HOW JOHN DURHAM AND CHUCK GRASSLEY COVERED UP GETTING ASS-HANDED BY RUSSIA

The most important passage of the classified annex of the Durham Report is this one — though you won't hear it from the frothy mob, in significant part because Chuck Grassley and Tulsi Gabbard are hiding what these documents are. Durham describes that it is "dated the following day" just after discussing an email dated July 25, so July 26.

[redacted] also obtained from the Sensitive Intelligence collection [redacted] an email dated the following day. The FBI's translation of this email is as follows:

> Great! A whole bunch of material appeared in the press today regarding this subject. It appears that the noose around Guccifer's Russian background is tightening. I suggest doing [TN: writing] something about a task from someone, I don't know, some dark forces, like the FBI for instance, or better yet, Clinton sympathizers in IC, Pentagon, Deep State (or somewhere else?), about American websites deploying a campaign to demonize the actions of Russia's GRU, acting in accordance to orders by VVP [TN: Vladimir Putin], to undermine the forces of good in the elections in the interest of Donald Trump, who is basically an agent of influence. Using inept GRU operatives (there is such information) and their general inclination to adventurism and idiocy, a number of crucial technical indications pointing to Russia were exposed. And so on. Will that be okay?[38]

[redacted] Another [redacted] email [redacted] dated July 27, 2016, appears to discuss "mak[ing] [something]" to "illuminate" how Clinton was attempting to "vilif[y] Moscow" and discredit Putin and Trump.[39] [redacted]

[redacted][40] The email attached the following English text in a document, which appears to be another email from Benardo, bearing a date of July 27th:

> From: Leonard Benardo
>
> Sent: July 27, 2016
>
> Hi,
>
> HRC approved Julia's idea about Trump and Russian hackers hampering U.S. elections. That should distract people from her own missing email, especially if the affair goes to the Olympic level. The point is making the Russian play a U.S. domestic issue. Say something like a critical infrastructure threat for the election to feel menace since both POTUS and VPOTUS have acknowledged the fact IC would speed up searching for evidence that is regrettably still unavailable. However there seems to be signs GRU penetration (cyrlic, 2.0 VPN elite VPN, Felix Edmundovich). They appear hardly skilled, "incompetent bumbling idiots" as smb [somebody] called them. In absence of direct evidence, Crowdstrike and ThreatConnect will supply the media, and GRU will hopefully carry on to give more facts.[41]

Go ahead and read it once. But before I explain why it is so important, first let me illustrate how Chuck Grassley and Tulsi Gabbard are obscuring the provenance of these documents.

As I explained here, these documents were stolen

from Russian foreign intelligence (SVR) by another country's intelligence service (understood to be the Dutch). The documents themselves generally consist of two different kinds of documents:

- Emails and other raw intelligence that SVR stole from victims, including US think tanks, State Department, and the Executive Office of the President
- Discussions among SVR — mostly intelligence analysis — about the files they stole

Sometimes the victim files the Russians stole would be attached to the reports, sometimes they would be incorporated into the reports. Sometimes the Russians would translate the English-language documents they stole, other times they would not. So the game of telephone that most of these documents entail looks like this:

- SVR steals documents
- SVR translates documents
- SVR analyzes documents
- Dutch intelligence steals documents from SVR
- Dutch intelligence shares documents with CIA and/or FBI
- CIA and/or FBI translate the Russian bits
- CIA and/or FBI analyze what they found
- CIA sends what they think they found to FBI

But that's not all. For the key documents in this collection, they report the speech of one or another Hillary Clinton associate, which means the game of telephone looks like this:

- Debbie Wasserman Schultz or Julianne Smith talk with Think Tank guys (primarily Open Society's Leonard Benardo, but also OSF's Jeffrey Goldstein, as well as unidentified people at Atlantic Council and Carnegie Endowment)
- Think tank guys write what they learned from DWS or Julianne Smith
- SVR steals documents from Think Tank guys
- SVR translates documents from English to Russian
- SVR analyzes documents
- Dutch intelligence steals documents from SVR
- Dutch intelligence shares documents with CIA and/or FBI
- CIA and/or FBI translate the Russian bits to English
- CIA and/or FBI analyze what they found
- CIA sends what they think they found to FBI

