

Trump Slip Ups in the Oval Office

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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Region: [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

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*It has the air of a hunting party, and the quarry, on this occasion, was a lumbering US President with a loose tongue. The individual aiming the rifle in this case was The Washington Post, assisted by the murmurings and breathless whispers of various concerned officials as to what Donald Trump did in his meeting with Russian foreign minister, **Sergey Lavrov**.*

The Russian theme has been following Trump like a dedicated stalker, though it has had fanning assistance across a range of quarters. The frequency of allegations are starting to look like a White Hall farce with confused romances and misplaced fidelities. The star of the show still remains The Donald.

The script begins with firm determination. FBI Director, with a good portion of his term still to run, receives a good knifing, followed by a meeting between the president, Lavrov and **Ambassador Sergey Kislyak**. It then transpires from the army of the disgruntled that Trump had been sloppy, even criminally so, in sharing classified material with a Russian official.

Trump's dizzying spin on the matter was that he was receiving gold from his Russian counterparts. In the description afforded by an official, naturally unnamed, to the *Washington Post*,

"I had great intel. I have people brief me on great intel every day."

The sizzling material in question (so called "code-word information"), however, was the disclosure of a threat learned through a key partner in the intelligence business, noting how parts of a specific plot hatched by Islamic State had supposedly been uncovered. Trump then went on to reveal the city in Islamic State territory where the threat was detected.

Reuters threw in its bit, suggesting that the conversation revealed material about "an Islamic State terrorist threat to the use of laptop computers on aircraft." The issue is bound to affect the next daft policy limiting the use of laptops on flights in the cabin of US-bound flights.

National security advisor **H.R. McMaster** had few concerns, though there was a sense that he was attempting, vainly, to smooth matters with some tongue twisting.

"The president and the foreign minister reviewed common threats from terrorist organisations to include threats to aviation. At no time were any intelligence sources or methods discussed, and no military operations were

disclosed that were not already publicly known.”[1]

Deputy national security advisor **Dina Powell** was more forthright, insisting that the entire story alleging an improper intelligence disclosure was false.

“The president only discussed the common threats that both countries faced.”[2]

The official account of the Trump-Lavrov meeting is bland, a creaseless account.

“President Trump emphasized the need to work together to end the conflict in Syria, in particular, underscoring the need for Russia to rein in the Assad regime, Iran, and Iranian proxies.”[3]



Ukraine was also raised, as was Russian responsibility to implement the Minsk accords. Nothing specific, however, was noted about the Islamic State source.

USA Today wondered whether Trump could have been tossing about details of classified material like confetti at a raucous wedding. There was “no question” he could, having the “legal authority” to do so, even including rivals and adversaries.

“What complicates this incident is that the information wasn’t his to give: The information came from an unnamed US ally.”[4]

Harvard University’s **Alan Dershowitz** was dramatic.

“Let’s not minimize it,” he claimed to CNN’s Erin Burnett Outfront. What took

place was possibly “the most serious charge ever made against a sitting president.”[5]

What followed was a response to Burnett’s pressing observation about what he, effectively, a new domain of seriousness in public office.

“You’re saying this is the most serious charge ever made against a sitting president and yet it’s not criminal, it’s not impeachable, and yet it’s more serious than things were?” Dershowitz is emphatic: “Absolutely right.”

Given the abuses from the ever evolving imperial presidency, this is a tall if confusing order indeed, though commentators have been quick to note that there was no breaking of any regulation in any criminal sense, nor did this constitute a “leaking of classified information”. As Lawfare asserts,

“Nixon’s infamous comment that ‘when the president does it, that means it is not illegal’ is actually true about some things. Classified information is one of them.”[6]

Constitutional affirmation of this has also been provided by the US Supreme Court in *Department of the Navy v Egan* (1988), in which it was stated that the President’s

“authority to classify and control access to information bearing on national security... flows primarily from his Constitutional investment of power in the President and exists quite apart from any explicit congressional grant.”[7]

The implication of that for the sharing of intelligence is clear enough. If sensitive information reaches the knowledge of President Trump, it will simply be another tit bit to barter, an item to casually mull over in the presence of other representatives.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com.

Notes

[1]

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-revealed-highly-classified-information-to-russian-foreign-minister-and-ambassador/2017/05/15/530c172a-3960-11e7-9e48-c4f199710b69_story.html?utm_term=.576594e4607f

[2] <https://twitter.com/abbydphillip/status/864249105857622016>

[3]

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/10/readout-president-donald-j-trumps-meeting-for-foreign-minister-sergey-lavrov>

[4]

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/05/15/5-unanswered-questions-latest-trump-russia-intelligence-leak/101731194/>

[5]

<http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/333541-dershowitz-this-is-the-most-serious-charge-ever-made-against-a>

[6] <https://www.lawfareblog.com/bombshell-initial-thoughts-washington-posts-game-changing-story>

[7] <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/484/518.html>

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