The National Security Agency was established on November 4, 1952, under a directive issued by President Harry S. Truman. The Central Security Service comprises the elements of the Armed Forces that perform signals intelligence and information assurance along with NSA. CSS was established under a presidential directive in 1972. Yet, code making and code breaking have influenced American history from the earliest days of the nation. General George Washington, leading the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War, is known as “America’s First Spymaster,” and the Culper Spy Ring used codes and other means to protect the information they were passing to Washington in support of his activities.

During the Civil War, both Union and Confederate soldiers sent encrypted messages and intercepted enemy communications. In 1917, British decryption of the Zimmermann Telegram helped push the United States into World War I. Intelligence derived by solving Japanese and German ciphers greatly influenced the war and saved countless lives. Likewise, breaking crossing communications was as important to the Allied victory in WWII as reading the enemy’s messages. The Marine Corps and Army trained Native Americans in radio communications; they used their own languages and codes in order to confused enemy soldiers who may have been listening. The Army and Navy also encrypted messages using the SIGABA, an extremely complex cipher that has never been broken by the enemy. The Cold War saw cryptography foster the development of new communications and computer technology. Today’s supercomputers, wireless communications, data storage devices, and verification systems owe much of their development to NSA.
TODAY, our national leaders, policymakers, warfighters, law enforcement agencies and Intelligence Community partners face some of the gravest national security challenges in U.S. history.

To respond to these threats to our nation, we need to understand our adversaries, their capabilities, and their plans and intentions. At the same time, we must protect our communications and information from those adversaries, and we must outmaneuver those adversaries in cyberspace.

INFORMATION ASSURANCE

Our nation's security depends on protecting data and information systems, and securely communicating classified or sensitive information that is critical to military and intelligence activities. To fulfill its information assurance mission, NSA is charged with protecting our most critical national security and telecommunications information and networks (national security systems) from daily attempts at exploitation of these systems by our adversaries.

NSA is not the only department or agency charged with protecting U.S. Government data and information systems. NSA works with U.S. Cyber Command, the Department of Homeland Security, and other agencies, all of which have an information assurance mission.

SIGNS OF INTELLIGENCE

NSA conducts its foreign signals intelligence mission by targeting, collecting, processing and analyzing the communications of our adversaries in order to provide actionable intelligence to our customers and partners.

NSA conducts intelligence products that inform decisions made by national leaders, support military operations, provide law enforcement to the military, and protect America's assets at home and abroad. Every signals intelligence product responds to a specific requirement, and our SIGINT activities are executed in strict compliance with the laws, regulations, and policies that govern those requirements.

INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

NSA’s Research Directorate is a robust “in-house” organization dedicated to advancing intelligence and information assurance through science. It is on the leading edge of research in multiple areas, including advanced telecommunications, quantum computing, and nanotechnology, including NSA and the U.S. Army Center of Technical Innovation. NSA also conducts a robust Technology Transfer program, aimed at sharing some of the results of cutting-edge fundamental research in both the public and private sectors.