

The Leaked Signal Chat, Annotated

By The New York Times Updated March 26, 2025 at 11:35 a.m. E.T.

On Wednesday, The Atlantic published a fuller look at the contents of the messages in this group chat, including sensitive details about U.S. strikes that experts say almost certainly were highly classified before the strikes were carried out. To reflect the new information, marked “new,” additional messages have been included and further material has been added to some existing messages.

Excerpts of a Signal chat published Monday by The Atlantic provide a rare and revealing look at the private conversations of top Trump administration officials as they weighed plans for U.S. strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen.

The chat, which was created by national security adviser Michael Waltz, included users identified as Vice President Vance, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and C.I.A. Director John Ratcliffe, as well as senior officials who were not listed with their full names. Among them were “MAR,” the initials of Secretary of State Marco Rubio; “TG,” the initials of director of national intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, “Scott B,” which appeared to be Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent; and “SM,” the initials of White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller.

President Trump has downplayed the inadvertent inclusion in the group of Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor in chief of The Atlantic, claiming that officials did not share classified information. The new



revelations Wednesday, however, led to mounting calls by Democrats for Mr. Hegseth to step down, saying he behaved recklessly and could have endangered American troops.

Below is a reproduction of the chat, with annotated analysis from our reporters.

Thursday, March 13

Michael Waltz

Team - establishing a principles group for coordination on Houthis, particularly for over the next 72 hours. My deputy Alex Wong is pulling together a tiger team at deputies/agency Chief of Staff level following up from the meeting in the Sit Room this morning for action items and will be sending that out later this evening.

Pls provide the best staff POC from your team for us to coordinate with over the next couple days and over the weekend. Thx.

4:28 P.M.

The principals committee is the highest level of the National Security Council, composed of cabinet members and their equivalents. The principals often debate various courses of action and present it to the president for a final decision.

The Houthis are an Iranian-backed group in Yemen whose attacks in the Red Sea have dramatically increased shipping costs. The Biden administration sought to curb their attacks with strikes from aircraft carriers, but with limited success.

A tiger team is a group of people assembled for a particular task by the National Security Council. Here, Mr. Waltz is talking about bringing together aides to the principals to work specific problems related to the stepped up campaign against the Houthis.

—Julian E. Barnes

MAR

Mike Needham for State

4:29 P.M.

Mr. Rubio has not personally addressed the matter. On Monday, the State Department spokeswoman said she would not comment on his “deliberative conversations” and directed further questions to the White House. Mr. Needham also serves as Mr. Rubio’s chief of staff, in addition to the advisory role of counselor.

—Michael Crowley

JD Vance

Andy baker for VP

4:29 P.M.

TG

Joe Kent for DNI

4:30 P.M.

Ms. Gabbard was traveling internationally during the course of this text exchange. She was in Hawaii on March 12 before heading to Asia, for a trip that took her to Japan and Thailand before arriving in India on March 16, the day after the strike.

—Julian E. Barnes

Scott B

Dan Katz for Treasury

4:39 P.M.

Pete Hegseth

Dan Caldwell for DoD

4:53 P.M.

John Ratcliffe

[Content of message not published by The Atlantic]

5:24 P.M.

Mr. Goldberg reported that, at this point in the chat, Mr. Ratcliffe shared the name of a C.I.A. official who is an active intelligence officer as someone to be added to the group. In a hearing Tuesday, Mr. Ratcliffe said the officer was not undercover. But the C.I.A. likes

to keep its officers' names
secret so they can still take
future assignments overseas.

—Julian E. Barnes

Brian

Brian McCormack for NSC

6:34 P.M.

Friday, March 14

Michael Waltz

Team, you should have a statement of conclusions with taskings per the Presidents guidance this morning in your high side inboxes.

State and DOD, we developed suggested notification lists for regional Allies and partners.

Joint Staff is sending this am a more specific sequence of events in the coming days and we will work w DOD to ensure COS, OVP and POTUS are briefed.

8:05 A.M.

Government officials work sometimes in the “high side,” which is a classified system, and the “low side,” which is an unclassified government system. This entire conversation, however, takes place in neither the “high side” nor the “low side,” but in a publicly available messaging app.

