**The Editor Who Was Accidentally Texted War Plans**

**Jeffrey Goldberg tells the story of how he was included in a private government group chat.**

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rachel abrams

From “The New York Times,” I’m Rachel Abrams. This is “The Daily.”

[MUSIC PLAYING]

It’s being called a reckless and devastating breach of national security, revelations that top Trump officials inadvertently shared secret US military plans with a prominent journalist by mistakenly adding him to a group chat. Today, “Atlantic” magazine editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg explains how he initially thought the messages were a scam, and now what he makes of the enormous fallout since going public.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

It’s Wednesday, March 26.

Jeffrey, is that you?

jeffrey goldberg

Yeah, it’s me.

rachel abrams

[CHUCKLES]: Well, hello, Jeffrey. You’ve had quite a week. It’s only Tuesday morning.

jeffrey goldberg

Yeah, tell me what we’re doing.

rachel abrams

OK.

jeffrey goldberg

What is this for?

rachel abrams

What is it? So I’m with “The Daily.” My name is Rachel Abrams. I’m —

jeffrey goldberg

Oh, “The Daily.” Oh, yeah, I’m familiar with it.

rachel abrams

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

jeffrey goldberg

It’s from the local —

rachel abrams

It’s a little podcast from “The New York Times.”

jeffrey goldberg

— local newspaper in New York.

rachel abrams

Yeah. No, we’re just starting out. So thanks for bearing with us.

jeffrey goldberg

No, that’s great. It’s cool. So do you have a lot of listeners?

rachel abrams

Yeah, we have a decent amount. My mom, my dad.

jeffrey goldberg

My mom and my mom.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

rachel abrams

Jeffrey and I talked on Tuesday morning. It was a full day after a story came out about how he’d been added accidentally to a group chat with top Trump administration officials.

So Jeffrey, we have never met before, but yesterday, I think I texted you, I emailed you, I called you, I called your publicist. I was desperate to get you on the show to talk about your story and the reaction to it.

jeffrey goldberg

Should have tried Signal.

rachel abrams

Should have tried Signal, that’s right. So as we’re hinting at, you just wrote something that really everybody is talking about. So tell us, where does the story begin?

jeffrey goldberg

Well, the story begins in earnest about March 11. I received a message request on Signal from someone identified as Michael Waltz. He’s the National Security Advisor of the United States.

rachel abrams

Signal, the secure messaging app.

jeffrey goldberg

Yeah, the commercial, non-government end-to-end encrypted app that a lot of people in journalism and outside of journalism use because it’s allegedly safer.

rachel abrams

Right.

jeffrey goldberg

And I don’t know Waltz. I’ve met him a couple of times. But it struck me as unusual because I have a somewhat contentious relationship with the Trump administration, or more to the point, with Trump.

But certainly, in the normal bandwidth of Washington experience, for a magazine editor who covers politics and foreign policy and national security to get a message request from the national security advisor, if it was indeed him, I accepted the request, forgot about it. A couple of days later, I’m included in a group called the Houthi PC Small Group.

rachel abrams

Can you translate that for us? You have deep experience in foreign policy as a journalist, as you’ve said. What does Houthis PC Small Group mean to you in this moment?

jeffrey goldberg

Houthis are obviously the Iran-backed terrorist organization that runs part of Yemen and been obviously attacking shipping, attacking Israel for the last year and a half, becoming quite a menace to international shipping. PC stands for Principals’ Committee, meaning that small group of principals, cabinet members, people who run intelligence agencies.

rachel abrams

And you are certainly, I think we need to point out, not a principal in this context.

jeffrey goldberg

No, (CHUCKLING) I have never been to a principals’ meeting.

rachel abrams

Right. Just to be clear.

jeffrey goldberg

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So that’s what PC stands for. Small group is not actually that small. It was 18 people, 19 people. I wouldn’t consider that a small group. I would consider it a medium group.

rachel abrams

And who is in the group at this point?

jeffrey goldberg

JD Vance, Michael Waltz, and the secretaries of state, defense, treasury, CIA director, director of national intelligence, et cetera — I mean, again, people who are identified as such on my phone.

