

US to keep NSA and cyber command chief's job unified (Update)

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A White House review will conclude that a sweeping US spy agency program to collect data on telephone calls and Internet use should continue but with new privacy safeguards, a report said Friday.

The *New York Times* also reported that President Barack Obama's study would recommend making public the privacy protections foreign citizens can expect when their telephone or Internet records are gathered by the National Security Agency.

Separately, a US official said the White House had also decided to maintain the "dual-hatted" arrangement which sees a single military officer head the NSA eavesdropping service and US cyber warfare operations.

The move comes as the administration finalizes a review ordered by Obama into the NSA's sweeping worldwide data and phone record collection, following revelations by fugitive intelligence contractor Edward Snowden.

The Times said that the committee conducting the review would recommend that top White House officials directly examine the list of foreign leaders whose communications are monitored by the NSA.

The protection will be introduced in the wake of a furor over revelations that US spies eavesdropped on the mobile phone of German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The Times also said that the White House review would create a body of legal professionals who would argue against lawyers for the NSA over espionage operations in the existing Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, which oversees surveillance.

White House officials declined to comment on the Times report, saying that the review was not yet finalized.

But officials said that the study into NSA operations in the wake of the Snowden affair was still expected to be delivered to the president by Sunday.

National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden also said that the White House had decided to maintain the current "dual-hatted" arrangement that sees a top military officer head the NSA and US Cyber Command.

Some critics of the current system had argued that the NSA and the military's cyber warfare command should be headed by different officials to avoid too much clandestine power residing in one official.

But Hayden said that after an interagency review, the administration "decided that keeping the positions of NSA Director and Cyber Command Commander together as one, dual-hatted position is the most effective approach to accomplishing both agencies' missions."

"NSA plays a unique role in supporting Cyber Command's mission, providing critical support for target access and development, including linguists, analysts, cryptanalytic capabilities and sophisticated technological infrastructure." Hayden said.

In practice, the decision means that the NSA will continue to be headed by a military officer—as the head of Cyber Command will of necessity

be a senior member of the armed services.

The current head of the two agencies, four-star General Keith Alexander, retires early next year.

Obama said last week that he would introduce some restraints on the NSA following the review.

It remains unclear when Obama will present unclassified findings of the report publicly.

A flurry of intelligence leaks from Snowden, who is living in temporary asylum in Russia, lifted the lid on a vast global spying network.

Tens of thousands of documents leaked by Snowden to The Guardian newspaper and other media outlets have detailed the vast scope of the NSA's shadowy activities.

Snowden's revelations made it clear that metadata and information from millions of emails and phone calls, incidentally, some of it about American citizens, has been systematically raked in by the NSA.

Civil rights groups have decried the NSA's activities as the actions of a Big Brother-like government, trampling on the rights of individuals with little oversight.

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