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◆ **WSJ NEWS EXCLUSIVE** EUROPE

Pentagon Investigates More Social-Media Posts Purporting to Include Secret U.S. Documents

Documents include details on Ukrainian forces, U.S. arms provided to Ukraine



Ukrainian forces prepared a mortar behind military positions this week on the outskirts of Bakhmut, Ukraine.

PHOTO: OLEG PETRASUYK/SHUTTERSTOCK

By *Yaroslav Trofimov* [Follow](#) and *Nancy A. Youssef* [Follow](#)

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The Pentagon is investigating social-media posts that purport to reveal highly classified U.S. government documents on the war in Ukraine and other key international topics, in what could be one of the most dangerous intelligence breaches in decades.

Well over 100 images, marked with “Top Secret” and other classifications indicating they represent highly sensitive U.S.-produced intelligence, were posted in the Discord message board of fans of the Minecraft computer game around March 1. While many of them were deleted recently, open-source intelligence researchers have managed to download more than 60 files.

The documents, which appear to originate from within the U.S. military and intelligence agencies, include details about the disposition of Ukrainian forces

intelligence agencies, include details about the disposition of Ukrainian forces, air defenses and military equipment, classified information about arms and support the U.S. has provided to Kyiv in its fight against Russian invaders, and intelligence on internal matters in a variety of nations, including Israel and South Korea.

The Pentagon on Friday referred to its statement from Thursday evening, when the first tranche of six leaked documents appeared online. “We are aware of the reports of social-media posts, and the department is reviewing the matter,” Pentagon deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh said.

Ukraine said Friday it would take new measures to prevent potential leaks of its war plans.

At least six images of documents, some of them marked “Top Secret,” were published on Thursday by pro-Kremlin war commentators on Telegram. Some of the images, which can only be viewed by those with authorized clearance, appeared Wednesday on the 4chan online-messaging board. At least one document was altered in a Russian Telegram post to lower estimates of Russian losses and inflate Ukrainian casualties.

While the one image appeared to be altered, U.S. defense officials said they believe at least some of the other images were leaks of documents produced by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The leak rattled Pentagon officials. This week, the U.S. has already changed how military personnel access such documents, defense officials said. But they have yet to determine how the documents appeared online or what military installation they could have come from, the officials said.

Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was briefed about the leak on Wednesday afternoon, as was Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, the officials said. “We are aware of the reports of social-media posts, and the department is reviewing the matter,” Pentagon deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh said. The Pentagon hasn’t said who is leading that investigation.

The appearance of the documents comes at a sensitive time, as Ukraine prepares a spring push to recapture areas controlled by Russian forces, which now occupy roughly 18% of Ukrainian territory. The U.S. and its North Atlantic Treaty

Organization partners have been training and equipping nine Ukrainian Army brigades with Western heavy weapons, including the Leopard-2 and Challenger tanks, and Stryker, Marder and Bradley fighting vehicles. Ukraine is separately training several other combat brigades, under the auspices of the army, the national guard, the border service and other security agencies.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that he convened the country's top military commanders and security officials on Friday to discuss the planned offensive and the preparation of these new brigades. The meeting, he added in a statement, also discussed new "measures to prevent leaks of information about the plans of Ukrainian defense forces."

The photographed documents and maps, dated March 1, don't show the planned routes and timelines for the Ukrainian offensive. They do, however, purport to show the details of the training and preparation of these nine brigades, giving the number and type of tanks, fighting vehicles and artillery pieces allotted to each of them, as well as the countries through which the equipment enters Ukraine.

The photographs that leaked online appear to be of printed presentation slides and maps. Because classified documents can only be printed on approved systems, the U.S. government will likely have some record of who produced them, said Aram Gavoor, associate dean for academic affairs at George Washington University Law School and a national-security expert.



Ukrainian forces at a military training ground near a front line in the Zaporizhzhia region.

PHOTO: STRINGER/REUTERS

Documents receive a Top Secret designation when U.S. officials believe their disclosure could cause exceptionally grave damage to national security. “That means that the unauthorized release of these could lead to loss of life inside Ukraine,” said Mr. Gavor.

While both U.S. and Ukrainian officials were wary of sharing information with one another early in the war, fearing their plans may be compromised, mutual trust had improved in recent months. It is unclear to what extent this incident will complicate exchanges between the two nations.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Mr. Zelensky, said Friday that if Russia had genuine access to Pentagon information on the Ukrainian offensive, it wouldn’t have made it public, and would have used the knowledge to prepare a trap instead.

“It’s a bluff...Russia is seeking any means to regain the information initiative, to attempt influencing scenarios and plans of the Ukrainian counteroffensive,” he said. “As for the real plans of the counteroffensive—Russian troops, without a question, will be the first to become acquainted with them. I suppose that this may happen very soon.”

After initially publicizing doctored images that reversed a 2.5-to-1 fatality ratio in Ukraine’s favor to a 4-to-1 ratio in Russia’s favor, some pro-Russian commentators changed tack on Friday, casting doubt on the authenticity of the slides.

Russian military analyst Yuri Kotenok, whose Voenkor Kotenok Z channel has 420,000 followers on Telegram, suggested that the slides may have been deliberately planted by the U.S. ahead of the offensive to mislead Russia about the true strength and readiness of Ukrainian brigades.

“Isn’t that leak part of a big deception plan against Moscow on the verge of the intensification of combat on the frontline?” he wrote on Telegram.

One of the leaked slides indicates that British, American, French and Latvian special-operations troops are in Ukraine. None of these governments has said it has sent troops to Ukraine.

The overall number of special forces from NATO countries is below 100, according to the document. The document doesn't indicate whether those forces are involved in training or are involved in combat.

The documents also claim to give detailed estimates of the numbers of Russian and Ukrainian troops on the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk front lines, with Russia described as holding a numerical advantage on all three.

Write to Yaroslav Trofimov at yaroslav.trofimov@wsj.com