A newly released CIA review has backed the core conclusion of a 2016 intelligence assessment that Russia interfered in the U.S. presidential election to harm Hillary Clinton and aid Donald Trump. However, it also criticized aspects of the process used to arrive at that judgment, citing political pressure and an unusually fast-paced timeline.

The eight-page review, released Wednesday and commissioned by CIA Director John Ratcliffe, said the original assessment was produced under an “atypical analytic process” and featured excessive involvement by senior intelligence officials. Despite these flaws, the review ultimately deemed the findings credible and based on sound intelligence.

The 2016 intelligence community assessment, released in January 2017, concluded with “high confidence” that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a campaign to undermine Clinton and bolster Trump. While the review questioned the level of confidence placed in the assessment — noting it was based on a single source rather than the multiple corroborating sources typically expected — it did not challenge the fundamental conclusion that Russia sought to meddle in the election.

“Agency heads at the time created a politically charged environment that triggered an atypical analytic process around an issue essential to our democracy,” Ratcliffe said in a statement accompanying the report. “Under my watch, I am committed to ensuring that our analysts have the ability to deliver unvarnished assessments that are free from political influence.”

The review stops short of labeling the process corrupt or manipulated, but its release has renewed tensions surrounding the long-running controversy over Russian election interference — and the Trump administration’s response to it.

Former intelligence officials involved in the 2016 assessment defended their work. Beth Sanner, a former top intelligence official, called the report “a vote of confidence” in the

integrity of the intelligence community. “This is a fair question, and there should not be a timestamp on asking it. But this report suggests that the answer, for now, remains yes,” she said.

Others pointed out that postmortem reviews are standard practice in the intelligence community, particularly after high-profile or contentious events. “The issues that are highlighted in this report are also extremely normal,” said Emily Harding, a former CIA analyst now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “It’s a luxury when an analyst does not have a compressed time frame.”

Despite this, the public release of the review is unusual and, according to some former analysts, politically motivated. “The only reason why you would be putting this out into the public domain is for political reasons,” said one former CIA official, speaking anonymously to protect their identity.

Ratcliffe’s own comments appeared to go further than the review’s conclusions. In a series of posts on X, formerly Twitter, he accused former intelligence chiefs John Brennan, James Clapper, and James Comey of manipulating intelligence and suppressing dissenting views to target Trump. “All the world can now see the truth,” Ratcliffe wrote.

No response has yet been issued by Brennan, who led the CIA during the original assessment and has been a frequent target of Trump’s criticism. Trump revoked Brennan’s security clearance in 2018, citing “erratic conduct and behavior.”

The original 2016 assessment, including the now-notorious Steele dossier as an annex, has remained a point of contention for Trump and his allies. The dossier, which has since been largely discredited, alleged Trump had deep ties to Russia — claims that were not substantiated in the final intelligence report.

Investigations into Russian interference, including a two-year probe by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, dominated Trump's first term. Mueller's investigation did not find sufficient evidence that the Trump campaign conspired with Russian officials, but confirmed that Moscow had mounted a sweeping campaign to influence the election.

A 2020 Senate Intelligence Committee review of the 2016 assessment, led by Republican Senator Richard Burr, found no significant analytic flaws. The bipartisan panel supported the original finding that Putin "aspired" to help Trump, even while acknowledging differing levels of confidence among agencies. The CIA and FBI expressed high confidence in the judgment, while the NSA rated it with moderate confidence.

The Senate report emphasized that all intelligence disagreements had been "reasonable, transparent, and openly debated" — and found no evidence of political pressure to sway findings.

While the CIA's new review raises questions about internal dynamics during the production of the 2016 report, it reaffirms the integrity of its core conclusion: Russia interfered in the U.S. election with the intent to influence the outcome.

As political divisions continue to define discussions around election integrity and foreign interference, the intelligence community's work — and how it is scrutinized — remains under a powerful and persistent spotlight.