

Tulsi Gabbard declassified documents over CIA objections, sources say

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National Intelligence Director Tulsi Gabbard [decided to declassify a document](#) on Russia's interference in the 2016 election last month over the objections of CIA officials who argued that more details should remain secret to protect sensitive spying sources and methods, according to two sources with knowledge of the matter.

[The Washington Post](#) first reported the disagreement.

Some former intelligence officers said they were alarmed at the detail revealed in the declassified document. The top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, Mark Warner, of Virginia, [has warned](#) that the move could put intelligence-gathering efforts at risk.

A CIA spokesperson said agency director John Ratcliffe strongly supported the public release of the document.

“This effort reflects Director Ratcliffe’s continued commitment to elevating the truth and bringing transparency to the American people,” the spokesperson said in an email.

Gabbard’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Last month, she declassified the document, a [five-year-old report](#) about the 2016 election by Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee, saying President Donald Trump backed the decision.

The declassified version of the report included relatively few redactions, and it included references to eavesdropping and “an established clandestine” human source with insights into Russian President Vladimir Putin’s view of the U.S. presidential contest.

Michael van Landingham, a former CIA analyst who helped write the 2017 intelligence community assessment, said he was taken aback at the detail exposed in the declassified document.

“I was shocked to see the declassification detailing the dates the US IC [intelligence community] gathered material, naming specific Russian actors, and quoting at length from both raw and serialized intelligence reports of Russian leadership discussions,” he told NBC News. “This sort of information would allow for Russian authorities to easily find potential sources of the leaks, which would complicate the job of the US IC keeping America safe.”

Van Landingham said that when he was working as an analyst examining the same material about Russia’s election meddling in 2016, he was subject to a polygraph test and was allowed to read the information in hard copy only after he signed his name to request it.

In a [recent internal review](#) of a 2017 U.S. intelligence assessment of Russia’s interference in the 2016 election, the CIA used more cautious language in referring to the information that supported the assessment’s conclusions, without specifying the precise nature of intelligence sources.

The CIA review, which Director John Ratcliffe declassified July 2, referred to “highly classified” intelligence reporting about Putin’s preferred candidate in the U.S. presidential race, without specifying the source of the information.

Larry Pfeiffer, a former senior intelligence official who worked at the National Security Agency and the CIA, said that the declassified Republican House report was “probably the lightest redaction of the most sensitive document I’ve ever seen” and that it could have potentially damaging consequences.

“When our intelligence community leaders conduct end-runs around procedures established to protect sources and methods, they put at grave risk foreign sources risking life and limb to give us information vital to our security,” Pfeiffer said.

Gabbard claimed in the White House briefing room July 23 that the Republican House report showed that the Obama administration fabricated intelligence that Russia waged information warfare to try to help Trump win the election. Former President Barack Obama and former officials in his administration have dismissed the accusation as totally baseless.

Other Trump administration officials, including Ratcliffe, have issued a series of reports and declassified documents making similar claims of a [plot by the Obama administration](#) to play up Russia's influence efforts in the 2016 election and to sabotage Trump's presidency.

On Monday, Attorney General Pam Bondi directed Justice Department prosecutors to [launch a grand jury investigation](#) into the Obama administration's review of Russia's actions related to the 2016 election, a senior Trump administration official said. A letter signed by Bondi does not say what the charges would be, whom the grand jury would investigate or where it will meet.

A senior former Justice Department official dismissed the investigation as "a dangerous political stunt." Democrats have called it a Trump administration effort to distract attention from its failure to [release files in the case of the late financier Jeffrey Epstein](#).

A [bipartisan Senate intelligence report in 2020](#) endorsed the intelligence community's analysis that the Kremlin sought to help Trump win the election. A special counsel appointed by Trump in his first term, John Durham, reported no evidence of a criminal conspiracy by the Hillary Clinton campaign or the Obama administration to undermine Trump with false information.

At a joint news conference with Trump in Helsinki in 2018, Putin said he had wanted Trump to win the election.