But I’m an appropriately suspicious journalist, and obviously, for reasons I can go into, I think this is a setup of some sort. I think this is a hoax, a deception, a non-state actor trying to entrap a journalist. I don’t know what it is. But the on-the-face premise of this is ridiculous, so it had to be something other than what it was purporting to be.

rachel abrams

Right. Basically, like, you being on a group chat with really top tier officials in the administration, you’re not believing this is the real thing.

jeffrey goldberg

Maybe I can be included on something having to do with the Easter Egg Roll or something at the White House, but I’m not going to be on this.

rachel abrams

And even though you think it’s fake at this point, I’m sure you’re still kind of curious. You’re watching this thing?

jeffrey goldberg

Well, yeah. I mean — [LAUGHS]:

rachel abrams

Because what if? What if?

jeffrey goldberg

I mean, let’s be honest. You become a journalist because the most interesting place on the planet is the other side of a closed door, right?

rachel abrams

Right, right. Of course.

jeffrey goldberg

So I got to watch it, one way or the other, you know?

rachel abrams

So what do they start discussing?

jeffrey goldberg

Well, the first text in this chain is from Michael Waltz saying that he’s setting up this discussion group. This is on a Thursday, I guess, for basically, we’re heading into this weekend. There’s this sort of elliptical promise of something happening over the next 72 hours.

And the Michael Waltz username asks these other principals to give their weekend POC, Point Of Contact, in case there’s a reason to have a further discussion. And so one after another, six or seven people respond. Marco Rubio or the person playing Marco Rubio responds with a name from somebody from the State Department and so on, the Defense Department, et cetera.

And most interesting in this moment to me is that the CIA director, John Ratcliffe, names a person and says, this person is going to be representing the CIA in this discussion. Now, what I learned over time is that the person he names is an active CIA officer whose name has never been discussed in public. I thought, this is really weird. What is happening here? But that’s the initial foray.

And then the next day, there’s a really interesting substantive policy debate about whether the US should ramp up its military activities against the Houthis in Yemen. And there’s a lot of criticism in the chain of the Biden administration’s inability to get the Houthi situation under control. Mainly, what there is, is a lot of resentment expressed toward the Europeans for not being able to float navies that could actually do this work and criticism of the Europeans for not being able to pay, the sort of thing that we’ve heard for a while from these guys.

And JD Vance starts the conversation out by saying he disagrees with the decision to attack Yemen, at least right now. He goes on to say that we’re sending the wrong message to Europe, and why do we have to do this. And it’s the European shipping that’s in danger, not American shipping. And furthermore, the president doesn’t really understand the consequences of doing this.

And JD Vance, he’s doing this in front of half the cabinet, people who work for the president. He’s telling them, I disagree with the president. And also, I’m not sure he gets it. And JD Vance is playing the role that we understand JD Vance to play, which is like kind of a soft isolationism. It’s like, why are we fighting Yemen? What are we doing?

And then the more traditional, muscular, interventionist philosophy is represented by Michael Waltz, the national security advisor, and Pete Hegseth, the secretary of defense, is, yes, we recognize that Europe is pathetic. And this is what Hegseth says about Europe — in all caps, by the way. They recognize this European dynamic, but they’re more interested in just like, let’s get this thing going against the Houthis.

rachel abrams

So this conversation, just to recap, is them discussing whether ramping up attacks on the Houthis militarily will be a good political strategy.

jeffrey goldberg

Yes.

rachel abrams

And you’re telling it sounds like they’re having a kind of a polite disagreement.

jeffrey goldberg

Yeah.

rachel abrams

JD Vance is seemingly disagreeing with the position that Trump has. And that disagreement seems like it hinges on whether or not we’re making the Europeans pay enough, which is something we’ve talked about on the show quite a bit.

jeffrey goldberg

Right. Exactly.

rachel abrams

So just, I want to check in with you here, because in this moment, do you still think that this is a hoax? Are you starting to sense that it could be real?

