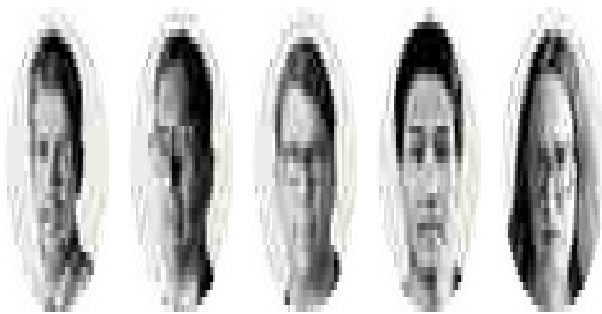


ELON MUSK GOT MASSIVE CONFLICT OF INTEREST INSIDER TRADING TIPS

Pentagon Set Up Briefing for Musk on Potential War With China

The access would be a major expansion of Elon Musk's government role and highlight his conflicts of interest.



By [Eric Schmitt](#)[Eric Lipton](#)[Julian E. Barnes](#)[Ryan Mac](#) and [Maggie Haberman](#)

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The Pentagon was scheduled on Friday to brief Elon Musk on the U.S. military's plan for any war that might break out with China, two U.S. officials said on Thursday.

Another official said the briefing would be China focused, without providing additional details. A fourth official confirmed Mr. Musk was to be at the Pentagon on Friday, but offered no details.

Hours after news of the planned meeting was published by The New York Times, Pentagon officials and President Trump denied that the session would be about military plans involving China. "China will not even be mentioned or discussed," Mr. Trump said in a late-night social media post.

It was not clear if the briefing for Mr. Musk would go ahead as originally planned. But providing Mr. Musk access to some of the nation's most closely guarded military secrets would be a dramatic expansion of his already extensive role as an adviser to Mr. Trump and leader of his effort to slash spending and purge the government of people and policies they oppose.

It would also bring into sharp relief the questions about Mr. Musk's conflicts of interest as he ranges widely across the federal bureaucracy while continuing to run businesses that are major government contractors. In this case, Mr. Musk, the billionaire chief executive of both SpaceX and Tesla, is a leading supplier to the Pentagon and has extensive financial interests in China.

Pentagon war plans, known in military jargon as O-plans or operational plans, are among the military's most closely guarded secrets. If a foreign country were to learn how the United States planned to fight a war against them, it could reinforce its defenses and address its weaknesses, making the plans far less likely to succeed.

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, according to officials with knowledge of the plan.

A White House spokesman did not respond to an email seeking comment about the purpose of the visit, how it came about, whether Mr. Trump was aware of it, and whether the visit raises questions of conflicts of interest. The White House has not said whether Mr. Trump signed a conflicts of interest waiver for Mr. Musk.

The chief Pentagon spokesman, Sean Parnell, initially did not respond to a similar email seeking comment about why Mr. Musk was to receive a briefing on the China war plan.

Soon after The Times published this article on Thursday evening, Mr. Parnell gave a short statement: "The Defense Department is excited to welcome Elon Musk to the Pentagon on Friday. He was invited by Secretary Hegseth and is just visiting."

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About an hour later, Mr. Parnell posted [a message](#) on his X account: "This is 100% Fake News. Just brazenly & maliciously wrong. Elon Musk is a patriot. We are proud to have him at the Pentagon."

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth also [commented on X](#) late on Thursday, saying: "This is NOT a meeting about 'top secret China war plans.' It's an informal meeting about innovation, efficiencies & smarter production. Gonna be great!"

Roughly 30 minutes after that social media post, [The Wall Street Journal confirmed](#) that Mr. Musk had been scheduled to be briefed on the war planning for China.

In his own post on social media early Friday, Mr. Musk said he looked forward to “the prosecutions of those at the Pentagon who are leaking maliciously false information to NYT.”

Whatever the meeting will now be about, the planning reflected the extraordinary dual role played by Mr. Musk, who is both the world’s wealthiest man and has been given broad authority by Mr. Trump.

