

Musk's Pentagon meeting points to advanced planning for conflict with China

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On Thursday, the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* independently reported that Elon Musk, the world's richest man and owner of leading US military contractor SpaceX, was scheduled to receive a top-secret briefing on secret operational plans for war with China at the Pentagon on Friday.

Elon Musk leads the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which is spearheading the Trump administration's efforts to dismantle Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

The publication of the report triggered a highly unusual and vociferous denial by US President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, as well as a Pentagon spokesperson.

Trump immediately replied to the reports on his Truth Social platform, declaring, "Elon is NOT BEING BRIEFED ON ANYTHING CHINA BY THE DEPARTMENT OF WAR!!!"

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth wrote on X just hours after the publication of the report:

This is NOT a meeting about "top secret China war plans." It's an informal meeting about innovation, efficiencies, and smarter production.

Sean Parnell, the chief Pentagon spokesman, bizarrely declared that Musk was "just visiting."

While Musk went to the Pentagon on Friday, Reuters claimed the secret briefing on US war plans did not take place and that Musk instead met with Hegseth in his office.

The publication of the expected briefing by the *Times* and *Journal* takes place in the context of deep divisions

within the US political establishment over military policy. Trump and Hegseth have publicly declared to be seeking a negotiated settlement of the Ukraine war, with Hegseth explaining in February that "stark strategic realities prevent the United States of America from being primarily focused on the security of Europe." The Trump administration is instead "prioritizing deterring war with China in the Pacific, recognizing the reality of scarcity, and making the resourcing tradeoffs to ensure deterrence does not fail."

Ultimately, it is these conflicts over foreign policy and the role of Musk that brought the secret briefing to light. The US media has treated the issue of contention as Musk's participation in the secret briefing, rather than the fact that the United States appears to be in an advanced stage of preparation for war against the world's largest economy and the world's third-largest nuclear power.

In January 2023, Four-Star General Mike Minihan, head of the Air Force's Air Mobility Command, wrote an internal memo to soldiers under his command predicting that the United States and China would be at war in 2025.

Minihan said that "[Chinese Premier] Xi's team, reason, and opportunity are all aligned for 2025."

The memo, titled "February 2023 Orders in Preparation for—The Next Fight," called on his troops to "consider their personal affairs" and to "fire a clip into a 7-meter target with the full understanding that unrepentant lethality matters most. Aim for the head."

Elon Musk's company, SpaceX, is one of the largest US military contractors and plays a critical role in US military communications and space payload delivery.

The *Times* pointed to the role of Starlink, SpaceX's global high-speed data communication network that uses a massive array of low-earth-orbit satellites to

provide communications all over the world. Starlink is by far the most resilient global high-speed data network for remote areas, which has made the Pentagon reliant on it for its operations.

The *Times* reported:

The company separately has been paid hundreds of millions of dollars by the Pentagon that now relies heavily on SpaceX's Starlink satellite communications network for military personnel to transmit data worldwide.

Just as importantly, SpaceX has achieved a near monopoly on payload launches, accounting for 90 percent of the mass launched into orbit in 2024. The *Times* reported:

In 2024, SpaceX was granted about \$1.6 billion in Air Force contracts. That does not include classified spending with SpaceX by the National Reconnaissance Office, which has hired the company to build it a new constellation of low-earth orbit satellites to spy on China, Russia, and other threats.

In its report on the planned meeting, the *Times* explained:

Pentagon war plans, known in military jargon as O-plans or operational plans, are among the military's most closely guarded secrets.

It continued:

The top-secret briefing that exists for the China war plan has about 20 to 30 slides that lay out how the United States would fight such a conflict. It covers the plan beginning with the indications and warning of a threat from China to various options on what Chinese targets to

hit, over what time period, that would be presented to Mr. Trump for decisions.

The *Times* reported:

Mr. Hegseth; Adm. Christopher W. Grady, the acting chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Adm. Samuel J. Paparo, the head of the military's Indo-Pacific Command, were set to present Mr. Musk with details on the US plan to counter China in the event of military conflict between the two countries.

The report continued:

The meeting had been set to be held not in Mr. Hegseth's office—where an informal discussion about innovation would most likely take place—but in the Tank, a secure conference room in the Pentagon, typically used for high-level meetings of members of the Joint Chiefs, their senior staff, and visiting combatant commanders.

Ultimately, the fact that the Pentagon deemed it necessary to share its most high-level, closely-guarded operational war plans for war with China with Musk points to the advanced degree of planning for such a conflict.



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