

From: [REDACTED] [NSA](#) [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED] [NSA](#) [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: (U) memo to me
Date: Friday, March 13, 2020 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I was also asked, at one point, what the mood in [REDACTED] was, in light of all of this. ([REDACTED] point about getting questioned/accused of politicization by the other side if we failed to publish anything included a reference to analysts who had worked hard on the report and who might be disappointed/frustrated that their work had gone for nothing.) I stated plainly that, in light of our experience with the [REDACTED] we would consider ourselves lucky if the new report, concerning 2020, was actually released before the election in November. I said that we did not know why we were here, trying to defend the election and identify threats to it, if we were unable to actually report what those threats were because of issues like this.

From: [REDACTED] NSA [REDACTED]@nsa.ic.gov>
Sent: Friday, March 13, 2020 [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED] NSA [REDACTED]@nsa.ic.gov>
Subject: (U) memo to me

[REDACTED]

Today I attended a meeting regarding what to do about the [REDACTED] that we proposed releasing in December 2018, which was intended to invite recipients to request [REDACTED] underlying the report. The [REDACTED] in question was a [REDACTED] the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] efforts targeting the U.S., starting in 2014 and including [REDACTED] [REDACTED] regarding the 2016 election. We had already published an [REDACTED] report covering most [REDACTED], but we were unable to include all [REDACTED] in the [REDACTED] for two reasons: 1) members of Congress would have been unavoidably contextually identified, even if we removed their names, and thus we would need to get pre-approval under the Gates Procedures, and 2) it was judged that some of the details regarding the 2016 election were "sensational" and so required a limited distribution [REDACTED]. Although we [REDACTED] have consistently pushed for the last 16 months to get this [REDACTED] published, people higher in the chain than us – including but not limited to people at ODNI – time and again failed to make real decisions in a timely manner. We recently (in February) were told that ODNI had approved the distribution list for the report, and so we pushed the report to [REDACTED] for release, pending DIR approval. Then, DDIR objected to releasing the report as-is at this time.

The meeting was attended by: DDIR [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

DDIR had proposed several options for how we might release or not release information from the [REDACTED]

██████████ explained that some of the options he had proposed were non-starters because the key original problem – that of unavoidably contextually identifying members of Congress and thus creating issues under the Gates Procedures – would not be solved by those options. ██████████ conveyed that ██████████ preferred course was to release the report using the ODNI-approved distribution (i.e., continuing with the process we had begun 16 months ago).

DDIR explained that he was concerned that releasing the ██████████ at this time – in the current political climate, with an acting ODNI who had been tasked (according to DDIR) to “clean house” in the intelligence community, and with an administration that is suspicious of the IC and aggressive in removing anyone who stands in their way – would damage NSA’s credibility. He believed that questions would be asked as to why NSA was choosing to release this information, most obviously pertinent to the 2016 election, now, more than a year after ██████████ and that NSA would be accused of releasing it for political purposes. (I lacked the courage to point out that we, ██████████, had processed the information in a timely manner, and the delay in releasing it was due in part to decisions and inaction on the part of people in the room.) DDIR perceived that ODNI, CIA, and FBI to an extent had been tarred as hosting or being part of the “deep state”, but that NSA thus far had not been associated with the deep state and was trusted; he felt that publishing this ██████████ report would destroy that trust. He felt that the questioning of NSA that would ensue would have ramifications on the credibility of NSA reporting overall and would result in morale problems among the broader NSA workforce, à la when the ██████████. He repeatedly said that he wanted to protect our ability to be who we are at NSA: nonpartisan, objective, speaking truth to power. (At one point he mentioned something about it would be a shame if the boss – meaning DIRNSA – lost his job. Both ██████████ and I got the impression, as we discussed afterward, that DDIR was concerned about losing his job and DIRNSA’s job.) He also said, at one point, that if we had released the report last April, for instance, then he would not have these concerns about the timing. (Again, I lacked the courage to rhetorically ask why it was that we hadn’t released the report by last April.)

DDIR suggested releasing a different product, where we would summarize and amalgamate the data not-yet-reported from the ██████████, rather than inviting recipients to request ██████████. I pointed out that while we could conceivably do that regarding the ██████████ assessment of and comments regarding the Republican field from 2016, it would not be possible to do so regarding the Democratic field from 2016, because ██████████ analysis of that field concerned only two people: Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, who is of course a senator, and who would have been contextually identifiable no matter what we did. ██████████ pointed out that releasing information about ██████████ analysis of the Republican field only would look even more political. ██████████ also pointed out that there was specific FI in the ██████████ assessments of the Republican candidates that we believed could carry forward (for instance, ██████████ opinion on policies that happened to be supported by those candidates likely remained the same, and thus insight into those opinions on policies could be relevant moving forward), but that we would still contextually identify members of Congress, who were candidates at the time, if we included the information on those policy preferences; and we would be omitting foreign intelligence from the report if we amalgamated the ██████████ assessments and left out those policy preferences. I also reiterated that we believed that there was foreign intelligence value in seeing exactly what the ██████████ said, how they thought, what they assessed in their own words.

██████████ at one point observed that, if we chose not to release the report and it came to Congress's attention that we had not released it, then that would equally invite accusations of politicization, merely from the other side of the political aisle.

We also discussed a report I currently have in draft, concerning the IRA's preferences – and thus their implicit strategy – for the 2020 Democratic primary, where we have the same problem of unavoidably contextually identifying members of Congress even if we leave out their names. DDIR asked whether we could work any of the information from the old ██████████ into this new report. I conceded that we could, at least, work in the information about the ██████████ strategy regarding the Democratic field from 2016, because that strategy appeared to match neatly with their inferred strategy for 2020, but opined that it would be awkward to include much else (given that the ██████████ 2016 strategy and assessment regarding the Republicans has no analogue in 2020, because the Republican nominee is already decided (the incumbent), whereas in 2016 there was no incumbent).

DDIR repeatedly said that he wanted to get the foreign intelligence information – and he agreed that there was valid foreign intelligence information in what we wanted to publish – to our intelligence customers, the proper “users” of the information, but did not want it to get into the hands of those who would “abuse” it, but he opined that the “abusers” would overtake/outweigh the “users”. Toward the end, he suggested exploring maybe a “crazy idea” like using the ██████████ process to share the ██████████ with ██████████ so that the analysts there who needed to see this information could have access to it without it having to be serialized.

The meeting ended with a suggestion that we all chew on it. ██████████ said ██████████ would come back with options.



