Report: US would make Internet wiretaps easier

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The Obama administration is drawing up legislation to make it easier for US intelligence services to eavesdrop on the Internet, including email exchanges and social networks, The New York Times said Monday.

 Broad new regulations being drafted by the Obama administration would make it easier for law enforcement and national security officials to eavesdrop on Internet and e-mail communications like social networking Web sites and BlackBerries, The New York Times reported Monday.

The newspaper said the White House plans to submit a bill next year that would require all online services that enable communications to be technically equipped to comply with a wiretap order. That would include providers of encrypted e-mail, such as BlackBerry, networking sites like Facebook and direct communication services like Skype.

Federal law enforcement and national security officials say new the regulations are needed because terrorists and criminals are increasingly giving up their phones to communicate online.

"We're talking about lawfully authorized intercepts," said FBI lawyer Valerie E. Caproni. "We're not talking about expanding authority. We're talking about preserving our ability to execute our existing authority in order to protect the public safety and national security."

The White House plans to submit the proposed legislation to Congress next year.

The new regulations would raise new questions about protecting people's privacy while balancing national security concerns.

James Dempsey, the vice president of the Center for Democracy and Technology, an Internet policy group, said the new regulations would have "huge implications."

"They basically want to turn back the clock and make Internet services function the way that the telephone system used to function," he told the Times.

The Times said the Obama proposal would likely include several requires:

-Any service that provides encrypted messages must be capable of unscrambling them.

-Any foreign communications providers that do business in the U.S. would have to have an office in the United States that's capable of providing intercepts.

-Software developers of peer-to-peer communications services would be required to redesign their products to allow interception.

The Times said that some privacy and technology advocates say the regulations would create weaknesses in the technology that hackers could more easily exploit.