jeffrey goldberg

I am suspecting that it could be real because it’s pretty accurate depiction of what these guys sound like.

rachel abrams

Yeah.

jeffrey goldberg

But I, again — and let me put this in the — it can’t be true. That’s what’s keeping me from believing that it’s true.

rachel abrams

It can’t be true.

jeffrey goldberg

It can’t be true. Like, come on. I’ve been around this world for a long time. They don’t do this.

rachel abrams

No. Bob Woodward has spent an entire career trying to infiltrate groups like this. So how could you possibly have just been added to a group chat?

jeffrey goldberg

Yeah, yeah. I mean, you know? And also, it’s weird that substantive government conversations would be taking place over Signal because Signal is not, by the US government standards, secure, in part because, obviously, it’s technically open to anyone, including yours truly.

And I know that previous administrations have used different messaging services, but not for substance, right? I mean, I think in the Biden administration, it’s a good example. They used Signal. But my impression is, based on some reporting, my impression is that they used Signal to do things like setting up lunch appointments or, hey, I’ve just left Saudi Arabia. I’ll call you from a skiff when I get to whatever.

rachel abrams

And just to be clear, the skiff is a —

jeffrey goldberg

The skiff is a compartmentalized facility that is built to protect conversations electronically. You can’t even take your phone or your Apple Watch or your Fitbit. These are very, very, very secure facilities.

And by the way, the senior people in the national security apparatus of the United States have these things built into their houses when they’re serving. So they can just go down to the basement and make the secure phone call. Right? And the whole idea is to protect these conversations from foreign surveillance.

rachel abrams

So what happens after this? How does the discussion progress from here?

jeffrey goldberg

Well, it progressed very quickly so that on Saturday the 15th, I am running some errands, and the Signal chat lights up. And probably the most important text in this entire series of texts comes from the account user, Pete Hegseth, who provides what I would call basically the attack sequence, a summary of the war plan.

And it’s detailed. It tells the exact time that attack will be launched. It tells the exact time the effects of the attack will be felt in Yemen. It talks about the weapons packages being used. It talks about some specific targets,

rachel abrams

Like actual military planning that is settled business and about to happen.

jeffrey goldberg

A forthcoming attack on Yemen. I’m also sitting there in my car. It’s 11:44 AM Eastern time I get this text. The text promises that the effects of the first wave of attacks will be felt in Yemen at 13:45, 1:45 PM Eastern time. So it’s two hours, right? And I’m thinking to myself, hmm. Well, I guess in two hours, I’m going to find out if this is a real chain or not, right, definitively.

So, I basically just kind of sit there. And at 1:55 or so, I go into Twitter and I put Yemen in the search bar. And then sure enough, there are bombs falling all over Yemen, just as the user identified as Pete Hegseth promised two hours earlier.

[EXPLOSIONS]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

archived recording 1

Breaking news overseas right now, where officials are confirming that US Air and Naval assets hit dozens of Houthi targets in Yemen, including missiles, radar, drones, and air defense systems.

archived recording 2

These are the most significant air strikes since President Trump returned to the White House and the first time US jets have struck these Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen since President Trump returned to the White House.

archived recording 3

Trump announced the strikes on social media, threatening the Houthi rebels with, quote, “overwhelming lethal force.”

archived recording 4

The US says it will keep attacking targets in Yemen until the Houthis stop their assault on global shipping in the Red Sea.

rachel abrams

I want you to describe to us what you’re seeing in this group chat after the attacks start.

jeffrey goldberg

It’s a couple of updates on the consequences of the attack — that’s all I’ll say — the damage that they think that they have done, combined with some congratulatory texts. And this is, of course, where they start using emojis.

rachel abrams

Emojis. Which emojis are they using?

jeffrey goldberg

Before the attack started, there was the prayer emoji used by a couple of people. And then during the attacks, when the reports are coming in that that’s going well from the American perspective, there’s the flexed bicep, I guess, emoji.

rachel abrams

I’m familiar with these.

jeffrey goldberg

There’s the fire emoji. There’s an American flag emoji. And sometimes they’re repeated a couple of times. And there, I’m sitting there, watching that and going, wow, every workplace is the same, huh?

rachel abrams

So what do you do next?

jeffrey goldberg

So I’m sitting in the car. I’m watching the Signal chat react to the Yemen attack. I’m realizing that this is almost certainly a real Signal group and not some sort of deceptive disinformation campaign. And so then I had to begin to make a series of decisions, consulting with colleagues, that ultimately led me to remove myself from the Signal group later that day, knowing that the group administrator in Signal, and the members, I believe, of a group as well, are notified that you have left the group.

