

The Inside Story of the Kushner-Bannon Civil War

West Wing sources come clean about the backstabbing, the bullying, the distrust, and the buzzing flies.

by

[Sarah Ellison](#)

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IX. Utterly Transactional

Ivanka Trump, who could play the No-BS Heiress in our reality show, and her husband, Jared, the Crafty In-Law, are both children of privilege and are both extraordinarily loyal to their fathers. The senior administration official told me that, with this president, it is “family above all else. That’s how he has lived his life. Anybody thinking they are going to win a fight against the family is not very smart.” Kushner has reportedly described himself as a “first among equals” among White House staffers—not an endearing self-assessment, but probably an accurate one—and has been given an almost laughable assortment of responsibilities. He is tasked not only with bringing peace to the Middle East but also with re-inventing the way the entire government does business. He is heavily involved in policy regarding China. He recently made a surprise trip to Iraq. In addition, he is now the boss of his father’s former tormentor, Chris Christie, who heads a White House commission to tackle the opioid crisis. Christie was the prosecutor who helped put Jared’s father, Charles Kushner, in prison, and Jared has not forgotten.

The Kushners were a prominent Democratic real-estate family in New Jersey. Their relationship to politics was mostly as members of the donor class. A person close to Jared told me that growing up in New Jersey taught him the utterly transactional nature of politics. His ability to move with ease from one political ideology to another, depending on what seems useful at the moment, comes naturally.

Kushner was drawn into the campaign, and the administration, by degrees—“drafted into this crazy journey,” he has been heard to say. More than anything it’s a reflection of how few people there were to do anything in the campaign’s early days. At one point during the campaign, when Trump wanted to speak more substantively about China, he gave Kushner a summary of his views and then asked him to do some research. Kushner simply went on Amazon, where he was struck by the title of one book, *Death by China*, co-authored by Peter Navarro. He cold-called Navarro, a

well-known trade-deficit hawk, who agreed to join the team as an economic adviser. (When he joined, Navarro was in fact the campaign's *only* economic adviser.)

Kushner operated in much the same way when it came to crafting Trump's tax plan—calling up someone for help out of the blue. Given the initial absence of pros who could do the job properly, he also tried his hand at writing speeches.

Responding to criticism from the boss ("Jared, this is terrible!"), Kushner said, according to a person familiar with the episode, "I'm not a fucking speechwriter. I am a real-estate guy."