

BRENNAN MAKES EVEN CRAZIER PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY CLAIMS ABOUT TRUMP DOSSIER

As I have laid out, the intelligence community has been making some odd claims about the Trump dossier. First, James Clapper claimed that the IC was the last to learn of the dossier, in spite of the fact that IC member FBI was getting the reports at least by August and probably earlier. Then, Sunday, John Brennan claimed the IC couldn't be held responsible for leaking the dossier (though without denying that the IC had leaked it), because the dossier had already been out there; except the dossier – released with a report that post-dates all known public versions of the dossier – therefore post-dates what “was already out there.”

Brennan's back with yet another claim, this in response to Trump's insinuation that Brennan might have leaked it: Brennan claimed he has never read the dossier.

“Was I a leaker of this? No,” Mr. Brennan said Monday in an interview at CIA headquarters, days before he ends a career that has spanned more than three decades and that took him from entry-level recruit to head of the nation's most storied spy service.

“First of all, this is not intelligence community information,” Mr. Brennan said. He noted that the dossier had been circulating “many months” and that he first heard about it from inquiring reporters last fall. To date, he hasn't read the document and gave it no particular credence, he said.

“I would have no interest in trying to give that dossier any additional airtime,” Mr. Brennan said.

I mean, sure, you're conducting one of the most sensitive briefings of recent history. The briefers here are all principals – along with Brennan and Clapper, Admiral Mike Rogers and Jim Comey. And you don't even read the stuff that goes into it? You don't review the underlying dossier that, you claim, you're briefing just so Trump knows what the Russians have on him?

That may well be true. But if it is, it suggests a very deliberately cultivated plausible deniability, one that the decision to have Comey brief the dossier to Trump by himself only adds to. Most charitably, Brennan cultivated such deniability only to ensure he can claim that the CIA is not engaging in domestic politics (and that may well be enough).

But along with the pointedly false claims about what the IC knew when, the claim raises questions about why CIA would go so far out of its way to be able to claim they didn't know.