I assumed at that point that Mike Waltz was going to call and say, hey, who is this? Or call and say, why’d you leave the group? And then I would say, Director Waltz or whatever, do you even know who this is? But nobody — look, I mean, here’s the truth of it, is nobody noticed when I was added, and nobody noticed when I left.

rachel abrams

And can you tell us why you decided to leave the group chat?

jeffrey goldberg

I think people can make their own deductions here. But I can’t get into, for various reasons, the conversations I subsequently had with colleagues and others about my decision-making. All I will say is that I removed myself from the group understanding the consequences of that.

And what I do is I decide, oh, I have to write a story about the world’s weirdest Signal group. On Monday, I texted and emailed the relevant people in the chat. I used the Signal contact. I sent long emails to a large number of players in this drama saying — asking various questions.

rachel abrams

And what was the response?

jeffrey goldberg

Well, I mean, I got one official response back from the National Security Council, which came pretty quickly, saying, apparently, this is a real chain, and we’re investigating why a journalist was inadvertently invited to the chain. But I think they had to acknowledge it, and they did. Once they acknowledged that it’s real, I published our first piece on the subject.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

rachel abrams

We’ll be right back.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

archived recording 5

Mr. President, your reaction to the story in “The Atlantic” that said that some of your top cabinet officials and aides had been discussing very sensitive material through Signal and included an “Atlantic” reporter for that. What is your response to that?

archived recording (donald trump)

I don’t know anything about it. I’m not a big fan of “The Atlantic.” To me, it’s a magazine that’s going out of business.

archived recording 6

You’re talking about a deceitful and highly discredited so-called journalist who’s made a profession of peddling hoaxes time and time again.

archived recording 7

I just can’t, to this moment, get over the idea that during the days that group was going on, not one of the participants said, we shouldn’t be doing this on Signal.

archived recording 8

Do you believe that this warrants a congressional investigation?

archived recording 9

Well, it will. Common sense says this was a major screw-up, and somebody should be held accountable.

archived recording (mike johnson)

Clearly, I think the administration has acknowledged it was a mistake. And they’ll tighten up and make sure it doesn’t happen again. I don’t know what else to say about that.

archived recording 10

Should Mike Waltz and Pete Hegseth be disciplined?

archived recording (mike johnson)

No.

rachel abrams

Jeffrey, I want to talk about the immediate reaction. This is such a breach of security protocols. Can you explain the hazards of this from a security point of view?

jeffrey goldberg

Yeah, put aside the weirdness of inviting a journalist by mistake. I mean, OK, it’s hard to put aside, obviously, given what’s happened. But one of the things that people don’t understand, I think, about why there are rules governing privileged conversations within the national security community is that Signal might be end-to-end encrypted, and it might be very hard to hack, but foreign intelligence services spend a lot of time trying to target the actual devices that belong to government officials, right?

In other words, the secretary of state, Marco Rubio, is walking around with a cell phone in his pocket. It should not surprise anyone to know that the Chinese government is very interested in knowing what’s going on inside that phone. And it uses all kinds of methods where, in a remote way, you can target that phone.

rachel abrams

And in this particular scenario, this particular attack on the Houthis, if a foreign adversary had gotten this information that you saw, what is the worst case scenario? Can you just play out the possibilities a little bit?

jeffrey goldberg

If somehow the Houthis understood that American warplanes were heading in their direction, that would give them conceivably more time to prepare a response, which would obviously put the pilots of those planes in danger. You’re the national security advisor of the United States. You’re the CIA director. You don’t want your target in Yemen to know that in an hour or so, he’s going to get blown up.

