

The Dual-Hat Debate: Why CYBERCOM and NSA Never Split

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This article was published in 2016. Research on this topic and find out whether there was a split between them. Were there any consequences? Also provide any interesting articles that support your findings.

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Nearly a decade after the national debate over whether U.S. Cyber Command (CYBERCOM) and the National Security Agency (NSA) should end their shared “dual-hat” leadership—where one four-star general or admiral leads both—they are still formally joined.

CYBERCOM was established in 2009 as part of the NSA, sharing staff, tools, and infrastructure with the NSA. Many expected the two would eventually split once CYBERCOM was fully established (Pomerleau, 2016). Some argued that unified leadership was valuable and should continue. Others said one person could not manage both roles and warned that using NSA intelligence tools in military operations could expose them (Di Pane, 2020). Trump attempted to separate the two agencies in the last weeks of his first term, but he ran out of time (Matishak, 2024). In his second term, his transition advisers prepared new separation plans to the dismay of some senior officials (among them Defense Secretary Hegseth and former DNI Gabbard). They agreed and concluded that the proposed breaks would be too disruptive to the not-yet-formed leadership team; the process would be too lengthy, arduous, and costly at that time, while the Trump Administration was pursuing other national security priorities during that same window period. Congress also strongly opposed a division of the agencies, voicing bipartisan concerns that it would slow operations and decrease security effectiveness just as threats from Russia, China, and other nations of concern increased (Matishak, 2025).

As a result, the dual-hat leadership remains in place. Most agree that the two organizations should separate only when CYBERCOM can operate independently while continuing to work closely with the NSA (Di Pane, 2020).

References

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