

OMB'S NEW SECURITY MEMO SUGGESTS WIKILEAKS IS MEDIA

A number of outlets are reporting on the OMB memo requiring agencies to review their security procedures in response to WikiLeaks.

Now, this memo is explicitly a response to WikiLeaks. It's a follow-up on a memo sent in November that names WikiLeaks.

On November 28, 2010, departments and agencies that handle classified national security information were directed to establish assessment teams to review their implementation of safeguarding procedures. (Office of Management and Budget, Memorandum M-11-06, "WikiLeaks – Mishandling of Classified Information," November 28, 2010.)

And one of the questions it directs agencies to ask names WikiLeaks (and, in a sign of the government's nimbleness, OpenLeaks) specifically.

Do you capture evidence of pre-employment and/or post-employment activities or participation in on-line media data mining sites like WikiLeaks or Open Leaks?

But the delay—almost six months between Bradley Manning's arrest and the November memo, and another month until this memo, sort of reminds me of the roughly eight month delay between the time Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab tried to set his underwear on fire and the the time a bunch of grannies started getting groped at TSA security checkpoints.

Why the delay?

And from a document usability standpoint, this

list of questions designed to help agencies identify weaknesses is a piece of shit. Trust me. No matter how good a bureaucrat is, asking them to use nine pages of nested bullets to improve a process is not going to work. This is simply not a credible process improvement effort.

I also wonder why it took WikiLeaks to initiate this effort. Just as an example, Los Alamos National Labs has been losing both storage media, computers, and BlackBerries going back a decade. You'd think the vulnerability of one of our nuclear labs would alert the government to our overall vulnerability to the loss of data via computer medium. Yet losing data to—presumably—our enemies did not trigger this kind of no-nonsense vulnerability assessment, WikiLeaks did.

The Russians and the Chinese are probably bummed that WikiLeaks will make it a teeny bit harder for them to spy on us.

All that said, Steven Aftergood makes one curious observation about the memo: this unusable list of nested bullets suggests that agencies should monitor employees' contacts with the media.

Among other troubling questions, agencies are asked: "Are all employees required to report their contacts with the media?" This question seems out of place since there is no existing government-wide security requirement to report "contacts with the media." Rather, this is a security policy that is unique to some intelligence agencies, and is not to be found in any other military or civilian agencies. Its presence here seems to reflect the new "evolutionary pressure" on the government to adopt the stricter security policies of intelligence.

"I am not aware of any such requirement" to report on media contacts, a senior

government security official told
Secrecy News. But he noted that the DNI
was designated as Security Executive
Agent for personnel security matters in
the 2008 executive order 13467. As a
result, "I suspect that an IC
requirement crept in" to the OMB memo.

I agree with Aftergood: it is troubling that an
intelligence community requirement now seems to
be applied to the federal workforce as a whole.

But isn't this, at the same time, rather
telling?

If a memo instituting new security reviews,
explicitly written in response to WikiLeaks,
institutes a policy of reviewing contacts with
the media, doesn't that suggest they consider
WikiLeaks to be media?