So yes, if you put this stuff out in the wild and in Signal and you’re not talking about this in a secure way, face to face, theoretically, the danger level goes up. I mean, this is so obvious to me. Like, logic dictates this.

rachel abrams

Yeah, I just don’t want to breeze over it. I want to make it really clear for people that the reason that it is important for the government to take all of these precautions and conceal these types of plans is that this information getting out there could compromise a military mission. It could put military service members at risk. Those are the stakes —

jeffrey goldberg

At greater risk, right. Greater risk.

rachel abrams

Greater risk. Those are the stakes here. And —

jeffrey goldberg

But also the success and failure of your mission, right?

rachel abrams

Right, of course. And because these are the stakes, did they break any laws here? We’re talking about how things are typically done. But did the existence of this group chat, adding you, was any of this illegal?

jeffrey goldberg

I can’t answer that question. I’m not a national security lawyer. We’ve interviewed national security lawyers who say that there are various risks associated with doing this the way they did it. That will be discovered in the fullness of time.

And there’s a lot of chatter right now in military forums and government forums of people who are saying, I’m an Army captain in the artillery, right? But every year, I have to be recertified in cybersecurity. And I have to watch videos of how to make sure that your information is correct, and what kind of information can you put on your personal phone, and what kind of information can’t you put on your personal phone.

And there are people who get kicked out of the military. There are people who go to prison for compromising security at a much lower level than, we’re about to attack Yemen. Here’s how the attack is going to go.

rachel abrams

Right. So I can imagine that if you are a member of the military or the State Department, you are frustrated, to say the least. Because you are held to a very, very high standard that these folks, at least for now, do not seem like they were holding themselves to.

jeffrey goldberg

Right, right. And that’s why there was no sympathy among government employees. There’s no particular sympathy for Hillary Clinton for having government emails on her personal server. But still, guys, you make these rules. You got to follow them.

rachel abrams

Is there any chance that anybody on this group chat could believably say that they didn’t know that they were supposed to take different kinds of precautions?

jeffrey goldberg

I mean, I guess you could say that. It’s the beginning of an administration. They are two months in. But is ignorance of the law, does that absolve you of following the rules? Although some of them have obviously served — Marco Rubio is on the Intelligence Committee. John Ratcliffe was the former DNI. Pete Hegseth served in the Army, and so on. Also, here’s the thing. I mean, even at that level, there’s kind of an orientation moment. Here’s your office. Here’s your computer.

rachel abrams

Here’s your skiff.

jeffrey goldberg

Here’s your skiff. This is the computer that you can communicate with other intelligence agencies with, but you cannot have your personal email on it. It’s a closed system. And this is the computer that you get to use to do internet research. And this is the — you know. I mean, you’re presumably told all this stuff.

rachel abrams

It really makes you wonder what else is being communicated this way.

jeffrey goldberg

How many other small groups are there?

rachel abrams

And also, why would these folks be communicating this way? I mean, just —

jeffrey goldberg

You know why?

rachel abrams

Why?

jeffrey goldberg

You know why?

rachel abrams

Tell me.

jeffrey goldberg

Because going into a skiff is a pain in the neck.

rachel abrams

Even if it’s in your basement?

jeffrey goldberg

I mean, I had to go to the supermarket. Maybe they got to go to the supermarket. I mean, you got to go to the supermarket. You got to go take your kid to Little League. I mean, all these people do have security details, mind you. They’re driven in armored suburbans, and they have very extensive communications devices associated with those vehicles. I mean, the idea is to make it maximally convenient. And by the way, this is —

rachel abrams

So that’s it? It’s convenience? That’s what —

jeffrey goldberg

I don’t know. Or, or if you talk about it on Signal, you’re obligated to make a copy of that discussion and send it to an official government account so that it can be archived by the National Archives. But Signal is a disappearing app. Obviously, the messages disappear.

rachel abrams

Well, they can. You can set it to disappear. Is that what happened here?

