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Passports probe focuses on worker

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- The State Department investigation of improper computer access to passport records of three presidential candidates is focusing on one remaining employee — a contract worker with a company headed by an adviser to the presidential campaign of Sen. Barack Obama

The probe by State's inspector general will include polygraph tests for supervisors in the passport section to find out whether the three contract employees who accessed the records had a political motive or were part of a political operation to obtain personal data on Mr. Obama, Sen. John McCain or Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Two of the three contract employees had been fired before The Washington Times first reported Thursday on security breaches involving Mr. Obama's passport records. The furor expanded yesterday to incidents involving the passport records of Mr. McCain and Mrs. Clinton.

The third employee, who has not been fired, worked for The Analysis Corporation (TAC), which is headed by John O. Brennan, a former CIA agent who is an adviser to Mr. Obama's presidential campaign on intelligence and foreign policy.

The TAC employee is the only individual to have accessed both Mr. Obama's and Mr. McCain's passport information without proper authorization, a State Department spokesman said. That employee, who was not named, triggered an electronic alarm system, officials familiar with the probe said.

The accessed records have the data provided in passport applications and used by the department to issue or renew travel documents.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said he was unaware of the specific activities of the IG investigation but said all three contract employees will be questioned.

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State Department officials said Thursday and yesterday that the intrusions appeared to be the result of "imprudent curiosity" on the part of contract employees who were hired last summer to help process passport applications.

In Portland, Ore., Mr. Obama said the series of attempts to "tap into people's personal records" were "a problem not just for me but for how our government functions."

"I expect a full and thorough investigation. It should be done in conjunction with those congressional committees that have oversight so it's not simply an internal matter," Mr. Obama told reporters.

Mr. McCain, who is traveling in France, called for an apology and a full investigation of the breach. "The United States of America values everyone's privacy and corrective action should be taken," he said.

Mrs. Clinton had not publicly commented by yesterday evening.

Mr. McCormack said the investigation also will determine whether the records of other high-profile political candidates were accessed improperly and whether there are "systemic" problems.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice promised that the department will carry out a "full investigation" and expressed anger about the breaches, as well as the failure to notify senior officials.

"It should have been known to senior management. It was not, to my knowledge. And we also want to take every step that we can to make sure that this kind of thing doesn't happen again," she said, adding apologies to all three candidates, starting with Mr. Obama.

"I was sorry and I told him that I myself would be very disturbed if I learned that somebody had looked into my passport file," Miss Rice said of her telephone apology yesterday to the Illinois senator. She also called Mrs. Clinton and Mr. McCain.

Officials do not know whether information was improperly copied, altered or removed from the database during the intrusions.

"We are looking at [whether] there is anything more to why these people did this other than inappropriate curiosity," said Patrick F. Kennedy, undersecretary of state for management, who is in charge of the passport offices.

State Department officials met for about 90 minutes with the Senate staffs of each candidate, along with the staff of Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr., Delaware Democrat and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who has jurisdiction over the Foreign Service.

Rep. Henry A. Waxman, California Democrat, sent a letter to Miss Rice demanding to know the names of the contract employees.

Besides the TAC employee, the State Department said the other two employees worked for Stanley Inc., a 3,500-person technology firm based in Arlington that this week won a \$570 million contract to continue providing passport services to the State Department, work the company has done since 1992.

TAC, a McLean-based information firm that has helped the State Department automate the Terrorist Watchlist over the last several years, issued a statement last night that it had been notified earlier in the day that one of its contractors had acted improperly. The firm said it had honored a State Department request not to fire its consultant to help the investigation.

"This individual's actions were taken without the knowledge or direction of anyone at TAC and are wholly inconsistent with our professional and ethical standards," the company wrote.

Calls to the Obama campaign about Mr. Brennan were not returned.

Mr. McCormack said yesterday there was a fourth person who breached the passport records, although he described it as a case of inadvertance. He said a passport office trainee last year was learning how to work with passport electronic records and searched for Mrs. Clinton's file as a test, but was "immediately admonished, and it didn't happen again."

Working-level supervisors confronted the three employees after a computer alarm system was triggered by the effort to access Mr. Obama's records.

"What didn't happen is that that information didn't rise up to senior management levels, so that we could be made aware of it. That should have happened," Mr. McCormack said.

If senior officials were alerted to the intrusions, additional safeguards would have been used to protect the data, Mr. McCormack said.

Officials said the computer alarm that was set off includes a notification mechanism that should have alerted State's inspector general. However, it is not clear whether the IG reviewed the improper computer activities, the officials said.

Acting Inspector General William E. Todd and the chief IG branch investigator, James B. Burch, a former U.S. Secret Service agent, are leading the passport probe, which began Thursday. Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey said his department was no reason yet to investigate.

Miss Rice and Mr. Kennedy did not learn of the breaches of Mr. Obama's personal data until The Times e-mailed questions about the security breaches on Thursday.

"As soon as we realized that there were these unauthorized accesses for Senator Obama's passport files, we collected the information, we briefed the secretary, we briefed Senator Obama's staff, all before we ever replied to the reporter," Mr. McCormack said.

"Then we replied to the reporter, and then we all talked to the rest of you as the questions came in," he said.

• *Jerry Seper contributed to this report.*
