

Top Trump Officials Debated War Plans on Unclassified Chat Shared With Journalist

Texts on Signal encrypted messaging service revealed disagreements about whether to strike Houthis in Yemen

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Senior Trump administration national-security officials held detailed discussions of highly classified U.S. plans to launch [airstrikes against Yemen's Houthi militants](#) using a nongovernment messaging service and mistakenly included a journalist in the conversation, U.S. officials said Monday.

The chats over the encrypted Signal app spanned days and included specific information about weapons, targets and timing used in the attack, [according to the Atlantic magazine](#), whose editor, Jeffrey Goldberg, was inadvertently included in the discussion and who disclosed the texts.

National-security experts and former officials say that use of Signal for conducting classified discussions about [imminent military action](#) was a serious breach of security procedures governing the handling of sensitive defense information.

It also opened a window into policy differences within the administration earlier this month.

Vice President [JD Vance](#) was skeptical of the need to strike the Houthis, who have attacked shipping in the Red Sea for over a year. Little U.S. trade passed through the Suez Canal, connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, whereas “40 percent of European trade does,” he texted.

Attacking the militants, Vance argued, would benefit Europe far more than the U.S. and might lead to a spike in oil prices. “I am not sure the president is aware how inconsistent this is with his message on Europe right now,” he said. While he would support the consensus of the top officials in the chat, Vance said, “I just hate bailing Europe out again.”

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and an account belonging to “S.M.,” apparently the initials of senior White House aide Stephen Miller, agreed with Vance’s criticism of Europe.

“It’s PATHETIC,” Hegseth said, though he recommended moving forward with the strikes instead of delaying the attack another month, as Vance suggested. The debate about the attack could leak, making the administration appear “indecisive,” or Israel could strike first, Hegseth said.

S.M. broached the idea of European allies and Egypt reimbursing the U.S. for the operation. “If Europe doesn’t remunerate, then what?,” S.M. texted. “If the US successfully restores freedom of navigation at great cost there needs to be some further economic gain extracted in return.”

After the initial wave of strikes, national security adviser Mike Waltz, who appeared to have been pivotal in organizing the Signal chat on the Houthi strikes, texted the emoji of a punch, an American flag and a flame.

Administration officials said President Trump was frustrated by the episode, and was directing his ire at Waltz. But it wasn’t immediately clear if he would move to oust his national-security adviser, the officials said.

Trump asked aides on Monday how Waltz could be so sloppy, one of the officials said.

“President Trump continues to have the utmost confidence in his national security team,” including Waltz, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement.

National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes confirmed the authenticity of the chat in a statement to The Wall Street Journal. He didn’t respond to questions about whether the chat ran afoul of legal procedures for handling classified information.

“The thread is a demonstration of the deep and thoughtful policy coordination between senior officials. The continuing success of the Houthi operation demonstrates that there were no threats to our servicemembers or our national security,” he added.

The Signal chat group that discussed the planned strikes against the Houthis listed 18 users, including Waltz, Hegseth, Vance, Central Intelligence Agency Director John Ratcliffe, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, special envoy Steve Witkoff and a user identified as “MAR,” which appeared to be Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Such conversations would normally happen in the White House Situation Room or over secure government communications networks designed for top-secret information. Signal is a free app run by a U.S. nonprofit.

The use of the Signal chat comes as the Trump administration has said it is trying to protect classified information by clamping down on leaks.

“I never sent any classified information on anything other than a secure U.S. government system. There is no justification whatsoever—none—to use any nongovernmental system,” said John Bolton, Trump’s third national-security adviser during the president’s first term. “This is appalling.”

A former senior intelligence official said that such a breach would customarily lead to an investigation and punitive action.

Former Trump officials argued it was an inadvertent but harmless error to put a reporter onto the sensitive text chain.

“The media will turn this into a story of incompetence or inexperience, which it is not. In the past, Signal has been as secure as many of the so-called top-secret encrypted systems so I would not criticize its use,” said Gordon Sondland, Trump’s ambassador to the European Union during the president’s first term.

Hegseth, speaking to reporters in Hawaii Monday, criticized Goldberg as “discredited” and said that “nobody was texting war plans and that’s all I have to say about that.”

Hegseth has made the pursuit of leakers and what he has described as misinformation a focus early in his tenure at the Pentagon. On Friday, Hegseth’s office released a one-page memo vowing to use polygraphs to track down “unauthorized disclosures” of sensitive information related to the Pentagon.

Two hours before the strikes began, Hegseth sent the group sensitive information about the strike plan, including “weapons packages, targets, and timing,” the magazine said.

“I will say a prayer for victory,” Vance wrote in one text. Two other administration officials responded with prayer emojis, the article said.

Goldberg wrote that he was initially dubious that the Signal chat group he was mistakenly invited to join was authentic. “I didn’t think it could be real. Then the bombs started falling.”

The article didn’t include the operational details on the strike and withheld the name of a CIA official, Goldberg said.

After reaching out to the White House, which confirmed the existence of the Signal chat group, Goldberg published his article on Monday, more than a week after the strikes began.

The administration officials discussed the need for protecting secrecy about the Yemen operation in their texts. After the initial wave of strikes, Hegseth told the group: “We are currently clean on OPSEC,” an acronym for operational security.

Trump’s first campaign for the White House included repeated criticism of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for using a personal email account to receive official communications, including some that contained classified information.

Waltz criticized the Justice Department two years ago for not investigating his predecessor, Jake Sullivan, for sending what Waltz said were classified messages in 2016 to Clinton’s email address.

Sen. Jack Reed (D., R.I.), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, described the report as “one of the most egregious failures of operational security and common sense I have ever seen.”

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R., La.) dismissed questions about whether Waltz should face consequences for discussing the Yemen operation on an unclassified chat group that included a journalist. “Clearly I think the administration has acknowledged it was a mistake and they’ll tighten up and make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

Republican Rep. Mike Lawler of New York criticized the administration’s use of Signal. “Classified information should not be transmitted on unsecured channels—and certainly not to those without security clearances, including reporters. Period,” he wrote on X.

The U.S. has hit Houthi targets every day since the initial March 15 attack. U.S. strikes Monday targeted underground storage facilities, missile systems, drone launch platforms, and control centers used by Houthi and foreign military experts, according to local reports.

The U.S.-led military campaign is intended to [stop the Yemen rebels](#) from launching attacks on commercial and military ships transiting the Red Sea and nearby waters. The Houthi attacks, which began in late 2023 in response to the war in Gaza, have severely reduced transit through what was once one of the biggest commercial shipping routes.