



Anne Neuberger, special assistant to NSA Director Keith Alexander, speaks with NPR's Tom Gjelten

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The controversy over the National Security Agency's surveillance programs has exposed a problem in the oversight of those programs: The development of the relevant technology has outpaced the laws and policies that govern its use.

"The technology is moving very fast," says Joel Brenner, a former NSA general counsel. "Legislation moves very slowly. Policy moves pretty slowly. The people who write policy don't always understand technology, and the people who write legislation almost never understand technology. And so in an era when the technology is moving quickly, it's really hard for the policy to keep up with it."

Examples of that mismatch arise from the NSA's main responsibility, which is to gather signal intelligence. Since the Sept. 11 attacks, its paramount mission has been to listen in when terrorists communicate.

Anne Neuberger, a special assistant to NSA Director Keith Alexander, says the challenge can be summed up in a single sentence: "Our duty," she says, "requires us to attempt to collect terrorist communications wherever they traverse global infrastructure."

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