

CHARACTER ASSASSINATION PROGRAM AGAINST TRUMP STILL GOING STRONG

There was a great deal of news this past week about [President Trump](#)'s audacious disregard for the advice and warnings from his own intelligence community experts.

Perhaps there's good reason for alarm.

But I think there's one shocking aspect — perhaps a larger story — that's gone virtually unreported. It appears that anonymous intelligence officials are executing an operation against the sitting commander-in-chief. It might not qualify as all-out mutiny, but it's also not all that far from one.

Right under our noses, while still under investigation for allegedly orchestrating leaks and undermining candidate Trump in 2016, some in the intel community are orchestrating leaks and undermining President Trump in 2019.

There's evidence of the existence of such an operation from the [Inspector General](#), various congressional probes, and investigative reporting. They've alleged, and in some cases concluded, that some top intel officials improperly leaked information to the news media and engaged in politically motivated surveillance practices involving multiple Trump associates.

In the newest press salvo, unnamed intel officials fanned out to air anonymous grievances against their commander-in-chief. They provided details of classified briefings and made

inflammatory charges, such as that President Trump is “endangering American security” with his “stubborn disregard” and “willful ignorance.” Disseminating these details, if true, could be seen as assisting our enemies.

Also cause for concern is the media’s role in this operation, whether witting or not. Many in the press dutifully parroted these grievances in one-sided accounts with [virtually no counterpoints](#), as if it’s inconceivable that these intel officials could be capable of flaws or conflicted by political motivations. Some reporters seem to think that “intel,” as distilled and presented by these officials, is somehow beyond question.

In fact, history teaches us the opposite can be true.

Past intel failures

The 9/11 terrorist attacks are perhaps the most dramatic modern example of failures within our intelligence community, and a reason to question intel assessments.

Because of the attacks, widespread reforms were instituted. Yet after the reforms, there’s been a legacy of intel abuses flagged by the Inspector General, investigative reporters and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court overseeing sensitive requests for surveillance of U.S. citizens.

Further, some intel officials sometimes have proven they simply are not to be believed. For example, FBI Director Christopher Wray repeatedly has insisted there have been no “702” surveillance abuses — a reference to Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), authorizing intelligence-gathering from internet traffic and phone calls — despite

[detailed findings](#) from the Inspector General and the FISA Court saying just the opposite.

Former Director of National Intelligence [James Clapper](#), now an anti-Trump activist, provided [false information](#) under oath to Congress in 2013 when he said no mass spying occurred on tens of millions of Americans. When his testimony was proven inaccurate, he apologized and said he'd misunderstood the question.

Former CIA Director [John Brennan](#), also now an anti-Trump activist, falsely assured the Senate that the CIA had not spied on Senate staffers. He, too, later [apologized](#) after an inspector general confirmed the spying had happened.

Are such officials to be uncritically, automatically believed when they bring complaints about their political enemies to the press?

Besides alleged deception by some intel officials in the past, the judgment and assessments of the intelligence community have been called into question on occasion.

For example, Russia twice alerted our intel officials about a man who had come to the U.S. and was known to be affiliated with Islamic extremists. However, the FBI's [assessment didn't find](#) any particular risk. The man went on to become one of the Boston Marathon bombers in 2013, murdering three people and injuring several hundred. There are many other examples of foreign terrorist threats being on the intel community's radar but going unrecognized or undeterred.

On the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in 2012, the intelligence community failed to anticipate potential risks in the Middle East.

Even after [protesters attacked](#) the U.S. embassy in Egypt, U.S. officials failed to respond by repositioning resources in the area. Hours later, the terrorist attacks on the U.S. compound in Benghazi, Libya, seemed to catch officials by surprise; four Americans, including the U.S. ambassador, were killed. A post-mortem revealed there had been a great deal of [intelligence](#) that [warned](#) of an impending attack.

Presumably, presidential briefings and assessments prior to these events would have been flawed or incomplete.

Presidential interactions with intel

President Trump isn't the first commander-in-chief to question his intelligence briefers, yet the officials typically didn't go public with their gripes.

Some of the leaked information is designed simply to embarrass and discredit him, deriding his lack of knowledge. For example, one intel leaker said that, in a briefing, Trump didn't know Nepal was an independent nation. Yet, no such official concern was expressed about gaffes or information lapses under other presidents.

In 2014, for example, President Obama publicly called ISIS the "[J.V. team](#)", creating one of two implications: Either his intel briefings sorely failed to identify the threat of this emerging Islamic extremist terror group or, if they did correctly assess the ISIS threat and convey it to the president, he disagreed with them.

According to intel sources, there were instances of President Obama refusing intelligence on certain matters on which he'd

made up his mind. In at least one case, he reportedly told a briefer not to bring him any more information on one terrorism topic; if the material were presented to him, he said, he wouldn't read it.

President Obama withdrew from Iraq against the recommendations of his military advisers, generals and secretary of State. He approved the disastrous takedown of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, and reportedly ordered aid to the wrong side in Syria, instead helping jihadist groups. All of these actions were either with the advice — or against the advice — of his intel officials.

And there's one infamous case where it can be argued that we could have benefitted from a president treating his intel with skepticism. Before President Bush launched the war against Iraq in 2003, a huge intelligence lapse led to the erroneous reporting that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

In the end, President Trump could be right or wrong. And the way he interacts with his intel officials deserves news coverage and scrutiny. But we should refrain from one-sided reporting based on anonymous, orchestrated leaks by people who clearly seek to use the media to sway public and political opinion.

Our intel community — especially today, with its recent conduct under scrutiny — should not be immune from healthy skepticism. These latest press reports are a pretty good indication that, for some intel officials, their operation against the commander-in-chief continues.

Sharyl Attkisson is an Emmy Award-winning investigative journalist, author of The New York Times best-sellers "The Smear" and

"Stonewalled," and host of Sinclair's Sunday TV program, "[Full Measure](#)." Follow her on Twitter [@SharylAttkisson](#).