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## Trump's Lying Band of Brothers



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We know that Donald Trump is not fit to be sitting in the White House. He is a dangerously disordered president, and we have observed enough aberrant behavior to fill a psychiatric text book. We know from his exchanges with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un that he has been quick to brandish his “bigger (nuclear) button” that has the unilateral power to kill us all. And now we know that he is surrounded by a national security team whose members are totally unfit to serve and are willing to lie to an American public and an American Congress that has yet to come to grips with the normalization of Trump’s “no rules” presidency.

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth has already lied to the press about the nature of the group chat involving war plans, and on Tuesday, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard and CIA director John Ratcliffe couldn’t recall any discussions of weaponry or targets, not even generic targets, in their testimony to the Senate Intelligence Committee. So don’t

expect any accountability as the president and his national security team do their best to vilify an excellent journalist invited to the chat.

We can be thankful that Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor of the Atlantic and an outstanding journalist for decades, responded to a call on the messaging app Signal that involved every member of Trump's national security team, including the vice-president, the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, and leading intelligence and military officials. We are fortunate that Goldberg, sitting in his car on a Safeway parking lot, took a call that he initially believed to be bogus or simply part of a disinformation campaign.

Goldberg was invited by National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, who may have intended to invite U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer (JG), who had no more need to be in such a group chat than did the Atlantic's JG. Typically, the trade representative would never be part of the Principal's Committee. Conversely, Goldberg probably has a better idea of overall U.S. national security than Greer, who is obsessed with tougher export controls and sanctions against China, and little else.

Every government official with a high-level security clearance is inundated with warnings against using personal cell phones in discussing government matters. Nevertheless, one of the participants in the chat, special envoy Steve Witkoff, was on the call on his cell phone while in Moscow. Russian intelligence has repeatedly tried to compromise Signal, and Witkoff's outrageous use of his personal cell phone for any discussion, let alone a discussion of precise military information dealing with the use of force. The make-up of this particular group suggests that some or all of these members have been using Signal regularly for sensitive discussions. It is particularly odd that not one individual questioned the presence of a journalist on the chat!

There is no national security information more sensitive than the discussion of war plans, which requires the highest level of operations security. These discussions must be held in a sensitive and security facility that can be found at the National Security Council, the Pentagon, or throughout the intelligence community. If an individual cannot be present at such a facility, at the very least he or she must be in a SCIF (a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility) to prevent unauthorized physical or electronic access. The high-level members even travel with their own classified communication systems.

Electronic surveillance and penetration has a long history. When I was the intelligence advisor to the U.S. delegation at the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks in 1971-1972, all professional matters were discussed in a SCIF that was flown to Vienna, Austria. When I was stationed at the U.S. embassy in Moscow in 1976, I had to keep my office shutters closed

because the KGB was targeting embassy windows to gather the signals emanating from the IBM Selectric typewriters that were used in the day. In my 25 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, I was not permitted to bring a cell phone into the building because of the ease of foreign electronic penetration.

The group of misfits who occupy the highest national security positions that exist in Washington were simply too unwilling on a Saturday morning to travel to a SCIF. It is highly likely that these Signal chats have been a regular feature of this particular team for the past two months. We know that Donald Trump has no understanding or appreciation for intelligence security because of the case of the United States of America v. Donald Trump that filed 40 criminal counts related to his removal of sensitive classified materials from the White House to various insecure locations at Mar-A-Lago, including a bathroom, a ballroom, and a utility closet.

In the first months of his first term, Trump revealed a highly sensitive document—obtained from Israeli intelligence—to the Russian foreign minister and the Russian ambassador. Trump’s disclosures jeopardized a critical source of intelligence on the Islamic State, and led Mossad—Israel’s CIA—to withhold the sharing of sensitive information for a period of time. A U.S. official stated that Trump “revealed more information to the Russian ambassador than we have shared with our own allies.” It must be added that some of our best intelligence on foreign terrorism comes from foreign liaison sources, including intelligence sources that can be found in adversarial countries.

Finally, it must be noted that the participating members of the group chat, with the exception of Goldberg, were members of the Principals Committee of the National Security Council, which is the senior interagency forum for consideration and decision making of the most sensitive national security issues. The NSC was created by President Harry S. Truman in 1947 to advise and assist the president on national security and foreign policy. The intelligence services in Moscow and Beijing probably cannot believe their new form of access to such decision making. Unfortunately, nothing will stop Trump from concentrating on his revenge tour and his campaign against the rule of law, not even the mishandling of Washington’s most sensitive intelligence information.

Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of [Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA](#) and [National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism](#), and [A Whistleblower at the CIA](#). His most recent books are “American Carnage: The Wars of Donald Trump” (Opus Publishing, 2019)

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