

# WHITE HOUSE CONFIDENT NO FIRE TO RUSSIAN SMOKE BECAUSE INVESTIGATION HAS LASTED SIX MONTHS

Mike Allen's new rag has an update on the White House efforts to counter the NYT story that Trump's team had repeated contacts with Russian intelligence leading up to the election. The piece that's getting all the attention is confirmation that Sean Spicer is the one who arranged the contacts.

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer personally picked up the phone and connected outside officials with reporters to try to discredit a New York Times article about Trump campaign aides' contact with Russia, then remained on the line for the brief conversations,

But I'm just as interested in the logic the White House used to reassure itself there's no risk to the investigation.

Top White House officials tell us they're authentically confident that the Russia smoke won't lead to fire, and are even happy to have their opponents distracted by the issue. "For over six months, we have heard about these alleged contacts with Russia," the official said. "And yet, ... with all the leaks have have come out, there's no 'there' there."

This is an administration that hasn't conducted anywhere near the kind of vetting

administrations normally do. Numerous staffers couldn't get security clearance, several nominees had to withdraw because of financial conflicts, and still more should have. The administration lied about the substance of Mike Flynn's contacts with the Russian Ambassador for weeks, and only fired Flynn when it became public that Flynn had purportedly lied to VP Pence. Moreover, Trump insisted the Hillary email investigation – a far less complex investigation – might result in indictments well past the six month mark of the investigation (it took just under a year for FBI to declare they would not charge her, even ignoring the October 2016 headfake related to the Anthony Weiner related emails).

And yet their assurance that these leaks will amount to nothing seems to come primarily from the fact that nothing has happened in six months of leaks (ignoring Flynn got fired after an interview with the FBI)?

I mean, they may well be right. Missing from most of the coverage of this story is the White House claim that Deputy FBI Director Andrew McCabe allegedly offered up that the story was "bullshit" (a claim Allen repeats unquestioningly). If that's the case, NYT really should offer a correction.

Except there's a big difference between saying there were not a stream of communications between Russian intelligence and Trump's associates and saying that the ties with Michael Cohen and Paul Manafort, especially, don't present potential means to compromise Trump's administration.

There's one thing I'll agree with the White House on, though: the Russian scandal is sucking up all the press' attention, even as Trump's rolls out his various dragnets of authoritarianism. While the press is obsessed with whether Trump was influenced by an authoritarian, most are ignoring how Trump is himself one.