



Does Trump Even Know Enough Intel to be Dangerous?

In the midst of the report by the *Washington Post* that President Donald Trump revealed classified intelligence to Russian officials during their visit to the Oval Office, the situation is looking worse and worse. The *New York Times* is reporting that three administration officials said the most honest — although off-limits — defense they could offer for why the president could not have revealed any intelligence that could have done any harm is that, because of his hasty and indifferent method of reading the intelligence briefings, he didn't know enough to do any harm.



The *Times* [reported](#), "There is a growing sense that Mr. Trump seems unwilling or unable to do the things necessary to keep himself out of trouble and that the presidency has done little to tame a shoot-from-the-hip-into-his-own-foot style that characterized his campaign."

Granted, one of the things that made Trump appealing to many voters — besides the fact that he wasn't Hillary Clinton — was his plain-speaking, unscripted style. There is nothing wrong with shooting from the hip unless — as the *Times* points out — the pistol is pointed at your own foot. But beyond that, the things that are acceptable — even appealing — in a candidate can be terrible for a president. Case in point: a plain-speaking, unscripted style may endear voters where a candidate is concerned, but may endanger national security and diplomacy where a president is concerned. The *Times* article — which does not name its sources — asserts that President Trump's style is a source for concern among those close to him who have the experience to recognize when that style may cause problems:

Some of Mr. Trump's senior advisers fear leaving him alone in meetings with foreign leaders out of concern he might speak out of turn. General McMaster, in particular, has tried to insert caveats or gentle corrections into conversations when he believes the president is straying off topic or onto boggy diplomatic ground.

This has, at times, chafed the president, according to two officials with knowledge of the situation. Mr. Trump, who still openly laments having to dismiss Mr. Flynn, has complained that General McMaster talks too much in meetings, and the president has referred to him as "a pain," according to one of the officials.

As *The New American* [reported](#) previously, it was General McMaster who was given the task of issuing the administration's non-denial denial regarding the *Post*'s report that President Trump went off script and revealed classified intelligence to Russian officials. And while McMaster's statement fell short of actually denying that the president let slip national security secrets, his follow-up statement to the press the next day was even worse. In a press briefing, McMaster was asked about the president's alleged disclosure to the Russian officials. In what may be one of the worst attempts ever to excuse something, McMaster said, "The president wasn't even aware where this information came from," adding, "He wasn't briefed on the source or method of the information either."



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on May 18, 2017

McMaster's statement that the president wasn't briefed and did not know the source of the information the White House has never actually denied that the president shared with the Russians may serve to confirm what is perhaps the most damning portion of the *Times'* story. The *Times* reported that three unnamed administration officials lamented that they could not publicly offer "their most compelling — and honest — defense" of the allegations that the president got loose-lipped and gave the Russians classified intelligence because that defense is that he "simply did not possess the interest or the knowledge of the granular details of intelligence gathering to leak specific sources and methods of intelligence gathering that would harm American allies." And the reason he lacked that knowledge is that he is a "hasty and indifferent reader of his briefing materials." In other words, the defense these three administration officials would offer — though they cannot do so on the record — is that the president doesn't do his homework and therefore does not know enough to reveal intelligence sources and methods.

Aside from the fact that "He can't be guilty of that because he doesn't do his job well enough to know that information" is a lousy excuse, it is also beside the point. As this writer pointed out in a [previous article](#):

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."

If — and that is the operative word here — the president did provide sensitive, classified intelligence to the Russians, he would be guilty (though not necessarily criminally) of risking both the national security and the intelligence gathering capabilities of the United States. If he did not — and the story from the *Washington Post* is false — then the White House needs to get its act together and refute this with a clear denial — something neither the president nor anyone else in his administration has done so far.

The president has been asked repeatedly and point-blank, "Did you reveal classified intelligence to the Russians?" It is time for a point-blank answer from the White House.

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