

The Columbus Dispatch

Jay Ambrose: Post overreaching in bid to wound president

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The Washington Post recently put American security at risk, but let's point the finger at President Donald Trump instead. The Post did.

It printed a story saying Trump divulged classified, endangering information to Russians, and maybe he did, but any risk to security was hugely magnified by the Post's divulging much of it to everyone else. It may even have created a risk that otherwise would not exist.

This episode begins with Trump meeting in the Oval Office with two Russian officials, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Ambassador to the U.S. Sergey Kislyak. He talked to them about terrorism and measures to use against it and, according to the Post, revealed secret information from an ally. A threat here, says the Post, is the ally could be disclosed, especially since Trump had mentioned a specific city, and it could quit assisting the United States.

We could thus be left without information crucial for our protection, the Post warned, without adding that the ally and our foes might know nothing about all of this minus the leakers and the Post then asking the world to lend an ear. To be sure, other news outlets have understandably gone with the story since the Post's revelations, but it is the Post that got things started (at least this time out).

Of course, the Russians also got the lowdown from Trump, and one might think that could work disastrously for U.S. interests. Maybe so, but then there is the account from National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, who was also at the meeting. In a press conference, he said the discussion was largely about information already widely publicized. The mention of one city did nothing to disclose an informational source that even Trump did not know about, he also said.

Here is a widely informed, deeply respected expert on national security matters essentially saying all this was no big deal, except maybe when we get to the leakers. McMaster mentioned them as a real problem, and when you ask what could have motivated them to do something possibly

perilous, the answer seems clear: to get Trump. No doubt they genuinely believe he is unfit for office and could someday land the country in terrible trouble, but that does not make it OK to betray the public interest and dishonor their sworn duties.

Might they even have been committing crimes? President Barack Obama's administration, you might recall, prosecuted nine accused leakers during his two terms in office. As has been pointed out by a reporter who tangled with the Obama team, that compares with three leakers prosecuted by all the administrations that came before him. The Obama team also went after press colluders, spying on some and threatening others with jail if they did not report their sources.

Even some loyalists in the Obama administration got confused and themselves leaked to jeopardizing effect, a Fox News account recalls. They publicly identified a CIA operative in Afghanistan, endangering his life, and on another occasion revealed much that should never have been told about doing serious digital damage to Iran's nuclear ambitions that have since been resuscitated.

It's a peculiar age in which we live, one in which disclosures that scorch the common good are somehow justified if they also fry someone in power. I am for press freedom and aggressive reporting, but there are instances in which the American public's right to stay whole exceeds our enemies' right to know. I also agree that Trump is an intellectually disheveled mess, a complete, total stumble-tongue, impulsive, narcissistic and the list grows long. Keeping an eye on him is important, but there can be a point when reporting is more nearly destructive animosity.

The Washington Post has been a great newspaper, especially on things Washingtonian, but its overreaching and that of many other news outlets lately has been deeply troubling.

Jay Ambrose is an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service. Email him at

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