Mr. Musk has a security clearance, and Mr. Hegseth can determine who has a need to know about the plan.



Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has already received part of the China war plan and is expected to present the information to Mr. Musk alongside top U.S. government and military officials. Kenny Holston/The New York Times

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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 U.S. plan to counter China in the event of military conflict between the two countries, the officials said.

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.

Operational plans for major contingencies, like a war with China, are extremely difficult for people without extensive military planning experience to understand. The technical nature is why presidents are typically presented with the broad contours of a plan, rather than the actual details of documents. How many details Mr. Musk had wanted or expected to hear was unclear.

Mr. Hegseth received part of the China war plan briefing last week and another part on Wednesday, according to officials familiar with the plan.

It was unclear what the impetus was for providing Mr. Musk such a sensitive briefing. He is not in the military chain of command, nor is he an official adviser to Mr. Trump on military matters involving China.

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March 6, 2025

But there is a possible reason Mr. Musk might have needed to know aspects of the war plan. If Mr. Musk and his team of cost cutters from the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, want to trim the Pentagon budget in a responsible way, they may need to know what weapons systems the Pentagon plans to use in a fight with China. Take aircraft carriers, for example. Cutting back on future aircraft carriers would save billions of dollars, money that could be spent on drones or other weaponry. But if the U.S. war strategy relies on using aircraft carriers in innovative ways that would surprise China, mothballing existing ships or stopping production on future ships could cripple that plan.

Planning for a war with China has dominated Pentagon thinking for decades, well before a possible confrontation with Beijing became more conventional wisdom on Capitol Hill. The United States has built its Air Forces, Navy and Space Forces — and even more recently its Marines and Army forces — with a possible fight against China in mind.

Critics have said the military has invested too much in big expensive systems like fighter jets or aircraft carriers and too little in midrange drones and coastal defenses. But for Mr. Musk to evaluate how to reorient Pentagon spending, he would want to know what the military intends to use and for what purpose.

Mr. Musk has already called for the Pentagon to stop buying certain high-priced items [like F-35 fighter jets](#), manufactured by one of his space-launch competitors, Lockheed Martin, in a program that costs the Pentagon more than [\\$12 billion](#) a year.

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Mr. Musk's company SpaceX has become so valuable to the Pentagon that the Chinese government has suggested that it might target SpaceX assets if a war with China were to break out. Valerie Plesch for The New York Times

Yet Mr. Musk's extensive business interests make any access to strategic secrets about China a serious problem in the view of ethics experts. Officials have said revisions to the war plans against China have focused on upgrading the plans for defending against space warfare. China has developed a suite of weapons that can attack U.S. satellites. Mr. Musk's constellations of low-earth orbit Starlink satellites, which provide data and communications services from space, are considered more resilient than traditional satellites. But he could have an interest in learning about whether or not the United States could defend his satellites in a war with China.

Participating in a classified briefing on the China threat with some of the most senior Pentagon and U.S. military officials would be a tremendously valuable opportunity for any defense contractor seeking to sell services to the military.

Mr. Musk could gain insight into new tools that the Pentagon might need and that SpaceX, where he remains the chief executive, could sell.

Contractors working on relevant Pentagon projects generally do have access to certain limited war planning documents, but only once war plans are approved, said Todd Harrison, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, where he focuses on defense strategy. Individual executives rarely if ever get exclusive access to top Pentagon officials for such a sensitive briefing, Mr. Harrison said.

“Musk at a war-planning briefing?” he said. “Giving the CEO of one defense company unique access seems like this could be grounds for a contract protest and is a real conflict of interest.”

Mr. Musk’s SpaceX is already being paid billions of dollars by the Pentagon and federal spy agencies to help the United States build new military satellite networks to try to confront rising military threats from China. SpaceX launches most of these military satellites for the Pentagon on its Falcon 9 rockets, which take off from launchpads SpaceX has set up at military bases in Florida and California.

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.

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.

Mr. Trump has already proposed that the United States build a new system the military is calling [Golden Dome](#), a space-based missile defense system that recalls what President Ronald Reagan tried to deliver. (The so-called Star Wars system Mr. Reagan had in mind was never fully developed.)

