

How American imperialism plots wars of aggression

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25 March 2025

On March 15, the US military launched airstrikes on residential neighborhoods in Sanaa, the capital of Yemen, killing 53 men, women and children. Among the targets were political leaders of the Houthi government. Yemen—the poorest country in the Middle East—has endured years of US-backed bombing and deliberate starvation at the hands of Saudi Arabia, resulting in the deaths of more than 400,000 people.

The US airstrikes violated multiple statutes and treaties under international law, rendering those who planned, perpetrated and executed the attack guilty of the following war crimes:

- Launching an unprovoked attack, in violation of the prohibition on the use of force under the UN Charter and the Rome Statute.

☛ Targeting and killing political leaders who are not engaged in combat, in violation of the protections of the UN Charter, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Rome Statute.

☛ Employing weapons or tactics that fail to distinguish between military and civilian targets, in violation of the prohibition on indiscriminate attacks as outlined in the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute.

On Monday, ten days after the US military launched the attack on Yemen, the *Atlantic* magazine published a report revealing the fact that leading officials in the Trump administration had accidentally included Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor-in-chief of the magazine, in a message thread in which they plotted the attack on Yemen.

Goldberg, having found himself privy to a criminal conspiracy to launch an illegal war of aggression, dutifully removed himself from the message thread, notified the conspirators of their mistake, and then waited ten days before publishing selected excerpts from the discussion.

The accidental inclusion of Goldberg in the war plans provoked outrage from the Democratic Party and the media—not over the criminal war of aggression or the war crimes being planned, but because the discussion took place outside secure military channels.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries called on Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to resign, claiming his actions “shocked the conscience” and “likely violated the law”—not for murdering civilians, but for inadvertently exposing these crimes

to the public.

But what is of interest to the public is not the channel through which the conspiracy was discussed, but its contents. The leaked discussion offers a revealing glimpse into how American wars of aggression are prepared, launched and fraudulently justified. Though Trump officials may have used a different communications platform, the content mirrors the planning and deceit behind countless wars launched by previous administrations.

The thread on the Signal app documented a discussion among senior members of the Trump administration regarding the timing and advisability of launching a new campaign against Yemen. While Vice President JD Vance argued for a delay, Trump, who communicated to the group via his fascist-minded adviser Stephen Miller, ultimately decided to launch the strikes immediately.

The discussion made clear that the attack on a small, poor and defenseless nation was purely a “war of choice,” intended to signal to the world that the United States remains the dominant global military power.

As Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth explained in the message thread, “This [is] not about the Houthis,” i.e., the nominal target of the attack. Rather, it was aimed at “restoring freedom of navigation” and “reestablish[ing] deterrence.”

The public justification for the attack on Yemen was the statement by Yemen’s Houthi government that it would block Israeli ships from transiting the Red Sea unless Israel stopped blocking food from entering Gaza.

The very prospect of this defiance of Israel, the United States’ proxy in the Middle East, was seen as challenging American imperialism. It had to be met with overwhelming violence to send a message to the rest of the world and, in Hegseth’s words, “reestablish deterrence.”

Each of the hundreds of wars, military operations and destabilization campaigns carried out by the United States since the US emerged as an imperialist power has been justified to the public as a response to an imminent threat. Unless the US military takes action, “people will die,” the public has been told over and over. But the exchange on the attack on Yemen made clear that no such “imminent threat” existed.

In the exchange, Joe Kent, Trump’s nominee to head the

National Counterterrorism Center, wrote, “There is nothing time-sensitive driving the timeline. We’ll have the same options in a month.” Hegseth added, “Waiting a few weeks or a month does not fundamentally change the calculus.”

The most pressing question raised by the Trump administration’s exposed war plans against Yemen is: What other “wars of choice” is the administration currently preparing?

Multiple participants in the discussion of the attack on Yemen made clear in previous statements that the central target of US military aggression is China. In the words of Hegseth, China is the only country in the world “with the capability and intent to threaten our... core national interests.”

Earlier this month, Elon Musk—the world’s richest man and CEO of leading military contractor SpaceX—traveled to the Pentagon to attend a classified briefing on US war plans against China, including specific targets for attack. In the end, the meeting was reportedly canceled after news of it leaked to the press.

But the very fact that such a meeting was scheduled to take place raises the question: Does the Trump administration have a timetable for war with China, the country with the world’s largest population and economy and third-largest nuclear arsenal?

In January 2023, four-star General Mike Minihan, head of the Air Force’s Air Mobility Command, issued an internal memo predicting a US-China war by 2025. He wrote, referring to Chinese President Xi Jinping, “Xi’s team, reason, and opportunity are all aligned for 2025,” and urged troops to “consider their personal affairs” and practice by firing at “a 7-meter target,” emphasizing that “unrepentant lethality matters most. Aim for the head.”

In the discussion about the attack on Yemen, a major concern raised by Vance was that “the public doesn’t understand this or why it’s necessary.”

This is undoubtedly a central issue in the Trump administration’s war planning against China: How can the American people be made to accept a war on the other side of the world—one that would involve, at minimum, the deaths of a vast number of US troops and the expenditure of hundreds of billions of dollars, and at worst, the nuclear annihilation of major American cities?

A current article in *Foreign Affairs* raises this very question. Under the headline, “Would Americans Go to War Against China?”, the leading journal of US foreign policy argues that while “most Americans say that they want to pull back from the world”—that is, launch fewer wars—public opinion could shift if a war with China were framed as a defensive response to an attack on the United States.

The article declares, “But in a survey we conducted in July of ordinary Americans as well as of former US policymakers, we found that clear majorities support attacking China if the People’s Liberation Army were to hit US ships in the South

China Sea.”

This line of argument aligns with the views of Elbridge Colby, Trump’s nominee for undersecretary of defense for policy. In his 2021 book, *The Strategy of Denial*, Colby argued that the US must ensure any war with China appears as though Beijing “fired the first shot.” Washington, he wrote, must “deliberately make China have to strengthen the coalition’s resolve”—that is, provoke a response that can be used to justify war to the public and US allies.

Colby declared:

Perhaps the clearest and sometimes the most important way of making sure China is seen this way is simply by ensuring that it is the one to strike first. Few human moral intuitions are more deeply rooted than that the one who started it is the aggressor and accordingly the one who presumptively owns a greater share of moral responsibility.

In other words, in order for the United States to successfully mobilize public support for a war with China, it would have to stage a 21st-century version of the 1898 sinking of the USS Maine—used to justify the US seizure of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, or the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which was used to justify massive US escalation in the Vietnam War.

The leaked discussions of the attack on Yemen must be seen as a warning. The Trump administration, at the head of a predatory and criminal financial oligarchy beset by political, economic and social crisis, and confronting mounting domestic opposition, is capable of any crime, including the launching of a full-scale global war of aggression.



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