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Adm. Mike Rogers — known around Washington for a gruff style — has struggled at times both to regain the public's trust and to keep more secret details about the government's spying tools under wraps. | Alex Brandon/AP Photo

NSA's Rogers to retire this spring

By **MARTIN MATISHAK** and **CORY BENNETT** | 01/05/2018 03:49 PM EST | Updated 01/05/2018 04:13 PM EST

NSA Director Adm. Mike Rogers has decided he will retire this spring, two former U.S. intelligence officials told POLITICO, ending a near four-year tenure bookended by major leaks that rattled the agency.

It's expected that President Donald Trump will nominate Rogers' successor this month, putting a final Senate confirmation vote two to three months away. The pending departure ends well over a year of rumors that the NSA chief was on his way out — willingly or not.

The Navy admiral was brought in to head the NSA in 2014 after former government contractor Edward Snowden made the agency's spying tools front-page news. He was immediately tasked with implementing some internal surveillance restraints amid outcries over the country's collection of Americans' personal information.

But Rogers — known around Washington for a gruff style — has struggled at times both to regain the public's trust and to keep more secret details about the government's spying tools under wraps. And morale at the agency has reportedly suffered, with many senior hackers and analysts leaving to collect big paychecks in the private sector.

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Just this past year, the NSA has been dealing with the online leak of its top-secret hacking tools by a mysterious group known as the Shadow Brokers. Despite the arrest of three NSA contractors or employees, there has been no public indication that the agency believes it has found the culprit.

Still, Rogers has lasted beyond the typical three-year assignment for NSA leaders, and has played an instrumental role in building up the military's cyber warfighting unit, known as U.S. Cyber Command, which Rogers also oversees.

Under Rogers' watch, the Pentagon's offensive cyber unit, once reliant on NSA resources and staff, will soon stand on its own and be granted the status of a "unified combatant command," on par with long-standing military units like Central Command. And by the

end of the 2018 fiscal year, Cyber Command is scheduled to reach full operational capability with 6,200 staffers across 133 teams.

Rogers' departure fits with a timeline a congressional aide told POLITICO last month, although there had been chatter that the admiral would stay on until the end of the 2018 fiscal year to steer Cyber Command's critical expansion.

That Rogers would have been able to dictate his own retirement would have seemed remarkable in mid-2016, when news outlets reported that the Obama administration's senior defense and intelligence leaders were imploring the White House to dismiss Rogers over the series of high-profile leaks of classified documents, as well as a slow start to the digital war against the Islamic State.

Trump to give award to top NSA veteran

By **JOSH GERSTEIN**

Obama administration officials were also miffed that Rogers had met with then-President-elect Trump — ostensibly to discuss a job in the incoming administration — without notifying his supervisors or the White House.

Since being retained by the Trump administration, Rogers has also angered some Capitol Hill lawmakers by declining to say whether the commander in chief had asked him to downplay the ongoing investigations into an election-year disinformation campaign the U.S. has blamed on Russia.

Internally, Rogers also caused some friction in 2016 with the controversial decision to merge the agency's offensive wing with its defensive teams. The reshuffling is meant to acknowledge the changing online landscape, where discovering software flaws is increasingly critical to both offensive hacking and bolstering digital defenses. But some employees and privacy advocates expressed concerns about mixing foreign espionage-focused units with the teams that protect American networks.

Still, the admiral has retained broad support on Capitol Hill and is widely respected in the national security community. And Rogers' proponents and detractors agree that his time at the helm will leave a mark on both the NSA and Cyber Command for years to come.

Top contenders to replace Rogers include Army Lt. Gen. William Mayville, who has been brought on as a deputy at Cyber Command to handle issues related to the outfit's elevation; Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Vincent R. Stewart, who was recently installed as Cyber Command's other deputy; Army Cyber Command chief Lt. Gen. Paul Nakasone;

and Navy Vice Adm. Michael Gilday, who currently commands the United States Fleet Cyber Command and U.S. 10th Fleet.

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