



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on June 2, 2009

President Obama's Cybersecurity Plan

[In his speech](#), the president pointed out that shortly after taking office he directed the National Security Council and Homeland Security Council to thoroughly review the federal government's efforts "to defend our information and communications infrastructure" and to recommend improvements. He mentioned that National Security Council Acting Senior Director for Cyberspace Melissa Hathaway led the review team, and that the 60-day review included input from industry, academia, civil liberty and privacy advocates, every level and branch of government, Congress, and other advisers — even input from "international partners."



To address the review's findings, the president has called for some changes, the most visible of which is the president's creation of a new White House office to be led by the "Cybersecurity Coordinator." The coordinator will be a member of both the National Security Staff and the National Economic Council. As of this writing, the Cybersecurity Coordinator had not yet been named.

President Obama's speech was filled with vague promises to "develop a new comprehensive strategy to secure America's ... networks," to "work with all the key players," to "strengthen ... public/private partnerships," to "invest in cutting edge research and development," and to "begin a national campaign to promote cybersecurity awareness and digital literacy." The federal government will supposedly do all of this while remaining "open and transparent." The president also vowed not to dictate security standards to private companies and not to monitor private sector networks or Internet traffic. He promised that "we will preserve and protect the personal privacy and civil liberties that we cherish as Americans."

These aren't going to be easy promises to fulfill, and perhaps it would be better if some weren't fulfilled at all. President Obama said that the promotion of cybersecurity awareness and digital literacy will include "a new commitment to education in math and science, and historic investments in science and research and development." Apparently we can count on the federal government becoming more involved in — and thus more in control of — education, and we can look forward to our taxpayer dollars being "invested" in research and development that private enterprise should be able to do more cost effectively. (NASA itself is turning to private companies to make space exploration more affordable; see details in our May 27 "[Obama Names Bolden for NASA](#).")

Regarding openness and transparency, these are not the words to describe how the government handles national security, and protecting cyberspace certainly impacts national security. See our April 19 "[Obama Supports Tapping Your Phone & Internet](#)" for just how strongly the president believes that "the United States must sometimes carry out intelligence operations and protect information that is classified for purposes of national security," even when that involves keeping classified the extent of



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federal surveillance of law-abiding Americans.

As for not monitoring private-sector networks or the Internet while supposedly preserving personal privacy and civil liberties, our aforementioned [“Obama Supports Tapping Your Phone & Internet”](#) notes that the National Security Agency under Obama has been conducting illegal snooping entailing “millions of [phone] calls and e-mail messages.” In this light, the president’s promises ring hollow.

This brings to mind that in March Rod A. Beckstrom, then-director of the National Cyber Security Center, resigned his post to protest lack of funding and the National Security Agency’s continued grab for power over federal cybersecurity matters. The National Cyber Security Center was established to coordinate security operations among various intelligence agencies, but Beckstrom said the NSA was attempting to bring his group under its control. The [Washington Post on March 10](#) quoted Beckstrom as saying, “It is very important that there be independence for the [center], and that it be able to carry out its role.”

It will be interesting to see what role the National Security Agency plays in President Obama’s brave new cyberworld.

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