

Obama met IT, telecoms chiefs on surveillance (Update)

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US President Barack Obama speaks during a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC on August 8, 2013. Obama met with leaders of IT and telecoms giants, including Apple, Google and AT&T, to discuss controversial electronic surveillance programs.

President Barack Obama met at the White House with leaders of IT and telecoms giants, including Apple, Google and AT&T, to discuss

controversial electronic surveillance programs, Politico reported Friday.

The White House confirmed the meeting, which was not mentioned on the president's agenda for Thursday, but it did not identify the participants.

According to Politico, Obama met with Apple CEO Tim Cook, AT&T chief Randall Stephenson, and with Vinton Cerf, a renowned technologist considered one of the "fathers" of the Internet and now a Google employee.

The subject of the meeting, which also included representatives of privacy rights groups, was the secret National Security Agency programs revealed by former intelligence contractor Edward Snowden, the report said.

Wanted on US espionage charges, Snowden has taken refuge in Russia, which last week granted him temporary asylum, infuriating Washington.

Asked about the meeting, a White House official said on condition of anonymity that it "was part of the ongoing dialogue the President has called for on how to respect privacy while protecting national security in a digital era."

According to Politico, the White House had previously invited business leaders and interest groups to a meeting Tuesday with senior administration officials to discuss the issue.

Since Snowden's revelations, Obama has insisted that the surveillance programs are legal and have helped to save lives by preventing attacks. He also has assured Americans that no one is listening in on their telephone calls.

The programs routinely scoop up the phone records of millions of Americans and monitor Internet and social media exchanges for foreign intelligence purposes.

White House spokesman Jay Carney said on June 11 that Obama welcomed a debate on the surveillance but that it was necessary to strike a balance between security and privacy.

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