

August 21, 2013 9:36 am

White House distances itself from destruction of Guardian servers

By Hannah Kuchler

The White House has distanced itself from the British government's destruction of journalistic material, saying it found it hard to imagine a situation where it would destroy a US media company's servers.

A spokesperson said on Tuesday it was "very difficult to imagine a scenario in which that would be appropriate" after The Guardian newspaper claimed two GCHQ officials destroyed servers holding documents related to its stories revealing a US mass surveillance programme.

The newspaper – which revealed the destruction after the partner of a journalist working on the story was detained for questioning under anti-terror laws – said it decided to allow the destruction after a threat of legal action by the government which could have stopped its reporting.

Alan Rusbridger, editor of The Guardian, stressed the newspaper had many copies of the same material, obtained from Edward Snowden, a former US National Security Agency contractor, stored in different countries.

The US government spoke out as it emerged that David Cameron, UK prime minister, had directly ordered a senior official to warn The Guardian about publishing documents related to the mass monitoring of phone and email communication.

Reports suggest Sir Jeremy Heywood, cabinet secretary, was the official asked directly by the prime minister and ministers to warn the newspaper.

Yvette Cooper, shadow home secretary, said on Wednesday morning that there may need to be a parliamentary inquiry into the prime minister's role.

"We don't know what was on the discs or what the material was that the government was pursuing. Clearly the government does have a responsibility to protect national security. However, I think this may be another area where an inquiry by the Intelligence and Security Committee may be the right way forward in terms of this particular case and what the prime minister's role was," she told the BBC's *Today* programme.

The UK government has robustly defended the police decision to detain David Miranda, partner of Guardian journalist Glenn Greenwald, saying it had the right to act if it believed he was carrying stolen information that could aid terrorists.

Mr Miranda was held for nine hours at London's Heathrow airport on Sunday and had his electronic equipment confiscated. The Brazilian national, now at home in Brazil, is taking legal action to challenge his detention under the Terrorism Act 2000 and to recover his equipment, while seeking assurances that British officials would not share the confidential material seized with anyone else.