

Homeland Security and spy agency to work together

October 14 2010, By LOLITA C. BALDOR , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Computer experts at the secretive National Security Agency are teaming up with the Homeland Security Department in an effort to strengthen the nation's defenses against cyber attacks.

The partnership unveiled Wednesday raised concerns among civil liberties advocates, who say that safeguards are needed to ensure that the collaboration between the spy agency and Homeland Security does not wind up violating the privacy rights of U.S. citizens.

NSA and Homeland Security officials both said they are creating small teams that will work in the other agency's operations centers, a move designed to help them share lawfully gathered intelligence and provide Homeland Security faster access to the NSA's broad technical expertise.

The collaboration is a move to help the U.S. guard against the growing threat of cyber attacks against government and private computer networks. U.S. government and private networks are increasingly under attack by hackers and other [cyber criminals](#).

The officials said the plan will include increased oversight by legal and privacy professionals to insure that individuals rights are protected. But privacy officials said the new relationship must be watched closely, including by outside watchdogs.

"The National Security Agency has traditionally pulled computer security into the realm of secrecy and surveillance," said Marc

Rotenberg, executive director of the Washington-based [Electronic Privacy Information Center](#). "There is a great need to insure that the NSA's tools for surveillance are not directed at the American public."

Cyber security expert James Lewis, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said there was an initial reluctance within DHS and on Capitol Hill to move forward with the plan, with some suggesting it would be better to build the cyber expertise within Homeland Security.

But senior U.S. officials decided it would be faster and cheaper for Homeland Security to use NSA's facilities and experts, rather than try to duplicate them, officials said.

A senior Defense Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss policy matters, said the nation doesn't have the time or money to replicate what NSA is already doing. The NSA is part of the Defense Department, and the agreement was signed by Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Homeland Secretary Janet Napolitano.

The NSA has expertise developed over many years in dealing with encrypted foreign computer code or messages, Lewis said. If encrypted malicious code is detected, the NSA is the government agency best equipped to handle it, he said.

The new partnership will link the NSA, DHS and the military's newly created Cyber Command. The command is based alongside the NSA at Fort Meade, Md., and headed by the agency's director, Gen. Keith Alexander.

Officials said the Defense Department will send two teams of four to six experts each to the DHS cyber operations center. One would be from the NSA and the other would be from Cyber Command, and they would

allow the Defense Department to respond more quickly to DHS during a cyber attack or incident.

At the same time, DHS will send a team to the NSA, including Adm. Michael Brown, the deputy assistant secretary for [cyber security](#). His team would include privacy and legal personnel, to safeguard civil liberties.

The moves will not give DHS or the NSA any new missions or authority, officials said, adding that they will enable everyone to share information more quickly when faced with a cyber emergency.

More information: Online:

Defense Department: <http://www.defense.gov>

Homeland Security Department/Cybersecurity: <http://www.dhs.gov/files/cybersecurity.shtm>

National Security Agency: <http://www.nsa.gov/>

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