



Sign in to The New York Times with Google ✕

---

 A B  
tiffany.oliver3@gmail.com

---

 1215 Writing Services  
1215writingservices@gmail.com

---

[3 more accounts](#)

## Finding the Pentagon Leak Suspect

How The Times identified the suspect at the center of the Pentagon leak before the authorities announced



By Mark Scheffler

April 16, 2023

**You're reading The Morning newsletter.** Make sense of the day's news and ideas. David Leonhardt and Times journalists guide you through what's happening — and why it matters. [Get it sent to your inbox.](#)

The murky digital trail started with four items posted to Russian channels on the messaging app Telegram, each consisting of a photograph of a classified U.S. intelligence report. Aric Toler, a freelance reporter who works with us, noticed that several similar documents had also been posted elsewhere and figured that the original source of the leaks had to be somewhere other than Telegram. But he couldn't find it.

"I looked and looked," Aric said.

Then a tip came in. Somebody messaged him saying that similar material had appeared on the chat app Discord, in a channel dedicated to maps for the video game Minecraft. Aric found 10 documents there and contacted the host.

The host insisted that he was not the leaker and sounded terrified. Like a lot of the people Aric encountered during the search, the host also seemed to be a teenager. He explained that he had gotten the documents from a chat group called wow\_mao on Discord. There, a user named Lucca had posted more than 100 images of leaked documents.

Aric then started livetweeting his research process, and people sent him private messages. He eventually learned that Lucca was part of another chat group — called Thug Shaker Central — where hundreds of documents seemed to have been uploaded. But Thug Shaker Central had vanished, deleted by its users when the leaks became public.

At this point, a former member of Thug Shaker with the user name Vakhi contacted Aric. Lucca was not the original leaker, said Vakhi, who is 17 years old. Somebody known as O.G. was.

### The granite clue

Two other Visual Investigations reporters — Christiaan Triebert and Malachy Browne — joined the effort at this point. Working with Aric, they heard from Vakhi that O.G. had started posting the documents to Thug Shaker last fall. O.G. worked at a military facility, Vakhi said, and the two of them had played video games together.

The search was on for O.G. "Thug Shaker was gone, and his fellow gamers refused to identify O.G., but we had enough information to home in on who he might be," Malachy said. "We looked at the games he played online, who he played them with and connected those dots."

On Steam, an app that sells video games and where users connect with other players, the reporters looked for Vakhi's account and for the people to whom he was linked. Aric used a specialized site that scrapes and indexes Steam user data, allowing him to see user names that were associated with Vakhi and his contacts. The team figured that one of the people who had interacted with Vakhi might have been O.G.

The reporters found a such person, with the original user name of jackdjdtx. On the account, they found a screenshot from a video game identifying a player as J Teixeira.

The reporters then scoured Flickr, Instagram and other parts of the web for this mystery person. They found one photo of a Jack Teixeira in a military uniform, another of him smiling in the woods and another of him in the kitchen of his childhood home — standing near a brown-and-white-speckled granite countertop.

On Wednesday, Christiaan and Malachy spoke to another Discord member who had downloaded a new trove of 27 photographs of leaked documents. In some of them, Christiaan and another member of our team, Riley Mellen, noticed that the surface on which the documents were sitting when they were photographed. It was a brown-and-white kitchen countertop.

On Thursday, Haley Willis, another member of our team, and two colleagues — Thomas Gibbons-Neff and C.J. Chivers — arrived before dawn at the Teixeira home in North Dighton, Mass. "We saw who we believe might have been Jack driving into the driveway," she said. "He saw us, we saw him and his car froze for a second in the driveway."

They approached the house. Jack's stepfather, Thomas Dufault, a retired Air Force master sergeant, was there. Haley asked him if she could speak to Jack. "He's not going to communicate with anybody except an attorney at this point," the stepfather said. Soon, a plane circled overhead. It was clear the authorities were already on to him.

Back in New York, we published our investigation. Later that morning, a SWAT team arrived at the house in Massachusetts.

## For more

- Aric Toler talked about the search on the Times podcast *Hard Fork*.
- Teixeira was obsessed with war and guns in high school.
- Ukrainians say the leaks confirm what they've been saying for months — they need more weapons.

## NEWS

### Sudan Fighting



Smoke in Khartoum, Sudan. Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

- Tensions between military factions spiraled into a battle for control of Sudan's capital, Khartoum, killing dozens of people.
- As of this morning, fighting was spreading beyond the capital. See maps and videos and follow our updates.
- The chaos has dashed hopes for democracy in Sudan. Here's why the fighting matters.

## Politics

- Transgender rights has replaced same-sex marriage as a rallying cry for the religious right.
- "The science of reading": A revolt over how children are taught to read is sweeping classrooms and statehouses.