

NATIONAL SECURITY

FBI arrests 21-year-old Air National Guardsman suspected of leaking classified documents  
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FBI arrests Air National Guardsman in classified documents leak



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April 13, 2023, 6:43 PM CEST / Updated April 14, 2023, 12:04 AM CEST

By Ken Dilanian, Michael Kosnar and Rebecca Shabad

WASHINGTON — Jack Teixeira, a 21-year-old member of the Massachusetts Air National Guard, was arrested by federal authorities Thursday in connection with their investigation into classified documents that were leaked on the internet.

FBI agents took Teixeira into custody Thursday afternoon "without incident," Attorney General Merrick Garland announced in brief remarks at the Justice Department, which has been conducting a criminal investigation.

"Today, the Justice Department arrested Jack Douglas Teixeira in connection with an investigation into alleged unauthorized removal, retention and transmission of classified national defense information. Teixeira is an employee of the United States Air Force National Guard," Garland said.

Teixeira will have an initial appearance in U.S. District Court for Massachusetts, said Garland, who added that the investigation is ongoing. He declined to take questions from the media.



Jack Teixeira.via Facebook

FBI agents arrested Teixeira at a residence in North Dighton, Massachusetts, the bureau's office in Boston said in a statement. The residence is more than an hour from the military base where he worked.

"The FBI is continuing to conduct authorized law enforcement activity at the residence," the statement said. "Since late last week the FBI has aggressively pursued investigative leads, and today's arrest exemplifies our continued commitment to identifying, pursuing, and holding accountable those who betray our country's trust and put our national security at risk."

Military records show that Teixeira holds the rank of airman first class and has been in uniform since he entered the Air National Guard in September 2019. He has been based at Otis Air National Guard Base on Cape Cod and is assigned as a cyber transport systems journeyman.

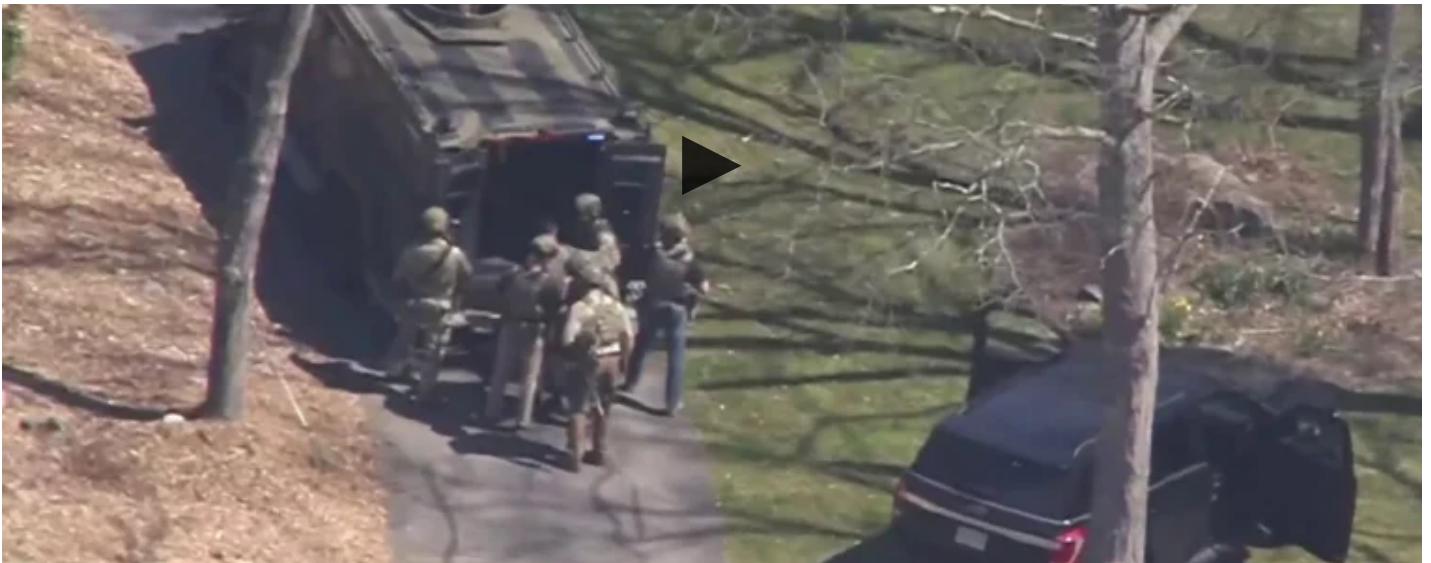
A Facebook post in July from the 102nd Intelligence Wing, which is headquartered at that base, congratulated a person with Teixeira's name on a promotion to airman first class.