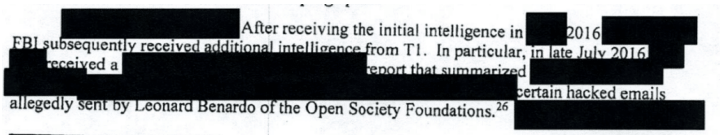
Best as I can tell, that path is the one involved in the documents Durham *claims* are the most important in his appendix, the ones that claim to report what Smith said about a Hillary Clinton plan to smear Donald Trump.

Here's what FBI lawyer Tricia Anderson wrote about the problems with this game of telephone in a memo:

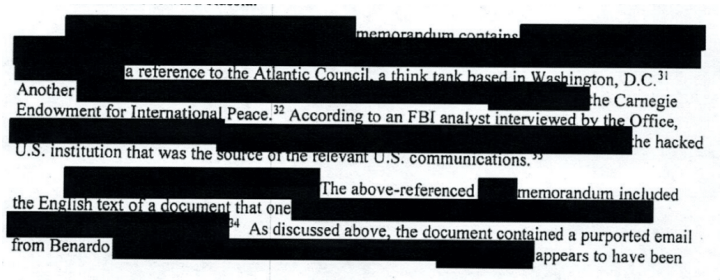
- The reports likely reflected multiple levels of hearsay given that they were based on purported communications between Wasserman Schultz and potential donors, not any underlying communications between Lynch and Clinton campaign staff;
- Wasserman Schultz' communications may have contained exaggerations designed to reassure potential donors who were concerned by news about the FBI investigation;
- The [Russians] who drafted the reports may have injected opinion, editorialization, or exaggeration into the reports; and
- Translation errors may have contributed to the potential for unreliability

Durham provided just a summary of this assessment, but a fair one (in part because he's more focused on later documents that don't involve DWS but do involve all those levels of reported speech).

Here's how the purported smoking gun was introduced (note, if Durham provided the date, it is redacted, but it reports something that happened on July 26, so it can be no later than then but could be July 27).


After receiving the initial intelligence in 2016
FBI subsequently received additional intelligence from T1. In particular, in late July 2016
received a report that summarized certain hacked emails
allegedly sent by Leonard Benardo of the Open Society Foundations.[26]

There was additional analysis about the provenance following the text.


memorandum contains
a reference to the Atlantic Council, a think tank based in Washington, D.C.[31]
Another the Carnegie
Endowment for International Peace.[32] According to an FBI analyst interviewed by the Office,
the hacked
U.S. institution that was the source of the relevant U.S. communications.[33]
The above-referenced memorandum included
the English text of a document that one
[34] As discussed above, the document contained a purported email
from Benardo appears to have been

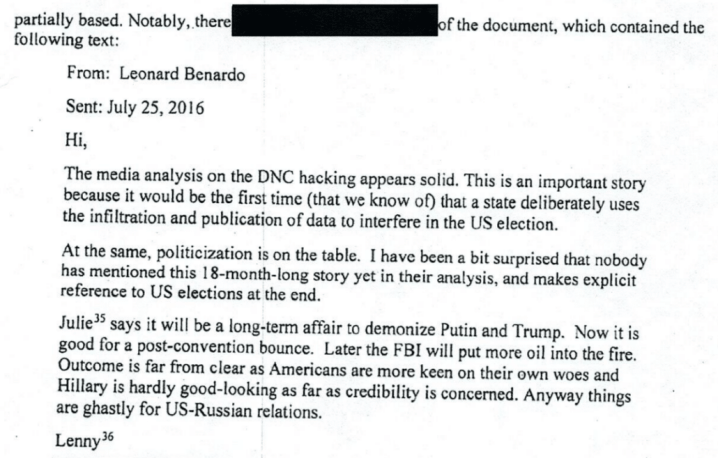
There are a number of things conveyed in these redactions:

