

Trump Stands by Hegseth After Phone Call About Newly Revealed Signal Chat

President says defense secretary is ‘doing a great job’

By Meridith McGraw and Alexander Ward
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WASHINGTON—President Trump spoke with embattled Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and vowed to stick by him, despite new revelations that the Pentagon chief shared sensitive information about a military strike in another group chat.

Trump and Hegseth chatted on the phone Sunday after news reports detailed how Hegseth used his personal phone to place sensitive military information into [a new Signal chat](#), and the publication of an essay by a former Pentagon spokesman detailing the “total chaos” of the secretary’s leadership. The conversation was positive, officials said, noting that Trump sees no reason to remove Hegseth after only three months in the job.

A person familiar with the conversation said both Trump and Hegseth were on the same page following their discussion.

That understanding was on full display as Trump at the White House Easter Egg Roll on Monday said Hegseth was “doing a great job.”

“It’s just fake news,” the president added. “Sounds like disgruntled employees. You know, he was put there to get rid of a lot of bad people, and that’s what he’s doing. You don’t always have friends when you do that.”

Hegseth also blamed former staffers he fired over alleged leaks of information for running to reporters.

“This is what the media does, they take anonymous sources from disgruntled former employees and then they try to slash and burn people and ruin their reputations,” said Hegseth. “Not going to work with me.”

Trump’s rally to Hegseth’s side is the latest instance of the president absorbing political heat for a close administration ally. During the [first so-called Signalgate](#), Trump defended national security adviser Mike Waltz for inadvertently adding a reporter into an encrypted chat where senior aides, including Hegseth, discussed imminent attack plans against the Houthis in Yemen.

Now the president finds himself again beating back accusations that he refuses to hold loyal aides accountable for their mistakes. Trump brushed back questions about the second Signal chat involving Hegseth on Monday as “the same old stuff from the media.”

“Senior Pentagon leaders are juggling wars in Europe and the Middle East, threats in the Indo-Pacific, and securing the homeland, but their ability to do so is severely threatened by the defense secretary repeatedly putting U.S. troops at risk by sharing operational plans, firing military leaders without cause, and internecine fighting across his staff,” said Mara Karlin, a former top Pentagon official in the Biden administration.

U.S. officials said it was unlikely that Trump would fire Hegseth, at least any time soon. Trump said he has “great confidence” in his defense secretary.

Trump spent [tremendous political capital](#) to get Hegseth confirmed as defense secretary, and doesn’t want another bruising Senate battle so early in his second term, the officials said. Publicly, Trump and senior officials have touted his work as defense secretary. Firing Hegseth over the new Signal conversation would also raise questions about why he held on to Waltz after weeks of turmoil following the first Signal crisis.

The general view inside the White House is that Hegseth faces a smear campaign from “disgruntled” former officials who were recently let go from their positions. Trump is also a fan of Hegseth’s performance and “look,” enjoying how he appears on camera and how he attacks the media during any political firestorm.

At least one prominent Republican has also come to Hegseth’s aid. “Secretary Hegseth is working hard to implement the president’s agenda,” Sen. Tom Cotton (R., Ark.) wrote on X Sunday night.

Despite Trump’s staunch support for Hegseth, the former Fox News host and veteran has been the subject of several bad headlines for the administration.

He [brought his wife](#), who isn’t a government employee, to some sensitive meetings at the Defense Department. He authorized a top-secret military briefing for [Elon Musk](#) about China strategy, only to [downgrade the sensitivity](#) of the meeting after intense White House blowback. Videos of the Tuskegee Airmen and images of the Enola Gay, the warplane that dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan, were temporarily removed from Defense Department websites as part of what some saw as Hegseth’s purge of anything resembling “diversity, equity, and inclusion,” or DEI.

Hegseth has also fired at least 10 admirals and generals, adding a source of instability and unpredictability in a Pentagon increasingly filled with fear about retribution from the secretary's office, officials said.

Last week, the Pentagon said it put three Hegseth staffers, Dan Caldwell, Colin Carroll and Darin Selnick, on administrative leave, escorting them out of the building. [In a post on X](#), the three said in a joint statement that “we still haven’t been told what exactly we were investigated for, if there is still an active investigation, or if there was even a real investigation of ‘leaks’ to begin with.”

Caldwell on Monday denied being the source of the leaks and said he was never questioned, searched, or polygraphed. He said in an interview on Tucker Carlson’s podcast that he believes his firing was politically motivated and tied to his opposition to war with Iran.

“We were threatening a lot of established interests inside the building and outside the building,” he said, referring to the Pentagon.

Caldwell blamed “career staff” for the leaks, accusing them of being “incredibly hostile” to Hegseth and Trump’s worldview.

“I have been a friend and supporter of Pete Hegseth for a long time, and I’m just personally devastated by this. It’s just awful,” he told Carlson. “The entire Department of Defense cannot continue to be consumed by chaos.”