

Trump Admin, Don't Try to Befriend People Who Despise You

By Victor Davis Hanson

There's been a story out this week about a leak with national security implications.



Apparently, about 10 days ago, around March 15, the security team of the Trump administration—which included Pete Hegseth, the defense secretary; [Marco Rubio](#), the secretary of state; JD Vance, the vice president; adviser

Stephen Miller; Susan Wiles, another presidential adviser; some intelligence officials; John Ratcliffe, head of the CIA; [National Intelligence Director Tulsi Gabbard](#)—there's about 15 people on it.

And they were communicating from an inherited protocol from the Biden administration, an encrypted Signal of media vehicles, so that they could talk about national security questions, specifically, including whether to bomb the Houthis in retaliation for shutting down maritime transportation on the Red Sea.

But here's what happened. Somebody, and allegedly it's national security adviser Michael Waltz, who was one of the architects of this group chat that was supposedly encrypted, put Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor of The Atlantic Monthly.

I mean, this is insane. He is one of the most hard-left critics of the Trump administration imaginable. But he was on there. And he listened to these conversations, apparently, for about 10 days.

And then, when he was waiting and—he never notified anybody that they had mistakenly put his name on the inclusion list to this confidential information. He just sat there and didn't tell anybody, of course. He was waiting for a big scoop. And he got it when on March 15, they decided to bomb the Houthis.

And there was an internal discussion. [JD Vance](#) said, "This is kind of against the MAGA initiative of not wanting to have optional military engagements." Some people said, "The Europeans benefit, they need access to the Red Sea. Here we are, again." But there was an internal discussion for and against.

As soon as he heard that, though, he learned that a few hours later there was an actual attack. He decided he was going to be famous or, in right-wing circles, conservative infamous.

So then on March 24, he published, "How I know all of this and they put me on this chat list." In other words, he didn't ever identify anybody and say, "This was a mistake. I don't have a national security clearance. Please don't put me on there." No. He just listened in, stealthily, through their mistake.

And what do we make of all this? Of course, the Trump administration people said immediately, "This was not classified information. It was just internal discussion." Goldberg said, "This was a complete lapse." And then, all proverbial hell broke loose.

Congress brought people in: "How can you do this?" Pete Buttigieg, of all people, said, "This is a massive screwup." [Hillary Clinton](#) weighed in. This is a person who destroyed 30,000 emails—many of them, some of them classified—and of course, was using a private server to

transmit classified information, which even James Comey said was felonious.

And then, we had Leon Panetta weigh in and critical. This is the Leon Panetta, of course, who was one of the “51 intelligence authorities” who lied to the country on Oct. 23, 2020, to arm Joe Biden in the debate.

But here’s my point. Why would you ever put Jeffrey Goldberg?

He has a history. He was the one, in 2020, right during the campaign, to help Joe Biden—went back and said, in 2018, when [Donald Trump](#) was visiting Normandy in France, that it was rainy and he said it wasn’t safe to go to the Aisne-Marne cemetery to see the American dead. I was on the American Battle Monuments Commission, so I know that cemetery very well. And 19 people didn’t deny Jeffrey Goldberg. But in a campaign-timed, synchronized manner, he said that Donald Trump said, “These people were suckers to die that way.” And he said he had four anonymous sources that were in the room. He never identified any of them. Nineteen said he was not telling the truth.

Joe Biden, almost immediately, began cutting commercials and saying that this had something to do with his son. And his son had died. Remember, he kind of mixed up the details, that his son had died because he was in Iraq. And how dare Trump? And it really hurt Trump in the 2020 election.

A couple of other details, very quickly. This is the same Jeffrey Goldberg, remember, that my former colleague, Kevin Williamson, left the National Review—he trashed me on the way out, by the way. I don’t hold any grudges on that. And he said he was going to work for Jeffrey Goldberg. And he announced it at a very high salary. And then, before he even started, Jeffrey Goldberg flipped, bowed to pressure, and said he was an anti-abortion person. And they fired him.

He doesn’t have a very good record for veracity. Why would you

ever, ever even consider having his name in your Rolodex? And the answer is, I don't know.

But as a general rule, if you're a conservative, you only deal with [hostile media](#)—and that's 95% of them—on the circumstances that you go in expecting a public debate. You don't talk to them off the record. You don't disclose them. Trust me, I've had this same experience.

Final note. This reminds me so much of 2010. Remember Stanley McChrystal, he was the commanding officer of all forces in Afghanistan. He brought in a similar Jeffrey Goldberg-type of person, Michael Hastings, a left-wing Rolling Stones reporter. Why, as a general in charge of intelligence, would you allow a left-wing reporter to be embedded with your intimate conversations?

And at one point, an unidentified officer said, "There's a phone call and it's Joe Biden," who was the vice president, but he called him "Joe, bite me." Hastings clinged on that, wrote a big letter. McChrystal allowed an officer—they chuckled, apparently, and they made fun of the vice president. They went back to Washington. He was recalled. And Barack Obama relieved him from command.

Remember, Article 88 says that no active or retired officer—high-ranking officer—can disparage the president, vice president, and Cabinet members.

I don't think that he meant that to be public. And he didn't say it. He just heard it and did not correct it. But that was grounds enough to relieve him from command.

Final footnote. We've had a lot of generals who've said a lot worse about the commanding officer. And none of them, whether active or retired, have faced any of the circumstances that Stanley McChrystal faced.

Bottom line, if you're in the Trump administration, do not, do

not under any circumstances think you can be friends with people who despise you. And this is a lesson that I hope Mike Waltz learns. And I think he will. And that they should press on.

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