

## Group Reports on US Intelligence-Gathering

From VOA Learning English, this is In the News.

A special advisory group in the United States is urging President Barack Obama to make changes to the government's surveillance programs. The group offered its suggestions in a report released this week.

Mr. Obama ordered the report on the intelligence gathering activities earlier this year. The order followed information leaks from Edward Snowden, a former National Security Agency contract worker. The leaks created a huge problem for the NSA and the president.

They also added to public knowledge about government information gathering, including the collection of data from telephone calls and activities on the Internet.

The surveillance programs are operating under U.S. congressional approval. They have been amended at different times, and are under the supervision of a special court.

Mr. Obama has described the programs as important to keeping Americans safe. But he has called for more "self-restraint" by the NSA.

In its report, the Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technologies proposes 46 changes. One is to end the government's storage of "metadata" of the telephone records of Americans. The report proposes that private companies or a non-government agency keep the records instead, not the NSA.

Another proposal is to require a court to approve individual searches of phone and Internet data records. The report also proposes limits on the NSA's power to study known targets of counter terrorism surveillance after they enter the United States.

The report is calling for a new process to identify "uses and limits of surveillance on foreign leaders and in foreign nations." It says decisions should consider whether other methods or targets of collection could provide needed information.

The review group met with President Obama on Wednesday after sending him their report last week.

Press secretary Jay Carney said President Obama plans to study the document over the holidays. He will speak to the nation about it next month after a separate government investigation is completed.

“The

president has been clear that even as we review our efforts and make some changes in how we do things, we will not harm our ability to face those threats. That is, his number one obligation as commander-in-chief.”

The official US position on Edward Snowden remains unchanged. The Obama administration says he should return to the United States to face criminal charges. It disagrees with suggestions that he receive a pardon to prevent him from releasing additional information.

Earlier this week a federal court ruled that secretly collecting the telephone records of Americans is likely unconstitutional.

Mr. Obama also faced pressure from leaders of high-tech companies. Reports said they urged him to make aggressive reforms, and expressed concern about damage to the United States’ image and business interests overseas.

The “60 Minutes” television program recently spoke with the head of the NSA, Keith Alexander. He denied that the agency is collecting e-mails or listening to the phone calls of Americans. He said the NSA’s job is foreign intelligence.

And that’s In the News, from VOA Learning English. I’m Faith Lapidus.