—Devlin Barrett

2 annotations

JD Vance

Team, I am out for the day doing an economic event in Michigan. But I think we are making a mistake.

3 percent of US trade runs through the suez. 40 percent of European trade does. There is a real risk that the public doesn't understand this or why it's necessary. The strongest reason to do this is, as POTUS said, to send a message.

I am not sure the president is aware how inconsistent this is with his message on Europe right now. There's a further risk that we see a moderate to severe spike in oil prices.

I am willing to support the consensus of the team and keep these concerns to myself. But there is a strong argument for delaying this a month, doing the messaging work on why this matters, seeing where the economy is, etc.

8:16 A.M.

1 Mr. Vance, a military veteran who was in Michigan touring a plastics manufacturing plant on March 14, has very consistently been skeptical of the U.S. being drawn into foreign conflicts. The point he makes here — in favor of holding off on a strike, and in the meantime convincing the public why one is necessary — is in keeping with his approach.

—Maggie Haberman

2 Mr. Vance, who has faced criticism for turning from a Trump critic to a loyalist, attempted to clean up the revelation that he questioned the president's judgment in a large group setting after excerpts of the chat became public. In a statement, his spokesman said that "Vice President Vance unequivocally supports this administration's foreign policy."

"The president and the vice president have had subsequent conversations about this

matter and are in complete agreement,” the statement said.

—Erica L. Green

New

Joe Kent

There is nothing time sensitive driving the time line. We'll have the exact same options in a month.

The Israelis will likely take strikes & therefore ask us for more to replenish whatever they use against the Houthis. But that's a minor factor.

I will send you the unclass data we pulled on BAM shipping.

8:22 A.M

Joe Kent, who was nominated by Mr. Trump to run the National Counterterrorism Center, has been serving as the chief of staff for Ms. Gabbard while he awaits confirmation. The Houthis have struck Israel several times since the beginning of the war in Gaza, prompting retaliation from Israel. Mr. Kent is making reference to the idea that Israel will strike the Houthis following the U.S. strikes, and then ask the U.S. to provide munitions to replenish the weapons they use in the strike. The prediction did prove correct. Israel has struck Houthi targets, including this week which followed an attempted Houthi strike on Israel.

—Julian E. Barnes

New

John Ratcliffe

From CIA perspective, we are mobilizing assets to support now but a delay would not negatively impact us and additional time would be used to identify better starting points for coverage on Houthi leadership

8:26 A.M.

This comment from Mr. Ratcliffe is most likely the material the Atlantic originally withheld because they believed it may have referred to an intelligence operation. In Senate testimony Tuesday, Mr. Ratcliffe said his comments were not classified. The agency does not typically discuss its efforts to gather intelligence on leaders of adversarial groups even in general ways, but allies of Mr. Ratcliffe will argue the information is general enough as not to be classified. And Mr. Ratcliffe, in contrast to Mr. Hegseth, was far more careful in what he shared. It would be hard to argue anything here, now that it is exposed, could interrupt the agency's efforts to collect intelligence on the Houthis.

—Julian E. Barnes

¹ Since becoming defense secretary, Pete Hegseth has focused on “messaging,” using his experience as a Fox News anchor to launch broadsides at

5 annotations

Pete Hegseth

VP:

I understand your concerns – and fully support you raising w/ POTUS. Important considerations, most of

which are tough to know how they play out (economy, Ukraine peace, Gaza, etc). I think messaging is going to be tough no matter what – nobody knows who the Houthis are – which is why we would need to stay focused on: 1) Biden failed & 2) Iran funded.

Waiting a few weeks or a month does not fundamentally change the calculus. 2 immediate risks on waiting: 1) this leaks, and we look indecisive; 2) Israel takes an action first – or Gaza cease fire falls apart – and we don't get to start this on our own terms. We can manage both.

We are prepared to execute, and if I had final go or no go vote, I believe we should. This [is] not about the Houthis. I see it as two things: 1) Restoring Freedom of Navigation, a core national interest; and 2) Reestablish deterrence, which Biden cratered.