Perceived missile threats from China — be it nuclear weapons or hypersonic missiles or cruise missiles — are a major factor that led Mr. Trump to sign an executive order recently instructing the Pentagon to start work on Golden Dome.



The site of SpaceX Starbase in Boca Chica, Texas. The Pentagon briefing could help Elon Musk gain insight into new tools that the Pentagon might need and that SpaceX, where he remains the chief executive, could sell. Callaghan O'Hare for The New York Times
Even starting to plan and build the first components of the system will cost tens of billions of dollars, according to Pentagon officials, and most likely create large business opportunities for SpaceX, which already provides rocket launches, satellite structures, and space-based data communications systems, all of which will be required for Golden Dome.

Separately, Mr. Musk has been the focus of an investigation by the Pentagon's inspector general over questions about his compliance with his top-secret security clearance.

[The investigations](#) started last year after some SpaceX employees complained to government agencies that Mr. Musk and others at SpaceX were not properly reporting contacts or conversations with foreign leaders.

Air Force officials, before the end of the Biden administration, started their own review, after Senate Democrats [asked questions](#) about Mr. Musk and asserted that he was not complying with security clearance requirements.

The Air Force, in fact, had denied a request by Mr. Musk for an even higher level of security clearance, known as Special Access Program, which is reserved for extremely sensitive classified programs, citing potential security risks associated with the billionaire.

In fact, SpaceX has become so valuable to the Pentagon that the Chinese government has said it considers the company to be an extension of the U.S. military.

“Starlink Militarization and Its Impact on Global Strategic Stability” was the headline of one [publication](#) released last year from China’s National University of Defense Technology, according to a translation of the paper prepared by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Mr. Musk and Tesla, an electric vehicle company he controls, are heavily reliant on China, which houses one of the auto maker’s flagship factories in Shanghai. Unveiled in 2019, the state-of-the-art facility was [built with special permission](#) from the Chinese government, and now accounts for more than half of Tesla’s global deliveries. Last year, the company said in [financial filings](#) that it had a \$2.8 billion loan agreement with lenders in China for production expenditures.

In public, Mr. Musk has avoided criticizing Beijing and signaled his willingness to work with the Chinese Communist Party. In 2022, he wrote [a column](#) for the magazine of the Cyberspace Administration of China, the country’s censorship agency, trumpeting his companies and their missions of improving humanity.

That same year, the billionaire told The [Financial Times](#) that China should be given some control over Taiwan by making a “special administrative zone for Taiwan that is reasonably palatable,” an assertion that angered politicians of the independent island. In that same interview, he also noted that Beijing sought assurances that he would not sell Starlink in China.

The following year at [a tech conference](#), Mr. Musk called the democratic island “an integral part of China that is arbitrarily not part of China,” and compared the Taiwan-China situation to Hawaii and the United States.

On X, the social platform he owns, Mr. Musk has long used his account to praise China. He has said the country is “by far” [the world leader](#) in electric vehicles and solar power, and has [commended](#) its space program for being “far more advanced than people realize.” He has [encouraged](#) more people to visit the country, and [posited](#) openly about an “inevitable” Russia-China alliance.

Aaron Kessler contributed reporting.

Eric Schmitt is a national security correspondent for The Times, focusing on U.S. military affairs and counterterrorism issues overseas, topics he has reported on for more than three decades. [More about Eric Schmitt](#)

Eric Lipton is a Times investigative reporter, who digs into a broad range of topics from Pentagon spending to toxic chemicals. [More about Eric Lipton](#)

Julian E. Barnes covers the U.S. intelligence agencies and international security matters for The Times. He has written about security issues for more than two decades. [More about Julian E. Barnes](#)

Ryan Mac covers corporate accountability across the global technology industry. [More about Ryan Mac](#)

Maggie Haberman is a White House correspondent, reporting on the second, nonconsecutive term of Donald J. Trump. [More about Maggie Haberman](#)