



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on July 20, 2018

White House Worried That Coats Is Undermining Trump Over Putin Summit

President Trump wants to continue building a friendship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and in what appeared to be a surprise to Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats (shown), he invited Putin to meet in Washington. But Coats' reaction to the invitation, of which he was unaware until told in a public forum, has White House officials wondering whose side the DNI is on.



The announcement, which came from White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders [in a tweet](#), took Coats by surprise, to no small measure of glee among the media elites who have been trying to undermine Trump's presidency since his election in 2016. Coats received the news from the hard-left Andrea Mitchell of NBC.

As [the Washington Post described it](#), "Coats was on stage at the [Aspen Security Forum](#) in the middle of an interview with NBC's Andrea Mitchell, who broke the news to him. Coats, clearly surprised, took a deep breath."

"Say that again," he said. "Did I hear you?"

She repeated the news.

"Okaaaay," Coats said. "That's going to be special."

White House officials wonder whether Coats was undermining the president and weren't happy about his performance, the *Post* reported.

Inside the White House, Trump's advisers were in an uproar over Coats's interview in Aspen, Colo. They said the optics were especially damaging, noting that at moments Coats appeared to be laughing at the president, playing to his audience of the intellectual elite in a manner that was sure to infuriate Trump.

"Coats has gone rogue," said one senior White House official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide a candid assessment.

After [Trump disputed](#) the judgement of U.S. intelligence agencies that Russia had interfered in the election in 2016, [Coats issued](#) a statement without White House approval: "We have been clear in our assessments of Russian meddling in the 2016 election and their ongoing, pervasive efforts to undermine our democracy."

Trump reversed himself, and, concerned that Coats might quit, the *Post* reported, assured the intelligence chief of his support. But now, seeing Coats' nonplussed reaction to the announcement of another meeting with Putin, the *Post* reported, "White House aides are worried that Trump will interpret the comments by Coats as a personal betrayal, since they came so soon after the president praised him."



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[According to](#) the *Post*:

A senior U.S. intelligence official said that Coats has a good relationship with the president and speaks with him frequently. He disputed the suggestion that the director was somehow undermining the president and said Coats was doing his job to describe what the Russians did.

"For someone in the White House to criticize Dan Coats for speaking truth to power is unfair," the intelligence official said.

Coats told Mitchell he didn't know what Trump and Putin said to each other, and opposed a private meeting, worrying that Putin might have recorded it.

"I don't know what happened in that meeting," [he told Mitchell](#). "I think as time goes by and the President has already mentioned some of the things that happened in that meeting, I think we will learn more. But that is the President's prerogative."

Coats said he would have advised against Trump and Putin's private meeting in Helsinki, which worried U.S. security officials because notes weren't taken and only two interpreters were present, and he had not been consulted.

"If he had asked me how that ought to be conducted," he said, "I would have suggested a different way, but that's not my role. That's not my job. So it is what it is."

Schiff Motion Defeated

Adam Schiff (D-N.Y.), the hard-left congressman from California, [pushed a motion](#) in the House Intelligence Committee to subpoena the interpreters in the meeting to find out what was said.

"This is an extraordinary remedy, I realize, but then it's extraordinary for the president of the United States to ask all of his senior staff essentials to leave the room and have a conversation with an adversary," Schiff said. "And then in a public conversation disavow his own intelligence agencies and in many respects disavow his own country."

Republicans killed that motion, which even a former national security official for President Obama and a former advisor to GOP Senator John McCain thought [was a bad idea](#).

The White House has not set a date for the next meeting with Putin, but it's likely the president will handle things differently given the dust-up about his recent tête-à-tête with Putin.

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