But, we can easily pause. And if we do, I will do all we can to enforce 100% OPSEC. I welcome other thoughts.

adversaries on social media and to amplify President Trump on pretty much all national security matters. So it makes sense that he would be focused on how to “message” the strikes.

—Helene Cooper

2 It is notable that Mr. Hegseth's first concern here was “this leaks, and we look indecisive.” The public now sees just how much national security officials initially debated whether to move forward with the plan.

—Erica L. Green

3 In managing the fallout of the leak, the administration has focused on what the mission accomplished. One of the series of statements issued from the White House Tuesday proclaimed that the “Trump administration's actions made Houthi terrorists pay.” It also criticized former President Biden's lack of action against

the group, which it said was armed “with precision-guided, Iran-provided weaponry.”

—Erica L. Green

4 This is among the more expansive foreign policy debates into which readers have had visibility since the administration began. Without knowing what more was discussed in the chat that The Atlantic did not publish, it’s notable that Mr. Trump, Mr. Hegseth and Mr. Waltz appear to have worked much of this out, and the rest of the group is being advised on what’s taking place.

—Maggie Haberman

5 The references to OPSEC — operational security or the idea the information had not leaked out — are in hindsight almost humorous, given that a journalist was inadvertently added to the chat.

—Julian E. Barnes

Michael Waltz

The trade figures we have are 15% of global and 30% of container. It's difficult to break that down to US. Specific because much of the container either going through the red sea still or around the Cape of Good Hope our component going to Europe that turns into manufactured goods for transatlantic trade to the United States.

Whether we pull the plug or not today European navies do not have the capability to defend against the types of sophisticated, antiship, cruise missiles, and drones the Houthis are now using. So whether it's now or several weeks from now, it will have to be the United States that reopens these shipping lanes. Per the president's request we are working with DOD and State to determine how to compile the cost associated and levy them on the Europeans.

8:32 A.M.

New**Michael Waltz**

As we stated in the in the first PC we have a fundamental decision of allowing the sea lanes to remain closed or to re-open them now or later, we are the only ones with the capability unfortunately.

From a messaging standpoint we absolutely add this to of horrors on why the Europeans must invest in their defense.

8:42 A.M.

2 annotations

JD Vance

@Pete Hegseth if you think we should do it let's go.

I just hate bailing Europe out again.

8:45 A.M.

1 The vice president had already offended Europe in several ways before the release of these messages. There was a recent uproar in Britain after he said an American economic deal in Ukraine would be a better security guarantee for that country than “20,000 troops from some random country that hasn’t fought a war in 30 or 40 years.” And he shocked Germany when he showed up to the Munich security conference and admonished Europeans about free speech laws.

—Shawn McCreesh

2 The idea of Europe not pulling its weight on military matters has been a frequent theme of the Trump administration, including during Mr. Vance’s and Mr. Hegseth’s February visits to Europe.

—Julian E. Barnes

JD Vance

Let's just make sure our messaging is tight here. And if there are things we can do upfront to minimize risk to Saudi oil facilities we should do it.

8:46 A.M.

The chance that American attacks on Houthis could prompt attacks on Saudi Arabia and a renewal of the kingdom's brutal war in Yemen was a chief concern of the Biden administration, a prime reason that White House operated with a degree of restraint in its strikes on Houthi targets.

—Julian E. Barnes

1 Mr. Hegseth is echoing here a Trump-administration critique that the U.S. Navy does more to keep shipping lanes through the Suez Canal open than European naval forces do. Using words like “loathing” and “pathetic” will likely make his next meetings with European counterparts dicey.

—Helene Cooper

2 The internal back-and-forth here, if it had taken place inside the walls of a government building, might

3 annotations

Pete Hegseth

VP: I fully share your loathing of European free-loading. It's PATHETIC.

But Mike is correct, we are the only ones on the planet (on our side of the ledger) who can do this. Nobody else even close. Question is timing. I feel like now is as good a time as any given

...as good a time as any, given POTUS directive to reopen shipping lanes. I think we should go; but POTUS still retains 24 hours of decision space.

