

CIA director distorts intelligence community's findings on Russian interference

By **Greg Miller** October 19 at 4:59 PM

CIA Director Mike Pompeo declared Thursday that U.S. intelligence agencies determined that Russia's interference in the 2016 American presidential election did not alter the outcome, a statement that distorted spy agency findings.

"The intelligence community's assessment is that the Russian meddling that took place did not affect the outcome of the election," Pompeo said at a security conference in Washington.

His comment suggested — falsely — that a report released by U.S. intelligence agencies in January had ruled out any impact that could be attributed to a covert Russian interference campaign that involved leaks of tens of thousands of stolen emails, the flooding of social media sites with false claims and the purchase of ads on Facebook.

A report compiled by the CIA and other agencies described that Russian operation as unprecedented in its scale and concluded that Moscow's goals were to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process and help elect Donald Trump.

But the report reached no conclusions about whether that interference had altered the outcome — an issue that U.S. intelligence officials made clear was considered beyond the scope of their inquiry.

"We did not make an assessment of the impact that Russian activities had on the outcome of the 2016 election," the report said. U.S. spy agencies are "charged with monitoring and assessing the intentions, capabilities, and actions of foreign actors," the report said, but do "not analyze U.S. political processes or U.S. public opinion."

Former U.S. intelligence officials voiced concern over Pompeo's statement.

"This is another example of Pompeo politicizing intelligence," a former senior U.S. intelligence official said. Pompeo "is the most political CIA director since Bill Casey" during the Reagan administration, the former official said. "This significantly

undermines the intelligence community's credibility.”

The former official and others spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing the subject's sensitivity.

A CIA spokesman denied that Pompeo intended to mislead the public with his remarks. “The intelligence assessment with regard to Russian election meddling has not changed,” said the spokesman, Ryan Trapani, “and the director did not intend to suggest that it had.”

Pompeo's comment came in response to a question about Russian meddling at the end of a lengthy public appearance at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a conservative think tank.

Pompeo also criticized former U.S. intelligence officials for their television appearances, implying that they violated their oaths and potentially contributed to the leaks of sensitive information.

“There are an awful lot of former CIA talking heads on TV,” Pompeo said, adding that their obligation to remain quiet about their work “far extends beyond the day you turn in your badge.”

His comment seemed to be aimed mainly at former senior intelligence officials in the Obama administration, including James R. Clapper Jr., the former director of national intelligence, who said in a recent interview that Russia's interference had “cast doubt” on Trump's win.

“Our intelligence community assessment did, I think, serve to cast doubt on the legitimacy of his victory,” Clapper said in an interview on CNN last month. He added that he worried Trump's perceived focus on the issue “transcends, unfortunately, the real concern here, which is Russian interference in our political process.”

Clapper could not immediately be reached to comment.

Michael Morell, the former CIA deputy director who is employed by CBS News to comment on national security issues, responded to Pompeo with a post on Twitter. Pompeo's caution against leaking is “wise,” Morell said. “But, to be clear, critiquing policy is not leaking.”


Democratic Sens. Ron Wyden (Ore.) and Martin Heinrich (N.M.), both members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, rebuked Pompeo for his Russia comments. Wyden said in a posting on Twitter that Pompeo's views on Moscow had “shifted with those of the president.”

Pompeo's mischaracterization of the intelligence report was the latest in a series of statements from the former Republican congressman that have seemed aimed at minimizing the significance of Russian interference in the 2016 election.

The intelligence report released in January noted Russia's “longstanding desire to undermine the U.S.-led liberal democratic order” but said the 2016 effort “demonstrated a significant escalation in directness, level of activity and scope of effort

compared to previous operations.”

U.S. officials have said they have seen no evidence that Russia tampered with voting systems on Election Day.

Greg Miller is a national security correspondent for The Washington Post. He was among the Post reporters awarded the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for coverage of U.S. surveillance programs revealed by Edward Snowden and a finalist for the 2013 Pulitzer Prize. He previously worked for The Los Angeles Times.  Follow @gregpmiller

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