

# Trump aides' stunning cry for help: Admitting the president misled the American people

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By **Aaron Blake** August 1

President Trump hates leaks. He hired Anthony Scaramucci 10 days ago to very publicly root them out, and he has even attacked his attorney general, Jeff Sessions, for not investigating them aggressively enough.

But oftentimes with Trump, a leak isn't just a leak; it's an effort to save him from himself.

Such is the case with The Washington Post's big scoop Monday night that Trump personally dictated the highly misleading initial statement about Donald Trump Jr.'s meeting with a Russian lawyer in June 2016. Anonymous White House advisers said they had settled on a plan to be transparent about the meeting, only to have the president come in at the 11th hour and decide to try and withhold the whole truth. The result, at Trump's personal direction, was a statement that claimed the meeting was about adoption, when in fact the stated purpose of it was opposition research -- supposedly from the Russian government -- about Hillary Clinton.

Check out this detailed blow-by-blow from The Post's Ashley Parker, Carol D. Leonnig, Philip Rucker and Tom Hamburger about how the Trump team responded to the New York Times learning about the meeting:

[White House director of strategic communications Hope] Hicks also spoke by phone with Trump Jr. Again, say people familiar with the conversations, [Jared] Kushner's team concluded that the best strategy would be to err on the side of transparency, because they believed the complete story would eventually emerge.

The discussions among the president's advisers consumed much of the day, and they continued as they prepared to board Air Force One that evening for the flight home.

But before everyone boarded the plane, Trump had overruled the consensus, according to people with knowledge of the events.

It remains unclear exactly how much the president knew at the time of the flight about Trump Jr.'s meeting.

The president directed that Trump Jr.'s statement to the Times describe the meeting as unimportant. He wanted the statement to say that the meeting had been initiated by the Russian lawyer and primarily was about her pet issue — the adoption of Russian children.

And now look at these comments from anonymous advisers:

“This was . . . unnecessary,” said one of the president’s advisers, who like most other people interviewed for this article spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive internal deliberations. “Now someone can claim he’s the one who attempted to mislead. Somebody can argue the president is saying he doesn’t want you to say the whole truth.”

And here:

Trump, advisers say, is increasingly acting as his own lawyer, strategist and publicist, often disregarding the recommendations of the professionals he has hired.

“He refuses to sit still,” the presidential adviser said. “He doesn’t think he’s in any legal jeopardy, so he really views this as a political problem he is going to solve by himself.”

And this:

Because Trump believes he is innocent, some advisers explained, he therefore does not think he is at any legal risk for a cover-up. In his mind, they said, there is nothing to conceal.

The White House's first six months, of course, have been littered with internal leaks. Many of them are owed to the warring factions within the West Wing and dissension in the broader administration. But every so often you see this kind of leak: the send-a-message-to-the-boss leak -- the spreading of unhelpful information about the president because advisers see no other way to make it stop.

And even in that line of reporting, this is a pretty remarkable cry for help. In this story, they're admitting that he is personally responsible for deliberately misleading the American people about a major topic of the Russia investigation. They're saying that he did something that could very well be construed as a cover-up and could damage his legal defense. The reason? Because they apparently can't prevail upon him in person and they think he simply doesn't get what kind of jeopardy he is putting himself in.

Part of it may simply be exasperation, as well. When you, as a White House staffer, continue to have to put up with the boss's unpredictable whims and furthering of unhelpful story lines (i.e. Russia was on my mind when I fired FBI Director James B. Comey), it's liable to lead to this kind of leaking.

Trump will surely view this as an effort by the deep state and/or the media to undermine him. He'd be better off understanding it for what it is: a desperate effort to help him help himself. After all, in this case, the advisers were right. The truth all came out in rather short order, and Trump only made it worse.

**Further reading:**

*Trump's lawyer repeatedly denied Trump was involved in Trump Jr.'s statement. But he was.*

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