8:49 A.M.

very well be considered classified: It is a debate among high-level officials about foreign policy. But on another, more basic level, it is far from a secret: Mr. Vance and others have spoken scornfully of European leaders in public settings.

—Devlin Barrett

3 The president was asked Tuesday afternoon whether he agreed with this assessment revealed in the signal chat. “Uh, do you really want me to answer that question?” he replied, adding, “Yeah, I think they’ve been freeloading.”

—Shawn McCreesh

S M

As I heard it, the president was clear: green light, but we soon make clear to Egypt and Europe what we expect in return. We also need to figure out how to enforce such a requirement. EG, if Europe doesn’t renumerate, then what? If the US successfully restores freedom of navigation at great cost there needs to be some further economic gain extracted in return.

Whether this was written by Stephen Miller or someone else, the mercantilist approach of the Trump presidency is in full relief here.

—Maggie Haberman

9:35 A.M.

Pete Hegseth

Agree

9:46 A.M.

Saturday, March 15

1 The Atlantic originally withheld this message from Mr. Hegseth, but released it Wednesday after the White House said the chat did not contain classified material. The message, as we can see now, included very specific details of the timing of the launches from carriers of the planes that were to strike Houthi targets. Launch times are closely guarded pieces of information to ensure that the targets cannot move into hiding or mount a counterattack at the

very moment planes are taking off and are potentially vulnerable.

—Julian E. Barnes

2 In the messages, Mr. Hegseth is describing air strikes by Navy F/A-18F Super Hornets launched from the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman in the Red Sea, and MQ-9 Reaper drones flying from land bases in the Middle East. The “Target Terrorist” that Mr. Hegseth describes in the chat is an unidentified Houthi commander in a part of Yemen controlled by the Iran-backed militant group. Trump aides have said one big difference in the strikes it has ordered since March 15 and those authorized by former President Joseph R. Biden is that Trump has delegated more authority to U.S. commanders in the region to strike Houthi commanders and leaders, not just radar sites, weapons depots and other locations.

—Eric Schmitt

New 6 annotations

Pete Hegseth

TEAM UPDATE:

TIME NOW (1144et): Weather is FAVORABLE. Just CONFIRMED w/CENTCOM we are a GO for mission launch.

1215et: F-18s LAUNCH (1st strike package)

1345• “Trigger Based” F-18 1st

1400: Trigger Based - 1st 1st-
Strike Window Starts (Target
Terrorist is @ his Known Location
so SHOULD BE ON TIME) - also,
Strike Drones Launch (MQ-9s)

1410: More F-18s LAUNCH (2nd strike
package)

1415: Strike Drones on Target (THIS
IS WHEN THE FIRST BOMBS WILL
DEFINITELY DROP, pending earlier
"Trigger Based" targets)

1536: F-18 2nd Strike Starts -
also, first sea-based Tomahawks
launched.

MORE TO FOLLOW (per timeline)

We are currently clean on OPSEC.

Godspeed to our Warriors.

11:44 A.M.

3 The details that Mr. Hegseth shared in the Signal chat were more a timeline than a detailed “war plan,” which would have far more specifics. But that is not likely to work in the defense secretary’s favor. It is the timing that is critical: Had this information leaked out, the people the U.S. was targeting in Yemen would have had time to escape. And Hegseth’s reference to OPSEC — operational security — meant he was aware of the need for secrecy.

—David Sanger

4 Hegseth has twice said in response to questions about the chat that “nobody was texting war plans.” But the disclosure of the precise timing and sequencing of the strikes is something that the Pentagon would only put in secure government channels.

—Helene Cooper

5 The new messages suggest that Tulsi Gabbard, the director of national intelligence, may

have mischaracterized a critical part of the exchange in her appearance before the Senate yesterday. Senator Martin Heinrich, Democrat of New Mexico, asked Gabbard: “Precise operational issues were not part of this conversation?” She responded: “Correct.” Given the launch times that the defense secretary shared in the chat, House Democrats will undoubtedly press her on this today.

