

TRUMP WAS WORRIED HR MCMASTER OR FIONA HILL WOULD SPY ON HIS CONVERSATION WITH PUTIN

There were two infuriating stories earlier this week in preparation of today's meeting between President Trump and Vladimir Putin.

The Daily Beast reported that Trump's aides wanted top NSC Russia expert Fiona Hill in the meeting between the presidents.

According to two White House aides, senior Trump administration officials have pressed for Hill—the National Security Council's senior director for Europe and Russia and the author of critical psychological biography of Putin—to be in the room during the president's highly anticipated meeting with Putin.

If Hill is there, these officials believe, it will help the White House avoid the perception that the president is too eager to cozy up to the Kremlin. The hope is to avoid a repeat of Trump's last meeting with top Russian officials, during which he disclosed classified intelligence to two of the country's top diplomats—and was pictured by Russian state media looking particularly friendly with them.

But it used linguistic gymnastics to avoid stating who might decide to keep Hill out of the meeting.

Then Axios reported that just Trump, Rex Tillerson, and a translator would represent the US.

There will likely only be six people in the room when President Trump meets President Putin on Friday at the sidelines of the G-20 meeting in Hamburg, Germany.

According to an official familiar with the meeting's planning, it will be Trump, Putin, the Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, and translators.

But it, too, remained silent about who decided to keep the attendee list so small (though admittedly, that detail was a less crucial part of their story).

Thankfully, the NYT has finally revealed that it was Trump, not Putin, who chose to limit attendees.

Only six people attended the meeting itself: Mr. Trump and his secretary of state, Rex W. Tillerson; Mr. Putin and his foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov; and two interpreters.

The Russians had agitated to include several more staff members in the meeting, but Mr. Trump's team had insisted that the meeting be kept small to avoid leaks and competing accounts later, according to an administration official with direct knowledge of the carefully choreographed meeting, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity around the matter.

And he did so specifically to avoid leaks about what would transpire.

This means that Trump (personally, given the NYT portrayal) decided to exclude his National Security Advisor and top Russian advisor. And he did so, again, based on the NYT reporting, because he didn't want a competing account from

coming out. He basically excluded the key staffers who should have been in the meeting, in spite of the wishes of aides, to avoid having Russian critics describing what really happened in his meeting with Putin.

Remember, this is not the first time Trump has excluded McMaster from a key meeting: he also left McMaster sitting outside his meeting with Bibi Netanyahu, after belatedly inviting Tillerson in.