Dead Drop: February 2

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The Newsletter

SUPPRESSIVE IMPRESSION: Mike Pompeo invited BBC reporter Gordon Correa into his CIA headquarters for an interview published on Monday. (The fact that a non-U.S. reporter and cameras were allowed inside the building was, itself, unusual.) But something Pompeo said in the interview caught the eye of Agency alumni. Talking about what the CIA is doing to counter Russian efforts to tinker with future U.S. elections, according to the article Pompeo says, "the intelligence community was involved in identifying who was behind subversive activity, using technical means to suppress it and trying to deter Russia." That sounded like the CIA director was sounding off about an act that, CIA vets tell us, could be a covert action – something that only the president can declassify. But those in the know say the director was talking about instances where the CIA informs local countries via diplomatic or other channels that servers are being hijacked by the Russians, and asks those countries to take the servers down. You decide which version you believe.

HAVE A BLAST: Sign of the times. There is a website called NUKEMAP which presents an interactive data visualization tool which gives you with an opportunity see what various sized nuclear weapons would do to various locations around the world. (Spoiler alert: nothing good.) When you visit the site, you enter a city name, then select a yield in kilotons – and you are shown a map which illustrate the blast effects of a nuclear weapon. If you simulate exploding a weapon similar to "Little Boy" (the bomb used on Hiroshima) over the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, for example, you are told there would be an estimated 100,850 fatalities. A similarly-sized weapon in New York City would result in 232,200 fatalities. The site enables you to move ground zero around – so if, let's say, you have a particular animus toward Tacoma Park, Md., you can see what happens with that location in the bull's eye. Pretty creepy, actually.

AIVD AID: Remember when the U.S. intelligence community asserted with high confidence that the Russian government was messing with our presidential electoral process? How'd they know that? According media in The Netherlands, the Dutch intelligence service (known as the AIVD) managed to hack into the hackers and watched – real time – as the Russian hacker group referred to as "Cozy Bear" penetrated Democrat Party email accounts. According to a translated article from the Dutch newspaper deVolkskrant, AIVD informed the FBI of what they saw.

POCKET LITTER: Bits and pieces of interesting /weird stuff we discovered:

- **Saving the world one mission at a time.** Back in October The Dead Drop told you about a "dramady" TV series being developed about a "tough-but-tender" male FBI agent and a "badass" female CIA officer who fight the good fight. Now comes news that ABC has given the go-ahead to shoot the pilot of that show, titled "Whiskey Cavalier." This brings it one step closer to airing. No word on whether the pilot will mention "secret societies" and "the deep state." "Whiskey Cavalier," BTW, is supposedly the code name of the FBI agent – whose character name is equally transparent: "Will Chase."
- **Look for the "Uniom" Label:** Some folks were amused by reports of a typo on tickets to this week's State of the Union address – allowing entrance for the State of the "Uniom." But here at The Dead Drop, we prefer to look on the bright side. At least the tickets read: "Admit Bearer" rather than "Admit Barer." The latter might have invoked thoughts of Stormy Daniels.

- **Hot Heads:** There is a new book out called "Hottest Heads of State" a satirical report which, according to the Johns Hopkins University news source "Hub," answers questions you probably never had – such as: Which president had the best beard? And how can you style your hair like Martin Van Buren? The Hub's authors J.D. and Kate Dobson were asked if they work for the CIA, since their website says they "write comically informative books about presidents, rank world leaders by their hotness, and make candles in St. Louis," which the interviewer says is "just the kind of misdirection I'd expect from intelligence ops who might be strategizing fake news and social media misinformation." For the record, the authors deny it.

NETWORK NEWS: Not a day goes by when members of The Cipher Brief Network aren't making news. Here are just a few examples from this week:

- **A Third Explanation:** Former CIA Russia-hand Daniel Hoffman writing in the Wall Street Journal explains that the Christopher Steele dossier may not be the smoking gun revealing Team Trump and Russian collaboration that some Democrats see, or fictional opposition research that some Republicans claim, but rather part of "a Russian espionage disinformation plot targeting both parties and America's political process." (Cipher Brief CIA vet Mark Kelton dug into that theme, too, warning the administration to approach cooperation with Moscow with care, as "divergent strategic goals and differing national security interests regarding even issues of seemingly mutual concern almost surely dictate that any cooperation between Washington and Moscow will remain tactical and episodic.")

- **"An Assault on Our Institutions":** Former DNI Jim Clapper and former CIA and NSA Director Mike Hayden made a joint appearance on "CNN Tonight" with Don Lemon Monday addressing "the memo" controversy with the House Intelligence Committee and the President's decision not to enforce Congressionally enacted sanctions against Russia. Both lamented recent shots at federal law enforcement and the intelligence community. Clapper saying recent attacks are "bad for the FBI and the Department of Justice" and that he shudders "to think what the morale of those organizations is right now." Hayden reprised that in Lawfare.com, as well as in The Cipher Brief, warning that we are "chiseling away at processes and institutions on which we currently depend – and on which we will depend in the future."

- **Swinging in the Middle:** Retired NATO Supreme Allied Commander and current Dean of the Fletcher School at Tufts, Admiral Jim Stavridis, was on Hugh Hewitt's MSNBC program on Saturday talking about the precarious situation in Turkey where a U.S. NATO ally is at loggerheads with U.S. Kurdish allies.

- **That's Thick:** Former Acting CIA Director John McLaughlin posted a tweet about the Nunes/FBI memo saying: "FISA warrants typically are big thick documents, 50-60 pages. If the Nunes memo about one is just 4 pages, you can bet it's a carefully picked bowl of cherries." McLaughlin's tweet was picked up in places ranging from CNN to the New York Daily News.

- **Trump Year One Foreign Policy Report Card:** Michael Morell, former Acting CIA Director, was interviewed by CBS News regarding the Trump administration's performance in the area of foreign affairs during the president's first year. Morell said the administration's ratcheting up the fight has "taken the wind out of the sails of ISIS." Morell also warned that the U.S. needs to be focused on other nations copying Russia's "weaponization of social media."

WHAT'S ON THEIR NIGHTSTAND?

"After watching NatGeo's recent docu-drama, Long Road Home, I am re-reading Martha Raddatz's 2007 book by the same title that inspired the mini-series about the intense one-day battle fought by American soldiers in the slums of Sadr City in April 2004. As a professional soldier, I am always skeptical about how authors capture war, especially at the small-unit level – in this case the platoon and company level. Martha's research and very personal interaction with those who fought provides an extraordinary look at the confusion, heroism, sorrow, and elation of ground combat. Another very unique and extensive aspect of this book focuses on the families of those in the fight and how they, too, were very much a part of this battle. This could be one of the iconic boots-on-the-ground books to come out of the Iraq War." – LT. Gen. (Ret) Guy Swann III

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING: Got any tips for your friendly neighborhood Dead Drop? Shoot us a note at TheDeadDrop@theCipherBrief.com or TheCipherBrief@protonmail.com.