



Air Force suspends Cyber Command program

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The Air Force on Monday suspended all efforts related to development of a program to become the dominant service in cyberspace, according to knowledgeable sources. Top Air Force officials put a halt to all activities related to the establishment of the [Cyber Command](#), a provisional unit that is currently part of the 8th Air Force at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, sources told Nextgov.

An internal Air Force e-mail obtained by Nextgov said, "Transfers of manpower and resources, including activation and reassignment of units, shall be halted." Establishment of the Cyber Command will be delayed until new senior Air Force leaders, including Chief of Staff Norton Schwartz, [sworn in today](#), have time to make a final decision on the scope and mission of the command.

The Cyber Command, headed by Maj. Gen. William Lord, touted on its Web site its capabilities to "secure our nation by employing world-class cyberspace capabilities" and had ambitious plans to have a cyber command presence in all [50 states](#).

The Cyber Command hyped its capabilities on TV, in Web video advertisements and in a series of high-profile presentations conducted by Lord. The hard sell may have been the undoing of the Cyber Command, which seemed to be a grab by the Air Force to take the lead role in cyberspace. Both the Army and Navy have similar expertise in cyber operations, service sources said.

Philip Coyle, senior adviser with the Center for Defense Information, a security policy research group in Washington, said he believes the Navy's Network Warfare Command and the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center have led the way in cyberspace. The Army engages in cyberspace operations daily in Afghanistan and Iraq, said Coyle, who served as assistant secretary of Defense and director of its operational test and evaluation office from 1994 to 2001.

The decision to ratchet back the Cyber Command may have come from Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who wants to see a greater role for the Navy in cyberspace, said an Air Force source. Coyle speculated that the Air Force may have been too public in pushing the Cyber Command and is now suffering from its own hubris.

The decision to pull the plug on the Cyber Command – even temporarily – is just the latest in a string of bad news for the service, Coyle said. This includes Defense Secretary Robert Gates' request in June for the resignations of Air Force Chief of Staff T. Michael "Buzz" Moseley and Air Force Secretary Michael Wynne because of the service's poor management of nuclear weapons. Also in June, the Government Accountability Office [questioned](#) the Air Force's selection of Northrop Grumman over Boeing for a multibillion-dollar aerial refueling contract and recommended that the service reopen the competition. [It did so in July](#).

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