U.S. officials had been searching for the source of the leak, which exposed potentially hundreds of pages of intelligence about Russian efforts in Ukraine and spying on U.S. allies.

The Pentagon press secretary, Air Force Brig. Gen Pat Ryder, declined to confirm the suspect's identity at a briefing Thursday and referred reporters to the Justice Department because it's a "law enforcement matter" and an ongoing investigation, he said.

The Defense Department is "working around the clock" with the intelligence community, Ryder said, "to better understand the scope, scale of these leaks." Ryder also said the Pentagon is "very limited" in what it can say about the documents themselves.

Aerial video shows arrest of Pentagon leaks suspect



Asked about the intelligence activities of the Massachusetts Air National Guard, where Teixeira worked, Ryder said, "In general, intelligence wings throughout the Air Force support what you might imagine — Air Force intelligence requirements worldwide to support a variety of types of intelligence missions and requirements, which include active guard and reserve components."

The classified documents from the Defense Department were found online last month — how long they had been on the internet and the total number that have been posted remain unclear. They revealed details about U.S. spying on Russia's war efforts in Ukraine and secret assessments of Ukraine's combat power, as well as intelligence-gathering on America's allies, including South Korea and Israel, NBC News has reported.

President Joe Biden suggested Thursday morning that officials appeared to be nearing a breakthrough in their investigation.

"There's a full-blown investigation going on, as you know, with the Intelligence Committee and the Justice Department, and they're getting close," Biden told reporters in Ireland.

Two White House officials later confirmed that the president has been briefed about Teixeira's arrest.

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The suspect's identity was first reported Thursday by The New York Times, which said he was the leader of a small online gaming group where the documents were first leaked.

The Washington Post has reported about the gaming group, identifying its leader only as "OG." The main source for the story was a member of the group on the platform Discord, a minor who was granted anonymity. The Post said it reviewed about 300 photos of classified documents the suspect is alleged to have leaked, most of which the report said have not been made public.

NBC News has not yet verified the details about the gaming group or that it was where the classified documents were first shared.

In a statement after Teixeira's arrest, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Jack Reed said: "This was a major security breach that cannot be allowed to happen again. Leaking this trove of classified information endangered our military and intelligence professionals and undermined the security of our allies and partners.

"Anyone with a security clearance who betrays their country by purposefully mishandling classified documents or disclosing classified materials must be held accountable," Reed, D-R.I., added.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Turner, R-Ohio, said in a statement that his panel will "examine why this happened, why it went unnoticed for weeks, and how to prevent future leaks."

Biden and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin were briefed about the disclosure last week, administration officials said. That was when the White House learned about the existence of the documents in the public domain, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters this week.

According to Bellingcat, the online open-source investigative group, the documents appeared in early March on the Discord social media app. Some documents may have appeared as early as January, the group said.

Eoghan Macguire, a researcher and editor who helped break the story at Bellingcat, said the documents were passed around three separate Discord servers before they were broadly made public on the extremist site 4chan.

Kirby said that the Pentagon is "leading an interagency effort here to review whatever national security implications might come out of all this" and that the Justice Department is leading a criminal investigation.

He also said it appears some of the classified documents had been altered from their original form. Kirby said Biden administration officials spent last weekend contacting "relevant allies and partners" and "at very high levels" to reassure them about the leaks.