



# Harvard Model Congress

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# Data Leaks and Whistleblowers

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Jack Teixeira, who serves as a Massachusetts National Guardsman was arrested in April of 2023 as an alleged accomplice of a leak containing top secret US Military documents. The documents involved contained descriptive plans of both the US military and surrounding allies concerning the Ukrainian-Russian war. This leak is among one of many breaches of US security which shed light on past security leaks concerning the US' military actions. For instance, in the 1970s, the Pentagon Papers were leaked along with the Supreme Court's decision regarding the Dobb's case (Elving, 2023).

With the rise of social media and frequent internet use, there are growing concerns about data breaches and the US' ability to protect itself from foreign threats. What is even more concerning, is the motives and actions that lead up to these security breaches. Teixeira for instance, would often be caught investigating in highly classified information in which he wasn't granted security clearance for (Graham 2023). There are frequent debates about how ethical national security leaks are-- for one, they shed light on cases of corruption but can also be used for less ethical reasons. As mentioned earlier, the Pentagon papers were leaked by Daniel Ellsberg who put millions of Americans' private information at risk but also highlighted the government's vulnerability of corruption (Moran, 2023). Some may argue that citizens deserve the right to know if their country is committing crimes. An example of this was when Chelsea Manning revealed the Iraqi War Logs, and the US military's human rights abuses were exposed (Bureau 2010).

Thinking in the context of national security, Teixeira's leaks posed a threat to American intelligence abroad by highlighting the high prevalence of eavesdropping and

spying. Data breaches also ruin the US' credibility among international allies who had entrusted them with secret information.

In order to prevent security leaks, the National Security Council has taken ample measures to prevent them. President Joe Biden signed the National Security Memorandum in 2021 to improve national and cyber security measures (White House, 2021). Prior to Teixeira's leaks, Congress had passed the Data Breach Protection Act and are becoming increasingly strict on breaches of secret information (Adragna and Gould, 2023).

Conservatives and liberals have differing opinions on how data leaks should be handled. Conservatives believe that whistleblowing has more harmful effects than beneficial because the information is often obtained and spread illegally. Liberals on the other hand, advocate for the protection of whistleblowers like when Barack Obama reduced Chelsea Manning's sentence from 35 years to seven years (Savage, 2017). As the number of data leaks has increased in recent years, more initiatives have been taken beyond policy making to increase security. The US Department of Defense has been implementing "increased levels of physical security" and accountability measures to track who has access to such information (Baldor and Copp, 2023). While there may be differing perspectives between liberals and conservatives on how to deal with the matter, some bipartisanship efforts have also been introduced to tighten the security clearance process (Adragna and Gould, 2023). The security clearance process is –and has always been—a hefty process but the actions of such individuals granted clearance are rarely monitored. For instance, it was reported that Teixeira made questionable online searches regarding shootings (Debusmann, 2023).

Whistleblowers are charged with heavy crimes under the Espionage Act given they distribute top secret information. The government distinguishes the gravity of a whistleblower's actions by stating that "spies... pass classified national defense information to a specific foreign government, leakers.. distribute such information without authorization to the entire world" (Aftergood, 2019). Yet, all of the perpetrators behind the largest national security leaks have been held accountable for their crimes. During the rise of the digital age, protecting national security becomes more of a challenging task. It not only puts national interests at risk, but it may endanger the lives of US spies and ruin ties with foreign governments. However, whistleblowers are sometimes given credit for exposing unlawful actions of the government. Which is why, you as members of the National Security Council must diligently work towards protecting national interests. As of 2021, the National Security Council had an estimated allocated budget of \$13,200,000 (Congressional Budget Submission). Putting taxpayer dollars to use and working to improve our nation's security is no easy task, but it will only improve through your creative solutions.

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