jeffrey goldberg

Yeah. And these were set to disappear.

rachel abrams

I see.

jeffrey goldberg

And so there is the plausible explanation that they’re like, we just want to have real talk, and we don’t want this to be archived forever in the National Archives.

rachel abrams

Right. OK, so that sounds like it potentially could be a legal problem.

jeffrey goldberg

Well, I mean, so it’s convenience and also a way of having a way of protecting your conversation from future congressional oversight. It’s a lot of other things.

rachel abrams

I think the natural question is to say, under normal circumstances, there would probably be an investigation led by Congress. Democrats are obviously calling for that, but it just feels like there must be so little interest in an investigation from anybody with the power to do it.

And I just want to give you some examples of the reaction to your story that make me say that, because over the past 24 hours, the Republicans have really played this down. House Speaker Mike Johnson has said, this is not our issue. Senator John Kennedy said, a mistake was made. It happens. A House Republican called it “a learning moment.” Trump himself said, Mike Waltz is a good man. He’s learned a lesson. Do you think there will be any consequences for the people who initiated or participated in this breach of national security?

jeffrey goldberg

Nothing that’s been said by the administration so far suggests to me that they’re treating this seriously, or treating it the way they would treat it if this were Democrats who had done this.

rachel abrams

You mentioned Hillary Clinton earlier, but I want to bring it back to her for a second because it seems noteworthy that a lot of the people on this Signal chat, and certainly President Trump, all of these people made a very big deal about Clinton and how she used a private email server for official business when she was secretary of state. Everybody remembers the chants “Lock her up.”

And every turn, they described what she did as a very serious breach of national security that should face consequences. And can you, for a second, putting aside whether or not this is hypocritical, could you ruminate on whether you think what you have seen is as serious, more serious, far more serious just by comparison to what she did?

jeffrey goldberg

If this is not a big deal, then people like Pete Hegseth and Marco Rubio and all the rest have to go back into time and say that Hillary Clinton wasn’t a big deal either. Right? I mean, this is this kind of arid, dispiriting Washington game where when you commit a crime, it’s the worst thing that ever happened on the planet. And when I do it, it’s perfectly acceptable and understandable.

Here’s the thing. And this is sort of what I would love to say to Pete Hegseth. Six months ago, if Tony Blinken and Jake Sullivan and Lloyd Austin, secretary of state, the national security advisor, and the secretary of defense in the Joe Biden administration, were communicating with Kamala Harris over Signal about an imminent military attack and describing to Kamala Harris which weapons are going to be used in the attack, and they mistakenly included a journalist in that conversation, do you really think Pete Hegseth would say it’s not a big deal?

rachel abrams

Do you think that they think that the mistake here is being accidentally included and this getting out or having used Signal in the first place?

jeffrey goldberg

What I understand from inside the White House — I’ve talked to a couple of people and obviously read some of the reporting in the last period of time — they think that Mike Waltz is a dope for including me in the chat, and they’re really focused on that. I mean, there’s not a fantastic record of Democrats being completely assiduous about the storage and safekeeping of classified information. I mean, nobody’s perfect here.

But we’re coming out of a situation where the current president was actually indicted for hiding classified information in a bathroom. This is the president, of course, who is known to have discussed classified operations on the veranda of Mar-a-Lago. So the tone is set from the top.

I mean, there are people who take security very seriously, and there are people who don’t take it very seriously. I don’t think anybody would say that Donald Trump is one of those presidents who took it extremely seriously.

rachel abrams

Right, and I think this sort of speaks to the question I asked you about whether you think there are going to be any consequences because all of the examples you just laid out, those suggest that maybe these are folks that think that the mistake here was most likely just including you, which makes me wonder, do you think that you are going to be now targeted by the administration?

