Obama setting up better security for computers

May 29 2009, By LOLITA C. BALDOR , Associated Press Writer

President Barack Obama returns a salute as arrives on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, Thursday, May 28, 2009. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

(AP) -- America has for too long failed to adequately protect the security of its computer networks, President Barack Obama said Friday, announcing he will name a new cyber czar to take on the job.

Surrounded by a host of government officials, aides and corporate executives, Obama said this is a "transformational moment" for the country, where computer networks are probed and attacked millions of times a day.

"We're not as prepared as we should be, as a government or as a country," he said, calling cyber threats one of the most serious economic and military dangers the nation faces.

He said he will soon pick the person he wants to head up a new White House office of cyber security, and that person will report to the National Security Council as well as to the National Economic Council, in a nod to the importance of computers to the economy.

While the newly interconnected world offers great promise, Obama said it also presents significant peril as well. The president declared: "Cyberspace is real, and so is the risk that comes with it."

Laying out a broad five-point plan, the president said the U.S. needs to provide the education required to keep pace with technology and attract and retain a cyber-savvy work force. He called for a new education campaign to raise public awareness of the challenges and threats related to cyber security.

He assured the business community, however, that the government will not dictate how private industry should tighten digital defenses.

Government officials have grown increasingly alarmed as U.S. computer networks are constantly assailed by attacks and scams, ranging from nuisance hacking to more nefarious probes and attacks, including suspicions of cyber espionage by other nations, such as China.

Obama noted that his own computer system for the presidential campaign at one point last year was compromised by hackers, but said the security of the names and financial information on contributors was intact.

published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.