



BY T. J. EDWARDS

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...?

KEEPING AMERICA'S CLASSIFIED INFORMATION SECRET?



FROM 1991 THROUGH 2021, I served in the military across the United States and overseas (including three tours at the Pentagon and two combat tours in the Middle East). Over that period, I witnessed a range of security protocols and vigilance when it came to the access, storage, and protection of America's classified information and secrets. But I never witnessed a fool-proof system for keeping America's secrets safe.

It was always hard and meticulous work. It could even be hazardous duty with career ending consequences for those who didn't take handling classified information seriously enough. Not to mention the constant reminder in the back of your head, based on training and the importance of the classified material, that even an honest mistake meant mishandling classified documents could send you to jail. That is why I can't help wondering what is happening to our country's classified information and important secrets? Are we somehow more sloppy and less accountable with classified information? Is classified information now less secure or less protected than in the past?

I mean "What-the-heck?" is going on with America finding unauthorized classified documents publicly stored or released in social media? What is the story? In late 2022, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) raided the personal residence of a former president of the United States and found hundreds of unauthorized classified documents and materials. Then in February 2023, the FBI searched the personal residence our current president where they also found unauthorized classified documents. Searching a former vice president's residence yielded similar results. Let's be honest, these headlines do not actually inspire confidence when it comes to America's ability to secure and protect our classified information and secrets. "But wait, there is more..." as we often hear in television commercials. "More" classified documents seem to pop-up daily in public.

On April 10, 2023 the Associated Press published an article titled, "Leaked documents a 'very serious' risk to security, Pentagon says". That same day, the Washington Examiner reported, "The leak heard around the world: 'A nightmare' for US, NATO, and Ukraine".



America's most recent classified document breach allegedly comes from a 21-year-old Massachusetts Air National Guardsman (Jack Teixeira). He apparently posted more than 100 classified documents to the social media networking site *Discord*. These classified secrets spread to other interested audiences—to Twitter, the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Pentagon, and among numerous foreign governments (Russia, Ukraine, and China to name a few). At a minimum, this latest classified document breach is embarrassing to the U.S. military and our country.

America's leaders and intelligence officials must do more to properly protect and store our country's classified information and secrets. This isn't a Republican problem. It isn't a Democrat problem. This is an American problem. And it isn't an entirely new problem. During World War II for example, the Navy posted operational security posters that warned Sailors, "Loose Lips Sink Ships." This caution remains accurate today. What is a classified document - you ask? Unfortunately, a detailed answer takes significant time and explanation (which is part of the challenge). However, at the core, **classified documents are documents that contain sensitive information and are only accessible to authorized personnel.** These documents often contain infor-

mation related to national security, military operations, and other important matters. Classified documents play a critical role in ensuring the safety and security of a nation by keeping that information safeguarded. The U.S. system for classifying secrets is based on the idea that our government has access to significant information that is not available, or at least not widely available, to private citizens or organizations. Keeping classified information from falling into the wrong hands must remain non-negotiable for America and its leaders.

Foreign powers and adversaries want to use America's classified information to gain an advantage (militarily, diplomatically, financially, etc). We already know the devastating impacts that unauthorized data leaks have on public security, reputation, and finances. Information disclosure risks are even of greater concern in today's digital age. Risks not just to our country, but also to individuals and businesses.

We live in an increasingly connected and digital world. Thirty years ago, it took weeks and months to pull together the type of information necessary to create classified documents. Today, that timeline is considerably shorter. Given the explosion in new technologies like artificial intelligence, more and more data is available to collect and connect. In many cases, our government seems behind the curve in terms of even keeping up. The world we live in today is drastically different than just five years ago, let alone thirty years ago.



↑ Jack Teixeira



New technologies are giving rise to an altogether new threat: troves of personal data, much readily available, that can be exploited by foreign powers. This is why national security professionals and members of Congress are so concerned with the Chinese commercial company "Tik-Tok". Each new piece of information, by itself, is relatively unimportant. But combined, these pieces can give foreign adversaries unprecedented insights into the personal lives of many Americans.

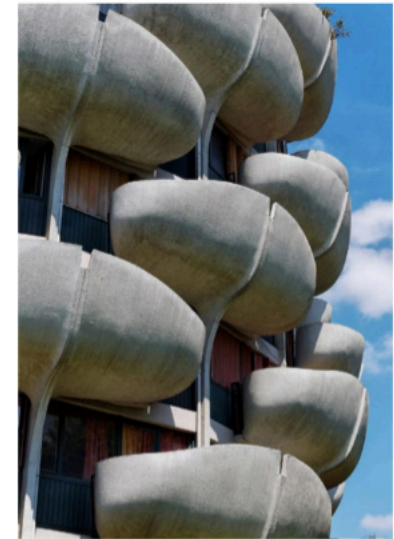
The United States must adapt its methods for protecting confidential and classified information. **It is essential to implement practical strategies for preventing leaks and protecting our nation's secrets. This can include using encryption technology, implementing access control measures, training employees on security best practices, and developing policies to prevent unauthorized access.** By taking these steps, our government and other organizations can seriously reduce the risk of data breaches and protect vital information from malicious actors.

With the advancements in technology, the protection of classified and confidential documents should be easier and more secure than ever before. We have technology solutions available now that enable organizations to protect their sensitive data from unauthorized access, malicious attacks, and other potential threats. Technology can also help organizations ensure that only authorized personnel have access to confidential documents. But technology alone isn't the only answer. Regrettably, technology isn't a fix-all or "easy-button." We still need strong American leadership when it comes to enforcing the discipline and precision required for handling and managing classified information. Americans should demand accountability from these leaders, as well as any other persons, groups, or adversaries caught leaking or mishandling classified information. A lack of leadership and accountability with America's classified information undermines our country's democracy and, increasingly, our U.S. national security. ■

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THE FACTOR

LES CHOUX DE CRÉTEIL



LES CHOUX DE CRÉTEIL (a/k/a The Cabages of Créteil) is a group of ten 15-story cylindrical residential buildings, in a suburb of Paris, France. The buildings were designed by architect Gérard Grandval and were completed in 1974. The area where the towers were built was an old cabbage field—no doubt the inspiration for the architect's design (and the name of the development).

The 5.5 feet tall, curved balconies were supposed to have all sorts of ornamental plants and small trees, but that never happened. In 1998 the municipality decided to upgrade the area, and, to encourage social intermixing, a fourth of the apartments were dedicated to students.

The project was recognized as a "Heritage of the 20th Century" by the French Ministry of Culture in 2008. ■



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