And I just want to quote from Pete Hegseth here, because immediately after your story came out, he denied that he had shared war plans. He said that you yourself were a deceitful and highly discredited so-called journalist who made a profession of peddling hoaxes time and time again. And just given how aggressive this administration has been toward the press generally, I just wonder if you think you might be the only one, ironically, that could face any punishment from this.

jeffrey goldberg

Oh, I don’t think about that. And by the way, those are words that hurt. I’m really sorry that he said that. Donald Trump has called me terrible things for five years. Just a few months ago, he called me a radical left, disgraceful something. I can’t even remember. It’s like a bunch of words — the usual words that he uses when he’s mad at a reporter.

So, A, I’m used to it. B, I don’t care. C, I’m going to do my job harder when I’m running up against opposition. D, this is our current reality in America, and someone has to just keep trying to do accountability journalism, even though there are a lot of pressures on people not to do accountability journalism.

rachel abrams

I got to push back on you because every journalist at a major institution right now is thinking about whether or not the administration is going to be more aggressive with its journalists. And when you are in the position that you found yourself, you are consulting with people like at “The Atlantic.” Every major news organization has teams of lawyers, has people to talk to, when you find yourselves in situations where you’re wondering, what should I do next? Are there any legal consequences?

And you had mentioned earlier that people could deduce why you left that chat, ultimately. And I respect the fact that you can’t go into the details. But I do want to ask you whether part of the reason why you left was that you were concerned you could get in trouble for it. Like, were you worried at all that you had stayed in that chat too long? And not just you — the people that you’re talking to at “The Atlantic” that presumably you’re getting advice from.

jeffrey goldberg

Your Honor, I’m going to respectfully decline to answer that question on the grounds that I can’t answer the question. I take the nation’s laws very seriously, but I am not in a position to discuss decision-making related to the type of material that I was seeing.

rachel abrams

I understand. And obviously, at the of the day, “The Atlantic” published your story. And I just want to zoom out for a second because as we mentioned earlier, you have covered foreign policy for decades. You have covered a lot of White Houses.

And I assume that this is not the first time that you have had to weigh the public interest in publishing information that could be embarrassing or that the government doesn’t want you to publish. This is not the first time that you’ve weighed that against national security risks.

And clearly, you decided that the story was worth publishing in the public interest to know how national security leaders are flouting security protocols. And I’m wondering, as you’re sitting here now at 11:41 AM on Tuesday, how are you thinking about this calculation? Do you think that we’re safer now, knowing what you reported?

jeffrey goldberg

First and foremost, what I discovered was what I considered to be a massive security breach, right, a breach you can drive a Mack truck through. The idea of reporting and the idea of having a free press and the idea of holding government officials accountable is that you make the world a better place by telling the citizens what’s going on and what the government is doing. And so let’s assume that this is a functional government, and it responds in ordinary ways to the discovery of flaws. With any luck, they’ll tighten up their procedures and policies.

rachel abrams

Right. I guess the answer to my question depends on if they actually do anything.

jeffrey goldberg

Yeah, I mean, I don’t know. It’s too early to say. I mean, we all can speculate about the unusual qualities of this administration and whether they respond in the way that other administrations would respond to these kind of events or these kind of revelations.

rachel abrams

Do you think that this event was so egregious that it’ll break through just — actually, just for regular people? Or is this going to be kind of the same thing that we’re so used to, which is one side gets very upset, the other side tries to dismiss it, downplay it until it eventually goes away? Like, is this so bad that it’ll break through to the immunity people feel to claims of hypocrisy?

jeffrey goldberg

Look, 10 years ago, Donald Trump insulted the war record of John McCain. I listened to that. I thought, oh, well, that’s it for the Donald Trump campaign because the one thing you don’t do is attack war heroes. But the rest is history. We know what happened.

Four years ago, five years ago, I reported that Donald Trump referred to the World War I and World War II war dead as suckers and losers. And there are people who said, so what? There’s always a contingent of people these days who say, so what, for partisan reasons. And so I’ve gotten out of the prediction business. The ordinary rules of political physics don’t really apply anymore.

rachel abrams

But if it does get brushed off, what does that say to you?

jeffrey goldberg

[SIGHS]: It says that we’re in a dangerous place. Successful countries respond to observable reality by changing course, to account for that reality. If these guys go back to using Signal to discuss war planning, that’s on them. That is what you would call reckless behavior.

