

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS): To Nancy Pelosi — Did Russia Hack the DNC Emails?

By [Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity](#)
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The lack of detail demanded by Pelosi may simply mean the absence of credible evidence of Russian interference as well as the absence of Clapperesque officials to conjure it up.

MEMORANDUM FOR: Speaker Nancy Pelosi

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: Did Russia Hack the DNC Emails?

Dear Madam Speaker:

After your intelligence briefing Friday, *Politico* reported that you were sharply frustrated by the lack of detail presented on “Russia’s continued interference in the 2020 election campaign.” You were quoted as saying you thought the administration was “withholding” evidence of foreign election meddling and added, “What I am concerned about is that the American people should be better informed.” We share your concern and, having followed this issue closely from the perspective of non-partisan, veteran intelligence officials, we are able to throw considerable light on it.

The narrative that Russia hacked Democratic National Committee emails in 2016 and gave them to *WikiLeaks* to hurt Hillary Clinton’s candidacy has become an article of faith for about half of Americans — somewhat fewer than the number misled into believing 18 years ago that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq — but it is still considerable.

Because of a bizarre, but highly instructive media lapse these past three months, most Americans remain unaware that the accusation that Russia “hacked” the DNC has evaporated. It turns out the accusation was fabricated — just like the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. In fact, some of the same U.S. officials were involved in both deceptions. For example, James Clapper, Obama’s director of national intelligence, played a key role 18 years ago in covering up the fact that no WMD had been identified in satellite imagery of Iraq; more recently he helped conjure up evidence of Russian hacking.

We quote below the horse’s-mouth testimony of Shawn Henry, head of CrowdStrike, the cyber security outfit paid by the DNC, and certified as a “high-class entity” by FBI Director James Comey, to look into the “hacking” of the DNC. Mr. Henry admitted in sworn testimony on December 5, 2017 that his firm has no concrete evidence that the DNC emails were hacked — by Russia or anyone else. This testimony was finally declassified and released on

May 7, 2020, but you will not find a word about it in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* or other “mainstream” outlets. (We wonder if you yourself were made aware of Henry’s testimony.)

The original accusation achieved its purpose in fostering the belief that President Trump owed his election to President Putin, and thus is beholden to him. It also provided a degree of verisimilitude — as well as faux-righteous indignation — to support a host of punitive measures. “Russian hacking” was immediately used to justify President Obama’s expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats/intelligence officers at the end of 2016. Those with a sharp anti-Russia axe to grind no doubt deemed this unnecessary diplomatic step felicitous, welcome collateral damage to ties between Washington and Moscow.

Parallels Today

Now to the present — and specifically your suspicion that the administration is “withholding” evidence of foreign election meddling.

Full Disclosure: We veteran national security and intelligence professionals are nonpartisan and have a tendency to be blunt. We have been closely watching the play-by-play over the past four years and strongly doubt that our former intelligence colleagues are withholding evidence of Russian interference. We see a simpler explanation. The intelligence officials who trotted out copious “evidence” of Russian interference four years ago may still be writing op-eds and even books, but they are also under investigation. So a “once-burned-twice-shy” attitude is probably one factor in play.

More important, for obvious reasons the intelligence chiefs appointed by President Trump lack the incentive shared by their predecessors to hyperbolize and even manufacture “evidence” of Russian meddling in favor of Trump. In our view, this factor accounts largely for what you see as the lack of detail. In contrast, the legacy media, with a transparently shoddy record to defend on their “Russiagate” coverage, is still both hyperbolizing and manufacturing. Easy to do when you have a corner on the media market, as we indicate below.

In sum, this time around, senior intelligence and law enforcement officials have little incentive to manufacture/embellish evidence of “Russian meddling”, as was done four years ago by the former crew. And, again, to remind: the same thing happened in 2002/03 regarding the WMD alleged to be in Iraq, with some of the same dramatis personae responsible — but not held accountable.

It is sad to have to remind folks 18 years after the fact that the “intelligence” on WMD in Iraq was not “mistaken;” it was fraudulent from the get-go. The culprits were finally exposed but never held to account. Announcing on June 5, 2008, the bipartisan conclusions from a five-year study by the Senate Intelligence Committee, Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) asserted that the attack on Iraq was launched “under false pretenses.” He described the intelligence conjured up to “justify” war on Iraq as “uncorroborated, contradicted, or even non-existent.”

Non-existent?

No Consequences for ‘Finding What Wasn’t There’

There were no consequences for those officials who lied about WMD in Iraq. Donald Rumsfeld had put one of them, James Clapper, in charge of imagery analysis which, as you

know, was the key to finding WMD. Clapper made a stunning admission in his memoir, *Facts and Fears: Hard Truths From a Life in Intelligence*. He wrote that “intelligence officers, including me, were so eager to help [Bush/Cheney/Rumsfeld] that we found what wasn’t really there.”