- The classification marks
- That CIA received these documents
- The dates the Dutch passed them on
- Presumably (though given Durham's practice elsewhere in his report, not definitely) the date of the underlying memo
- A description of the people at SVR they were obtained from
- The import of all the other think tanks
- *The nature of the incorporated messages purported to be from Benardo*

I don't contest some of those redactions. But the amount of redaction, and lack of context elsewhere, obscure what the purported smoking gun is: a *draft* SVR report that in some way

incorporates language attributed to Leonard Benardo. **We have no clue whether it is dated July 26, 27, or 28** (by which date CIA had a copy). The section that most frothers are quoting (just like the section of other SVR reports released in recent weeks) is not an email itself, it is a Russian discussion about purported emails.

Durham follows the actual SVR report with the text attributed to Benardo; the description of *how* this text is incorporated in the document is redacted.



partially based. Notably, there [redacted] of the document, which contained the following text:

From: Leonard Benardo

Sent: July 25, 2016

Hi,

The media analysis on the DNC hacking appears solid. This is an important story because it would be the first time (that we know of) that a state deliberately uses the infiltration and publication of data to interfere in the US election.

At the same, politicization is on the table. I have been a bit surprised that nobody has mentioned this 18-month-long story yet in their analysis, and makes explicit reference to US elections at the end.

Julie[35] says it will be a long-term affair to demonize Putin and Trump. Now it is good for a post-convention bounce. Later the FBI will put more oil into the fire. Outcome is far from clear as Americans are more keen on their own woes and Hillary is hardly good-looking as far as credibility is concerned. Anyway things are ghastly for US-Russian relations.

Lenny[36]

He follows it with another similar (raw) email attributed to Benardo (which should make evident *whom* Benardo sent the email to, or at what time, but Durham didn't share that).

John Durham does not mention, at all, that the language of those first two purported Benardo emails — the ones with a date of July 25 — in no way supports the claim made in the SVR Report, that on,

> 26 July 2016, Clinton approved of a plan of her policy advisor, Julianna Smith … to smear Donald Trump. by magnifying the scandal tied to the intrusion by the Russian special services in the pre-election process to benefit the Republican nominee.
>
> As envisioned by Smith, raising the theme of "Putin's support for Trump" to the level of the Olympics scandal would

> divert the constituents' attention from the investigation of Clinton's compromised electronic correspondence.

He does note in a footnote that the SVR report got Julianne's first name wrong, Juliana. He simply asserts that the "Julie" referred to in the purported Benardo emails is Julianne; he doesn't note that in the purported follow-up Benardo email the name used is "Julia," not the kind of thing a colleague would normally do. Durham interviewed Benardo, who specifically said he didn't know who "Julie" (or "Julia") was.

The only corroboration *at all* that the language in the Benardo email was real, was evidence it was not: an email sent by someone else, a Carnegie Endowment cyber guy named Tim Maurer, discussing this article on attribution from Thomas Rid. Durham says less about the Rid article than another cited in this correspondence, which is telling, because Rid discussed the Democrats' decision, back in June, to go public with the hack.

> This was big. Democratic political operatives suspected that not one but two teams of Putin's spies were trying to help Trump and harm Clinton. The Trump campaign, after all, was getting friendly with Russia. The Democrats decided to go public.

Rid also discussed the Guccifer persona at length, which is important for reasons I'll explain in a follow-up.

As noted, ultimately Durham concludes that the emails themselves — documents that are supposed to be raw collection — are instead "composites," including from a totally different guy, Maurer.

> The Office's best assessment is that the July 25th and July 27th emails that purport to be from Benardo were ultimately a composite of several emails

> that were obtained through Russian intelligence hacking of the U.S.-based Think Tanks, including the Open Society Foundations, the Carnegie Endowment, and others. Indeed, as discussed above, language from Tim Maurer's email of July 25th is identical to language contained in Benardo's purported email of the same date.