If they’re going to not change certain procedures because they don’t like the media, or because they think that the Democrats are also bad, it just doesn’t sound like a healthy country. It doesn’t sound like a healthy way to run a country.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

rachel abrams

Jeffrey, I want to thank you very much for your time.

jeffrey goldberg

Thank you.

rachel abrams

During a contentious hearing on Tuesday in front of the Senate Intelligence Committee, two members of President Trump’s cabinet who were included in the text exchanges with Jeffrey Goldberg, CIA Director John Ratcliffe and Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, both denied that any classified material was shared in the messages. That prompted expressions of disbelief from several senators, including Angus King of Maine, an independent.

archived recording (angus king)

Secretary Hegseth put into this group text a detailed operation plan, including targets, the weapons we were going to be using, attack sequences, and timing. And yet you’ve testified that nothing in that text, in that chain was classified. Wouldn’t that be classified? What if that had been made public that morning before the attack took place?

archived recording (tulsi gabbard)

Senator, I can attest to the fact that there were no classified or intelligence equities that were included in that chat group at any time.

rachel abrams

At one point during the hearing, Democratic Senator Jon Ossoff of Georgia pressed Ratcliffe to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation.

archived recording (jon ossoff)

Director Ratcliffe, this was a huge mistake, correct?

archived recording (john ratcliffe)

No.

archived recording (jon ossoff)

A national political —

archived recording (john ratcliffe)

Hold on.

archived recording (jon ossoff)

No, no. You hold on.

archived recording (john ratcliffe)

Let me answer.

archived recording (jon ossoff)

No, no, Director Ratcliffe.

archived recording (john ratcliffe)

The answer — the reason I say no —

archived recording (jon ossoff)

I asked you a yes or no question, and now you’ll hold on. A national political reporter —

archived recording (john ratcliffe)

You can characterize it how you want.

archived recording (jon ossoff)

— was made privy —

archived recording (john ratcliffe)

The White House has made clear —

archived recording (jon ossoff)

— to sensitive information about imminent military —

archived recording (john ratcliffe)

— it as an inadvertent mistake —

archived recording (jon ossoff)

— operations against a foreign terrorist organization.

archived recording (john ratcliffe)

— an inadvertent mistake of adding a reporter.

archived recording (jon ossoff)

And that wasn’t a huge mistake? That wasn’t a huge mistake?

archived recording (john ratcliffe)

I think they characterized it as a mistake.

archived recording (jon ossoff)

This is an embarrassment. This is utterly unprofessional. There’s been no apology. There has been no recognition of the gravity of this error.

rachel abrams

On Wednesday morning, a day after senior administration officials insisted there was nothing classified shared in the Signal group chat, Jeffrey Goldberg released more of the messages containing details of strike plans. The texts, published in The Atlantic, show that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth shared the precise times that U.S. military jets would take off to strike Houthi targets – information that is typically highly classified.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

We’ll be right back.

[THEME MUSIC]

Here’s what else you need to know today. Ukraine and Russia agreed to cease fighting in the Black Sea and to hash out the details for halting strikes on energy facilities in what would be the first significant step toward a ceasefire three years after Russia launched its war against Ukraine. But the deal falls short of a complete pause in fighting, and it remains unclear how and when the limited truce would be carried out.

And President Trump signed a pardon for Devon Archer, a former business partner of Hunter Biden whose congressional testimony two years ago helped to fuel House Republicans’ investigation into the Biden family. Archer, who had been convicted in a fraud case, earned fans on the right after he testified against Hunter Biden.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Today’s episode was produced by Clare Toeniskoetter, Carlos Prieto, and Mary Wilson. It was edited by Paige Cowett and Maria Byrne, contains original music by Pat McCusker, Elisheba Ittoop, and Rowan Niemisto, and was engineered by Chris Wood. Our theme music is by Jim Brunberg and Ben Landsverk of Wonderly.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

That’s it for “The Daily.” I’m Rachel Abrams. See you tomorrow.