Nevertheless, with a glowing recommendation from Obama confidant John Brennan, President Obama appointed Clapper director of national intelligence in 2010. He remained in that post for the remainder of Obama’s term despite having misled the Senate in March 2013 about what he later admitted was a “clearly erroneous” testimony, under oath, regarding NSA surveillance of Americans.

Here’s the rub: Clapper and those he conspired with have gone from blissful *sans souci* to apprehension, acutely aware that they may not have a stay-out-of-jail card this time around. With bloodhounds like U.S. Attorney John Durham sniffing around there is now the possibility of consequences for intelligence leaders who make stuff up — as they did during Russiagate v.1. Perhaps also consequences for former CIA Director Brennan who, together with Clapper orchestrated a rump Memo by “handpicked analysts” and called it an “Intelligence Community Assessment.” The “ICA” cannot bear close scrutiny.

Election “meddling” and “interference” are stretchy elastic terms. Your Democratic colleagues are correct in pointing out that recent intelligence warnings of election interference by China, Russia and Iran are so vague as to be “almost meaningless”. Given the reluctance of today’s intelligence leaders to create “non-existent” intelligence (as on Iraq and more recently on Russia), those members of Congress who insist that they be more “specific” on Russian interference are bound to become increasingly frustrated.

What we suggest is the obvious: namely, that the lack of desired detail may simply betoken the absence of credible specifics on significant Russian interference, and the absence of Clapperesque officials to conjure it up. In a word, today’s intelligence managers — unlike their predecessors — are not likely to find Russia-indicting evidence that “wasn’t really there.”

‘Specifics’ in 2016: Russian Hacking

Four years ago, we had specifics. Yes, they were specifically wrong, but at least they were specifics. Those whose reading on these issues is limited to *The New York Times* and other Establishment media perforce lack adequate understanding about the shenanigans of 2016. If we want the American people to be better informed, this is a big problem — the more so, since many of the main culprits in corporate media are still at it. In an interesting coincidence on Friday, when you had your intelligence briefing, *NY Times*’s chief Washington correspondent David Sanger threw a long kitchen-sink smear at President Trump in a [piece](#) titled “Trump Still Defers to Putin, Even as He Dismisses U.S. Intelligence ...”

You may recall that it was Sanger, together with *NY Times* colleague Judith Miller, who blew the loudest bugles to “charge” into Iraq to destroy the (non-existent) WMD there. Sanger is still taking dictation from his anonymous “current and former officials.” In Friday’s article, he noted that “four years ago this week, the CIA was coming to the conclusion that Russia was responsible for the hacking of the DNC’s servers”, and linked to an [article](#) he co-authored at the time titled “Spy Agency Consensus Grows That Russia Hacked D.N.C.”

The *Times* highlighted Sanger’s article on Friday with a small front-page squib: “On Russia,

He's Consistent; President Trump Brushes Off U.S. Intelligence, and resurrects same mantras from the 2016 campaign. Page A11". On that inside page Sanger repeats his own consistent mantra about Trump's consistency: "Say this about Mr. Trump's approach to Moscow. It has been consistent."

Sanger's observation amounts to a poignant, if unintended, irony. His mantra regarding "Russian hacking" has been nothing if not consistent. We are reminded of Emerson's observation: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines" ... and, one might add, adored also by journalists with an important line to defend — in the face of growing evidence to the contrary of its speciousness.

Sanger and other media sophists that have insisted that the Russians hacked the DNC are unlikely to relent any time soon — truth be damned. The "Russian hack of the DNC", after all, was the cornerstone of the Russia-gate story; it is simply too big to fail.

Verifying the absence of WMD in Iraq, it turns out, was a relatively discrete issue that had to be acknowledged — however grudgingly — because, in Clapper's own words, he had "found what wasn't really there." So even Rumsfeld's nostrum that "the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" had to be discarded. There were no WMD in Iraq. Period.

Not As Easily Grasped As No WMD

The issue is not so clear-cut regarding the unrelenting Sangeresque claims that Russia hacked the DNC. We continue to encounter questions like, "Are you saying the Russians don't hack, and that they did not try to hack the DNC!?" No, the Russians hack all the time, as do other major powers, including the United States, and the DNC presumably was one important target.

What we in VIPS have been asserting since late 2016, though, is that there was/is no evidence that the Russians hacked those DNC emails, which were so prejudicial to Mrs. Clinton, and gave them to *WikiLeaks*. Sorry, we are aware that James Clapper "handpicked" (his word) some analysts from CIA, FBI, and NSA, who in turn "assessed" — sans evidence — that Russia did it. That does not do it for us.