Durham is hedging wildly here. I think the NYT overstates when it says, "Mr. Durham concluded that the email from July 27, 2016, and a related one dated two days earlier were probably manufactured." That *would* be the conclusion sane normal people would draw, that if emails purporting to be from Benardo were actually cut-and-pasted language from Maurer, but Durham doesn't make that conclusion (perhaps because he continued to chase this conspiracy theory for another two years after he interviewed all these people, indicting two more men only to discover his theories about *them*, too, were made up). Indeed, in an almost entirely redacted (and therefore useless) passage, Durham claims that in what must be July 2017, the CIA still maintained that the report and at least some of the purported emails were not fabrications. He also cites interviews he did with people who thought the Benardo emails were authentic.

But yeah, if the emails themselves are "composites," it means they're made up, not even attributing the author correctly. In fact, if they're composites, we have no reason to believe the emails dated July 25 weren't in fact "composited" on July 26 or 27.

Now's a good time to mention that Durham is obscuring the sequence of the documents here (not least by withholding the metadata of the real email he obtains, but also thanks to the redactions from Grassley and Tulsi). The sequence looks something like this, but we can't be sure:

- July 25: Thomas Rid story

- July 25, 11 to 11:35AM: Smith texts other people trying to figure out if there was any investigation of the hack (as I noted here, Durham doesn't disclose anywhere in his report that during the Michael Sussmann prosecution, Sussmann forced him to obtain these emails that show FBI releasing a statement without consulting with the Dems, the victims of the hack.
- July 25, undisclosed time: Maurer responds to the Rid story
- July 25, undisclosed time, but the date could be made up: Two drafts of purported Benardo emails
- July 26: Email between two Russian spooks suggesting "doing something about a task from someone"
- Unknown date: A draft Russian spy memorandum claiming that on July 26, Hillary Clinton approved a plan to smear Donald Trump, citing July 25 emails purportedly from Benardo
- July 27: Email between two Russian spooks about illuminating Hillary's attempts to vilify Trump and

Putin *that links to a purported Benardo email*, in what Durham describes as English but is … probably not written by a native English speaker

- July 27: Email from Smith soliciting signers for a letter condemning Trump's attack on NATO

Narratively, Durham puts the draft report, incorporating a July 25 email attributed to Benardo, then citing another July 25 email attributed to Benardo, and describing Hillary approving a plan on July 26, before the email between two Russian spooks, which by description is dated July 26. But I've been staring at it for an hour (and reviewing Durham's unclassified report and now realizing he never provides the date there, either) and for the life of me, I'm not sure if we know whether the two spooks email precedes the draft intelligence report or not (note, too, that it starts, "Great!" by responding to something, suggesting there's an even earlier one Durham suppressed). If my read that it is dated July 26 is correct, it would have been written *on the same day* as the purported approval by Hillary, of a plan to smear Donald Trump. But the only email attributed to Benardo reflecting Hillary's approval is written July 27, meaning it's more likely it was written on July 27.

So we don't know. I am still searching but I believe Durham never revealed the date of that memo. But based on what we can see, SVR didn't "have" an email reflecting Hillary approving this plan until July 27, the day after (at least by Durham's description) two Russian spooks discussed telling stories about the Deep State.

If that's right, Russian spooks were discussing "making" such a report before they "found" an email in stilted English that Durham couldn't

match describing Hillary approving this plan.

Based on interviews (italicized here) that appear only in this annex, John Durham first started chasing this conspiracy theory no later than September 2019 (the day after meeting with Nate Batty, the politicized FBI Agent who killed the Alfa Bank investigation). After interviews done by July 2021, Durham should have come to the conclusion he states here: that the purported emails were "compiled" from emails of entirely different people. And yet all the while, the IC was in possession of documents showing one Russian spook suggesting that another one, "do something about a task from someone, I don't know, some dark forces, like the FBI for instance, or better yet, Clinton sympathizers in IC, Pentagon, Deep State."

Durham tried to bury all that, that he created precisely the chaos the Russian spooks were trying to manufacture, in this classified annex and — if you believe Kash Patel — burn the proof.

The Russians told you what they were up to.

And yet you fell for it anyway.

Update: Fixed spelling of Benardo's last name.