Media claims Trump revealed classified information to Russian visitors

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A sensationalized report published on the web site of the *Washington Post* Monday afternoon claims that President Trump conveyed classified information to two high-ranking Russian officials during their well-publicized meeting last Wednesday at the White House.

The article, headlined, "Trump revealed highly classified information to Russian diplomats," claims that Trump discussed possible terrorist attacks by ISIS using laptops carried on passenger aircraft during a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Ambassador Sergey Kislyak.

According to the *Post* report, Trump disclosed information obtained from "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 US government, officials said. The partner had not given the United States permission to share the material with Russia, and officials said that Trump's decision to do so risks cooperation from an ally that has access to the inner workings of the Islamic State."

The newspaper claimed that after the meeting, recognizing the potential damage, White House officials called the CIA and the National Security Agency, which were in contact with the government that was the source of the information on ISIS.

The incident, assuming it is accurately reported and not a piece of deliberate disinformation from the US intelligence apparatus, suggests, among other things, that at least one country allied with Washington still maintains friendly relations with ISIS. Both Saudi Arabia and Qatar come to mind.

Washington itself played a role in the creation of the Islamic fundamentalist group, initially built up as part of the US regime-change operation in Syria directed at the government of Bashar al-Assad, Russia's only ally in the Middle East. ISIS only came into direct conflict with the US after it sent forces across the Syria-Iraq border in 2014, and particularly after its rout of the Iraqi Army in the capture of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, in June 2014.

ISIS has been sustained since then with supplies and new recruits who have been able to reach its landlocked territory either through Turkey—a NATO ally of the United States—or through Saudi Arabia and Iraq, both non-NATO allies of the US. Any one of these countries, as well as the sheikdom of Qatar, which has heavily financed Sunni fundamentalist groups like ISIS, could be the "U.S. partner" described in the *Post* report.

In terms of US domestic politics, the *Post* report is clearly aimed at providing another boost for the anti-Russian campaign alleging that the Trump presidential campaign colluded with Russian intelligence agencies in the hacking of the Democratic National Committee and Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta to influence the outcome of the 2016 election.

No significant evidence has yet been produced to substantiate claims that the Russian government was responsible for the hacking of materials subsequently published by WikiLeaks. Nor has there been any evidence of Trump-Russia collusion. The anti-Russia campaign has been launched in opposition to Trump's initial suggestions of a more cooperative relationship with Moscow, including a pullback from efforts to overthrow Assad in Syria, to focus more military resources on China and East Asia.

The nature of the security breach alleged in the *Post* article hardly justifies the screaming headlines in the newspaper, the breathless reports that led the Monday evening news broadcasts on ABC and CBS, and the hours of cable television coverage that have ensued.

Trump's major blunder, if the report is accurate, is to

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share information about potential ISIS terrorism with Russia without having permission to do so from the "U.S. partner," an action that "jeopardized a critical source of intelligence on the Islamic State," according to the *Post*.

From the standpoint of the deepening US political crisis, the main question raised by the *Post* report is how details of a closed-door meeting in the Oval Office made its way to the newspaper. The most likely sources are the CIA and NSA. The two spy agencies were either represented at the meeting or informed of Trump's comments afterwards by White House homeland security adviser Thomas Bossert.

In other words, the *Post* report is another shot fired in the internecine war within the American state apparatus, initially focused on foreign policy, particularly in relation to Syria and Russia, but more generally provoked by the personalist, authoritarian character of the Trump administration, and Trump's role as a loose cannon in both domestic and foreign policy.

White House officials flatly rebuffed the *Post* claims that Trump released information inappropriately. "The president and the foreign minister reviewed common threats from terrorist organizations to include threats to aviation," H.R. McMaster, the national security adviser said in a statement. "At no time were any intelligence sources or methods discussed and no military operations were disclosed that were not already known publicly."

The *Post* claims that Trump revealed to Lavrov and Kislyak the name of a city in ISIS territory where the details of the new terrorist threat had been learned, but the newspaper would not reveal this name to its readers, "at the urging of officials who warned that revealing them would jeopardize important intelligence capabilities."

In other words, the newspaper chose to enlist in the ranks of the military-intelligence officials waging political warfare against Trump.

The reported blurting out of classified information to the Russians led several Democratic congressmen to recall Republican criticism of Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton for being "extremely careless" with classified information that was found on the private email server she used while secretary of state.

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