The bombshell admission by CrowdStrike's Shawn Henry on December 5, 2017 — not made public until May 7, 2020 — that CrowdStrike has no concrete evidence that the DNC emails were hacked is definitive. That this revelation has been suppressed by *The New York Times* and other "mainstream media" for three months now speaks volumes.

VIPS' Record

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity cut its teeth on February 5, 2003 with an afternoon Memorandum for President Bush critiquing Colin Powell's UN speech earlier that day. We explained to President Bush the inadequacies of Powell's remarks, and pointedly warned that, were the U.S. to attack Iraq, "the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic". (We know that in October 2002 you had voted against authorizing Bush to make war, but also that 81 of your Democratic colleagues voted for it.)

Skipping ahead to 2016, when we saw allegations, without convincing evidence, that the Russians were responsible for "hacking" the DNC emails to influence the election, we immediately smelled a rat. We issued our first related VIPS Memo [expressing](#) our misgivings

on December 12, 2016.

Embedded in that memo is a short tutorial on the difference between a hack and a leak. Included also were eight charts, most of them disclosed by Edward Snowden, depicting the relevant NSA collection programs and how emails are traced over the Internet. What we already knew of the technology (two former NSA technical directors are VIPS members and were heavily involved in our analysis) presaged what we learned on May 7 from CrowdStrike's boss Shawn Henry. Here is the introductory sentence for our Memo of December 12, 2016:

“As the hysteria about Russia's alleged interference in the U.S. election grows, a key mystery is why U.S. intelligence would rely on “circumstantial evidence” when it has the capability for hard evidence, say U.S. intelligence veterans.”

Our most recent VIPS Memo was [addressed](#) to Attorney General Barr on June 5, 2020. See this excerpt:

“Not until May 7, 2020, when secret testimony to the House Intelligence Committee from late 2017 was made public, did it become completely clear that CrowdStrike has no concrete evidence that the DNC emails published by WikiLeaks on July 22, 2016 were hacked — by Russia or by anyone else. Seventeen months earlier, on Dec. 5, 2017, the president of CrowdStrike, former FBI cyber-crimes unit director Shawn Henry, admitted this in sworn testimony to the House Intelligence Committee. This is how he answered a leading question from ranking member Adam Schiff:

Mr. Schiff: Do you know the date on which the Russians exfiltrated the data from the DNC? ... when would that have been?

Mr. Henry: Counsel just reminded me that, as it relates to the DNC, we have indicators that data was exfiltrated from the DNC, but we have no indicators that it was exfiltrated (sic). ... There are times when we can see data exfiltrated, and we can say conclusively. But in this case, it appears it was set up to be exfiltrated, but we just don't have the evidence that says it actually left.”

Technology Phobia: Not an Excuse

In both of those memos, and in several others between 2016 and 2020, we made a concerted effort to explain the technical details in terms most non-technical people can easily grasp. We had become painfully aware of the widespread tendency to avoid reading our analyses on the assumption (pretense?) that the technical detail was too complicated. It isn't.

Again, full disclosure: we are, of course, aware that the Russia-hacked-the-DNC-emails-and-gave-them-to-WikiLeaks mantra has acquired the status of near-papal infallibility. And we know that our forensic analyses, even though unrefuted and based on the principles of science, will continue to strike a discordant note — not only with the Clappers of this world but also with many among many otherwise well informed members of Congress. (We have just about given up on the corporate media.)

We also foresee that our findings will probably not be welcome. As hardened veterans

analyzing these kinds of sensitive issues over decades, we are accustomed to being forced into the role of the proverbial skunk at a picnic. We are not deterred. We still adhere to the old ethos for intelligence analysis (in contrast to intelligence operations) of telling it like it is, without fear or favor. The truth is what matters; and, again, we share your desire that the American people become better informed.

Should you have any follow-up questions, we are at your disposal.

With respect,

Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

William Binney, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Richard H. Black, Senator of Virginia, 13th District (2012-2020); Colonel US Army (ret.); Former Chief, Criminal Law Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General, the Pentagon (associate VIPS)

Bogdan Dzakovic, Former Team Leader of Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security, (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Mike Gravel, former Adjutant, top secret control officer, Communications Intelligence Service; special agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps and former United States Senator.

Karen Kwiatkowski, Lt. Col., US Air Force (ret.), at Office of Secretary of Defense watching the manufacture of lies on Iraq, 2001-2003

Edward Loomis, NSA Cryptologic Computer Scientist and Technical Director (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA presidential briefer (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East & CIA political analyst (ret.)

Scott Ritter, former MAJ., USMC, former UN Weapon Inspector, Iraq

Sarah Wilton, Commander, U.S. Naval Reserve (retired) and Defense Intelligence Agency (retired)

Ann Wright, U.S. Army Reserve Colonel (ret) and former U.S. Diplomat who resigned in 2003 in opposition to the Iraq War

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