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New documents complicate Trump's ties with Russia

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President-elect Donald Trump's ties to Russia were further complicated Tuesday when CNN released a report related to classified documents presented to Trump and President Barack Obama last week. According to CNN, the documents included allegations that Russian operatives claim to have compromising information about Trump.

BuzzFeed published the 35-page classified document Tuesday. According to Buzzfeed, the memos and their allegations are unverified and include errors.

Republican National Committee spokesperson Sean Spicer criticized both BuzzFeed and CNN in Trump's first press conference since July on Wednesday morning.

"The fact that BuzzFeed and CNN made the decision to run with this unsubstantiated claim is a sad and pathetic attempt to get clicks," he said.

Trump also addressed the reports at the press conference, questioning the validity of allegations against him.

"I think it was disgraceful — disgraceful that the intelligence agencies allowed any information that turned out to be so false and fake out," Trump said. "I think it's a disgrace, and I say that, and that's something that Nazi Germany would have done and did do."

CNN released a statement Wednesday defending its decision to release the report, saying it did not publish any details of the 35-page document because it could not corroborate the allegations.

Benjamin Friedman, a research fellow at the Cato Institute, said these reports could have serious consequences if they are proven to be true.

"It's potentially a bombshell for Trump, although not totally surprising when given all the bits and pieces of information that have come out about his campaign and its connections to people in Russia," he said.

Donald Raleigh, a professor in the UNC Department of History, said Russia has a history of election interference.

"There has been plenty of evidence that Russia has tried to interfere in other elections, in the Baltic, for instance, and in Ukraine," he said.

Jonathan Weiler, a UNC global studies professor, said it is not unprecedented for major intelligence agencies to gather information on other world leaders.

"I think what's worrisome is if this stuff is substantiated — whether Trump's judgment and ability to act independently when it comes to Russia is in any way compromised," he said.

Weiler said these reports could affect United States foreign policy regarding Russia.

"I think that there will be a growing force in Congress, including among certain Republican senators, like John McCain and Lindsey Graham, who are really bothered by what they perceive as Russia's interference or influence over our election processes," he said.

Weiler also said the reports could cause conflict internally in the United States between intelligence agencies and the executive branch.

"We're entering into a dangerous phase here where at least some of the intelligence agencies like the CIA appear, even before he's been inaugurated, to have something of an antagonistic relationship with the guy who's about to become president of the United States," he said.

Regardless of the accuracy of the reports, Friedman said their content could have long-term effects.

"It's likely that to the extent that it can be verified, it will be, and it's going to remain an issue," Friedman said. "I guess it's obvious, but it's not going anywhere. This is a cloud that's going to hang over the Trump administration from its start, among other clouds."