JAMES CLAPPER'S LATEST EFFORT TO FEARMONGER ABOUT SNOWDEN'S DAMAGE

In addition to getting him to admit the US can't fix the Middle East but we have to stay because our "leadership" is needed there, in this column David Ignatius asked James Clapper, again, about how much damage Edward Snowden has caused.

> Clapper said the United States still can't be certain how much harm was done to intelligence collection by the revelations of disaffected National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden. "We've been very conservative in the damage assessment. Overall, there's a lot," Clapper said, noting that the Snowden disclosures made terrorist groups "very security-conscious" and speeded the move to unbreakable encryption of data. And he said the Snowden revelations may not have ended: "The assumption is that there are a lot more documents out there in escrow [to be revealed] at a time of his choosing."

Let's unpack this.

Clapper provides two pieces of evidence for damage:

1. Snowden disclosures have made terrorist groups "very security-conscious"
2. Snowden disclosures have "speeded the move" [by whom, it's not entirely clear] to unbreakable encryption

That's a bit funny, because what we saw from the terrorist cell that ravaged Paris and Belgium was — as The Grugq describes it — "drug dealer tradecraft writ large." Stuff that they could have learned from watching the Wire a decade ago, with a good deal of sloppiness added in. With almost no hints of the use of encryption.

If the most dangerous terrorists today are using operational security that they could have learned years before Snowden, then his damage is not all that great.

Unless Clapper means, when he discusses the use of unbreakable encryption, us? Terrorists were already using encryption, but journalists and lawyers and US-based activists might not have been (activists in more dangerous places might have been using encryption that the State Department made available).

Neither of those developments should be that horrible. Which may be why Clapper says, "We've been very conservative in the damage assessment" even while insisting there's a lot. Because this is not all that impressive, unless as Chief Spook you think you should have access to the communications of journalists and lawyers and activists.

I'm most interested, however, in this escrow idea.

> "The assumption is that there are a lot more documents out there in escrow [to be revealed] at a time of his choosing."

Snowden and Glenn Greenwald and Laura Poitras and Bart Gellman have said about a zillion times that Snowden handed everything off before he went to Russia. And everyone who knows anything about Russia would assume if he brought documents there, Putin has had them for almost 3 years.

Sure, there are surely documents that reporters have that, reviewed in the future by other people, may result in new disclosures. But the

suggestion that Snowden himself is asking the journalists to hold back some of the documents "in escrow" is rather curious. Why would Snowden withhold documents until such time that the technology behind disclosures would be out of date.

I mean, it's useful as a basis to claim that Snowden will continue to damage the IC when there's actually not that much evidence he already has. But it doesn't make much sense to me.

Ah well. In the article Clapper says he'll be around for 265 days, which means around February 9 of next year, someone else will take up fearmongering about Edward Snowden.