—Julian E. Barnes

6 The White House is walking a pretty difficult line here. They’ve insisted this wasn’t classified information, and they have minimized the issues with having such a discussion on a consumer messaging app. Yet with the additional details — a timeline more than a detailed war plan, as Sanger notes — it is more mystifying why this would be discussed among nearly 20 senior advisers outside of secure government communication lines.

JD Vance

I will say a prayer for victory

12:13 P.M.

New

Michael Waltz

VP. Building collapsed. Had multiple positive ID. Pete, Kurilla, the IC, amazing job.

1:48 P.M.

New

JD Vance

What?

New

Michael Waltz

Typing too fast. The first target - their top missile guy - we had positive ID of him walking into his girlfriend's building and it's now collapsed.

2:00 P.M.

JD Vance

Excellent

2:01 P.M.

John Ratcliffe

A good start

2:36 P.M.

Michael Waltz



4:58 P.M.

MAR

Good Job Pete and your team!!

5:14 P.M.

Michael Waltz

The team in MAL did a great job as well.

5:15 P.M.

This is an indication that the group knew what their boss ultimately wanted — a victory. In response to the leak, Mr. Trump and White House officials have focused on the successful outcome of the mission to deflect from the embarrassing and problematic way the deliberations about it were revealed.

“They’ve made a big deal out of this because we’ve had two perfect months,” Mr. Trump said on Tuesday.

—Erica L. Green

S M

Great work all. Powerful start.

5:18 P.M.

The strikes were the opening moves in what Trump officials told reporters was a new offensive against the Houthis and a strong message to Iran. Announcing the strikes, Trump said: “To Iran: Support for the Houthi terrorists must end IMMEDIATELY! Do NOT threaten the American People, their President, who has received one of the largest mandates in Presidential History, or Worldwide shipping lanes. If you do, BEWARE, because America will hold you fully accountable.”

—Helene Cooper

New

Pete Hegseth

CENTCOM was/is on point. Great job all. More strikes ongoing for hours tonight, and will provide full initial report tomorrow. But on time, on target, and good readouts so far.

5:20 P.M.

After an initial round of strikes, the defense secretary wrote in the chat that “CENTCOM was/is on point,” referring to the military’s Central Command, which was in charge of the operation.

—Eric Schmitt

Susie Wiles

Kudos to all – most particularly
those in theater and CENTCOM!
Really great. God bless.

5:21 P.M.

Along with the chat transcript, The Atlantic published screen grabs of the list of people on the chat, including Susie Wiles, the White House chief of staff, and Dan Katz, the Treasury chief of staff. But what is truly notable is who is not included: Adm. Christopher Grady, the acting chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the senior military advisor to the president and the defense secretary. It is unheard of that the Pentagon's highest-ranking officer would not be included in a senior meeting on a military operation.

—Helene Cooper

Steve Witkoff



5:47 P.M.

Mr. Witkoff, who serves as special envoy to the Middle East and Russia, is said to use text message apps relatively sparingly. He was in Russia when he was added to the group and appeared to have been back in the U.S. when he responded, according to a person briefed on his whereabouts. Mr. Witkoff

posted on X Wednesday that he only had a secure government phone with him in Moscow and did not access his personal devices until he returned.

—Maggie Haberman

TG

Great work and effects!

6:35 P.M.

We do not know if the text chain continued because Mr. Goldberg removed himself from the chat. He wrote in *The Atlantic* that after the strikes, he was convinced the chat was genuine and dropped out.

—Julian E. Barnes

Note

The messages shown here are a direct transcription of what is described in *The Atlantic*'s article about the text chain. In some cases, exact punctuation or paragraph breaks in the message exchange could not be determined from the article. Timestamps are displayed as described by *The Atlantic*; where no timestamp was described, none is shown. If *The Atlantic* mentioned omitting content from a message, that is noted in bracketed italics. Any other omissions *The Atlantic* may have made are not represented here.

Annotations by Julian E. Barnes, Devlin Barrett, Helene Cooper, Michael Crowley, David Sanger, Eric Schmitt, Erica L. Green, Maggie Haberman and Shawn McCreesh. Production by Lazaro Gamio and Ashley Wu.