



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on May 17, 2017

Did Trump Reveal Classified Intelligence to the Russians?

When President Donald Trump met with Russian officials in the Oval Office last week, he went “off script” and revealed sensitive, classified intelligence, according to a report by the *Washington Post*. If the report — which cites unnamed “current and former U.S. officials” — is accurate, this may be very bad news for both national security and future intelligence-gathering efforts.



The information President Trump is alleged to have let slip deals with intelligence provided to the United States by a Mid-East ally — likely Israel — about Islamic State plans to use laptop computer bombs on airplanes. On Monday, the *Washington Post* broke the story with the headline, “[Trump revealed highly classified information to Russian foreign minister and ambassador.](#)”

According to that report:

President Trump revealed highly classified information to the Russian foreign minister and ambassador in a White House meeting last week, according to current and former U.S. officials, who said Trump’s disclosures jeopardized a critical source of intelligence on the Islamic State.

The information the president relayed had been provided by a U.S. partner through an intelligence-sharing arrangement considered so sensitive that details have been withheld from allies and tightly restricted even within the U.S. government, officials said.

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It appears the the White House realized the seriousness of the president’s verbosity because “senior White House officials took steps to contain the damage, placing calls to the CIA and the National Security Agency,” according to the *Post*. A statement from White House national security advisor H.R. McMaster denying the report seems to have had the opposite effect than that which he intended. In that statement he said:

There’s nothing that the president takes more seriously than the security of the American people. The story that came out tonight, as reported, is false. The president and the foreign minister reviewed a range of common threats to our two countries, including threats to civil aviation. At no time — at no time — were intelligence sources or methods discussed. And the president did not disclose any military operations that were not already publicly known. Two other senior officials who were present, including the secretary of state, remember it being the same way and have said so. Their on-the-record accounts should outweigh those of anonymous sources. And I was in the room. It didn’t happen.

It is noteworthy that McMaster did not deny that President Trump provided the Russian officials with



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classified intelligence. He only said the story was false “as reported.” Just to put in the for-what-it’s-worth column, that type of nuanced denial would not sell to conservatives had it come from the Obama administration. The material issue is not whether “intelligence sources or methods [were] discussed.” The question is whether the president disclosed classified intelligence *at all*. McMaster’s cleverly crafted statement denies what was not asserted, while avoiding what was. Coming from the administration of a man who ran a campaign of “plain speaking,” this non-denial denial stands out in sharp contrast.

Besides, if the initial report is accurate — and the combination of the White House reaching out to the CIA and NSA and McMaster’s failure to actually deny the real meat of the report seem to indicate that it may be — it does not matter one whit whether President Trump revealed intelligence sources or methods; the Russians — highly skilled in espionage — would have little difficulty inferring those sources and methods. If the report is accurate, he may as well have told all.

One official told the *Post*, “This is code-word information,” a phrase that refers to one of the highest levels of classified intelligence. “Code-word information” deals with intelligence that — if known — could easily reveal sources and methods. The official also said that in the meeting, Trump “revealed more information to the Russian ambassador than we have shared with our own allies.”

Because the intelligence the president is alleged to have shared was gathered by an ally and given to the United States in confidence, the president’s alleged lack of discretion could hamper the ability of American intelligence agencies to gather intelligence that is needed to keep America safe. If the *Post* story is true, it would be reasonable for U.S. allies to be hesitant to share intelligence with a nation whose leader — by saying too much to the wrong people — might jeopardize their methods and sources.

If, on the other hand, the report by the *Post* is “fake news,” the administration needs to put out this fire by issuing a clear, unambiguous, point-by-point denial. In the absence of that denial, it will be difficult for anyone — no matter how strident a Trump supporter — to defend the president against accusations that he has risked both U.S. national security and relations between the United States and our intelligence allies.

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