

EVEN (ESPECIALLY?) THE FBI IS SUSCEPTIBLE TO FAKE NEWS

The WaPo has an utterly dispiriting story providing more detail on a document first revealed in this big NYT story on Jim Comey. Here's how the NYT described it:

During Russia's hacking campaign against the United States, intelligence agencies could peer, at times, into Russian networks and see what had been taken. Early last year, F.B.I. agents received a batch of hacked documents, and one caught their attention.

The document, which has been described as both a memo and an email, was written by a Democratic operative who expressed confidence that Ms. Lynch would keep the Clinton investigation from going too far, according to several former officials familiar with the document.

Read one way, it was standard Washington political chatter. Read another way, it suggested that a political operative might have insight into Ms. Lynch's thinking.

[snip]

The document complicated that calculation, according to officials. If Ms. Lynch announced that the case was closed, and Russia leaked the document, Mr. Comey believed it would raise doubts about the independence of the investigation.

But as the WaPo reveals, the document was not an email, but rather a Russian document purportedly reporting on email. And while in August the FBI deemed the document a hoax, it took five months – covering the all important July announcement

ending the Hillary investigation – to get to that point.

The document, obtained by the FBI, was a piece of purported analysis by Russian intelligence, the people said. It referred to an email supposedly written by the then-chair of the Democratic National Committee, Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.), and sent to Leonard Benardo, an official with the Open Society Foundations, an organization founded by billionaire George Soros and dedicated to promoting democracy.

The Russian document did not contain a copy of the email, but it described some of the contents of the purported message.

[snip]

Comey had little choice, these people have said, because he feared that if Lynch announced no charges against Clinton, and then the secret document leaked, the legitimacy of the entire case would be questioned.

From the moment the bureau received the document from a source in early March 2016, its veracity was the subject of an internal debate at the FBI. Several people familiar with the matter said the bureau's doubts about the document hardened in August when officials became more certain that there was nothing to substantiate the claims in the Russian document. FBI officials knew the bureau never had the underlying email with the explosive allegation, if it ever existed.

Yet senior officials at the bureau continued to rely on the document as part of their justification for how they handled the case before and after the election.

As the WaPo lays out, the FBI hadn't even asked Loretta Lynch, much less the other participants in the alleged emails, about them before Comey used the document to justify his July statement on the investigation into Hillary's emails. They simply relied on it, in spite of the way a Debbie Wasserman Schultz and George Soros screams of the worst kind of fevered misinformation that circulated last year. Or, at a minimum, they acted based on the assumption that they couldn't combat evidently fake news were it to leak.

We talk a lot about dumb ordinary voters who can't sort through PizzaGate and Seth Rich conspiracies on their own.

But even the FBI, with all the investigative tools you can imagine, was unable to sort through fake news. And that had a role in one of the most significant events in last year's election.