchoring” refers to a cognitive bias in psychology and suggests that the media leaks may have influenced the analysts working on the ICA to shape their findings to conform with the leaked narrative rather than conducting an objective analysis.

On December 9, 2016, both the Washington Post and New York Times reported the IC had “concluded with high confidence that Russia had intervened specifically to help Trump win the election.”

The Post cited an unnamed US official describing this as the IC’s “consensus view.”

The “highly compressed timeline was atypical for a formal IC assessment which ordinarily can take months to prepare, especially for assessments of such length, complexity, and political sensitivity,” the review found. “CIA’s primary authors had less than a week to draft the assessment and less than two days to formally coordinate it with IC peers before it entered the formal review process at CIA on December 20.”



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When the draft ICA was completed and sent for review to Intelligence Community “stakeholders,” the timeline was “compressed to just a handful of days during a holiday week [which] created numerous challenges ...

“Multiple IC stakeholders said they felt ‘jammed’ by the compressed timeline. Most got their first look at the hardcopy draft and underlying sensitive reporting just before or at the only in-person coordination meeting that was held on December 19 to conduct a line-by-line review.” Drafts of the ICA were only permitted in hard copy, so needed to be hand-carried between various spy agency buildings. “The pressing timeline and limitations of hardcopy review likely biased the overall review process.”

The “direct engagement” of agency heads Brennan, Comey and Clapper in the ICA’s development was “highly unusual in both scope and intensity. This exceptional level of senior involvement likely influenced participants, altered normal review processes, and ultimately compromised analytic rigor.

“One CIA analytic manager involved in the process said other analytic managers — who would typically have been part of the review chain — opted out due to the politically charged environment and the atypical prominence of agency leadership in the process.”



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The review criticizes the ICA for including the Steele dossier, a salacious and discredited opposition-research product written by former British spy Christopher Steele, who was

working for the Hillary Clinton campaign, which claimed Russia possessed sexually compromising blackmail material on Trump.

Despite the fact that “the ICA authors and multiple senior CIA managers — including the two senior leaders of the CIA mission center responsible for Russia — strongly opposed including the Dossier, asserting that it did not meet even the most basic tradecraft standards,” Brennan insisted it be included.

“CIA’s Deputy Director for Analysis (DDA) warned in an email to Brennan on December 29 that including it in any form risked ‘the credibility of the entire paper.’”

But Brennan responded that “my bottom line is that I believe that the information warrants inclusion in the report.”



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Brennan showed “a preference for narrative consistency over analytical soundness,” said the review.

“When confronted with specific flaws in the Dossier by the two mission center leaders — one with extensive operational experience and the other with a strong analytic background — he appeared more swayed by the Dossier’s general conformity with existing theories than by legitimate tradecraft concerns.”

“The decision by agency heads to include the Steele Dossier in the ICA ran counter to fundamental tradecraft principles and ultimately undermined the credibility of a key judgment. The ICA authors first learned of the Dossier, and FBI leadership’s insistence on its inclusion, on December 20 — the same day the largely coordinated draft was entering the review process at CIA,” according to the review. “FBI leadership made it clear that their participation in the ICA hinged on the Dossier’s inclusion and, over the next few days, repeatedly pushed to weave references to it throughout the main body of the ICA.”

In the end, the spy agency heads decided to include a two-page summary of the Steele dossier as an “annex” to the ICA, with a disclaimer that the material was not used “to reach the analytic conclusions.”



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However, the review says that “by placing a reference to the annex material in the main body of the ICA as the fourth supporting bullet for the judgment that Putin ‘aspired’ to help Trump win, the ICA implicitly elevated unsubstantiated claims to the status of credible supporting evidence, compromising the analytical integrity of the judgment.”

The review is critical of the decision by Brennan, Clapper and Comey to “marginalize the National Intelligence Council (NIC), departing significantly from standard procedures for formal IC assessments.”

“The NIC did not receive or even see the final draft until just hours before the ICA was due to be published ... Typically, the NIC maintains control over drafting assignments, coordination, and review processes.”

The review also quotes from Brennan’s memoir “Undaunted,” in which he revealed that he “established crucial elements of the process with the White House before NIC involvement, stating he informed them that CIA would ‘take the lead drafting the report’ and that coordination would be limited to ‘ODNI, CIA, FBI, and NSA.’ ”

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The review says such “departures from standard procedure not only limited opportunities for coordination and thorough tradecraft review, but also resulted in the complete exclusion of key intelligence agencies from the process. ... The decision to entirely shut out the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Department of State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research from any participation in such a high-profile assessment about an adversary’s plans and intentions was a significant deviation from typical IC practices.

“It also was markedly unconventional to have Agency heads review and sign off on a draft before it was submitted to the NIC for review. The NIC did not receive or even see the final draft until just hours before the ICA was due to be published.”



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There was only one meeting at which the IC analysts could coordinate, but one day before the meeting, Brennan sent a note to the CIA workforce saying he had already met with Clapper and Comey and that “there is strong consensus among us on the scope, nature, and intent of Russian interference in our recent Presidential election.”

The CIA review concludes: “With analysts operating under severe time constraints, limited information sharing, and heightened senior-level scrutiny, several aspects of tradecraft rigor were compromised — particularly in supporting the judgment that Putin ‘aspired’ to help Trump win.”

The Putin-Trump nexus “struggled to stand on its own” and its inclusion damaged the report because it “risked distracting readers from the more well-documented findings on Putin’s strategic objectives ...

“The two senior leaders of the CIA mission center responsible for Russia argued jointly against including the ‘aspire’ judgment. In an email to Brennan on December 30, they stated the judgment should be removed because it was both weakly supported and unnecessary, given the strength and logic of the paper’s other findings on intent. They warned that including it would only ‘open up a line of very politicized inquiry.’ ”