

Vindicated: Trump Campaign Members Were Monitored by the US Intel Community

Wednesday afternoon, U.S. Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, sent a shock wave through Washington, D.C., with this startling announcement:

At our open hearing on Monday, I encouraged anyone who has information about relevant topics—including surveillance on President-elect Trump or his transition team—to come forward and speak to the House Intelligence Committee. I also said that, while there was not a physical wiretap of Trump Tower, I was concerned that other surveillance activities were used against President Trump and his associates.

I recently confirmed that, on numerous occasions, the intelligence community incidentally collected information about U.S. citizens involved in the Trump transition.

Details about U.S. persons associated with the incoming administration—details with little or no apparent foreign intelligence value—were widely disseminated in intelligence community reporting.

I have confirmed that additional names of Trump transition team members were unmasked.

To be clear, none of this surveillance was related to Russia or any investigation of Russian activities or of the Trump team.

The House Intelligence Committee will thoroughly investigate this surveillance and its subsequent dissemination to determine:

- who was aware of it
- why it was not disclosed to Congress
- who requested and authorized the additional unmasking
- whether anyone directed the intelligence community to focus on Trump associates; and
- whether any laws, regulations, or procedures were violated.

I've asked the Directors of the FBI, NSA, and CIA to expeditiously comply with my March 15 letter, and to provide a full account of these surveillance activities. I informed Speaker Ryan this morning of this new information, and I will be going to the White House this afternoon to share what I know with the President.

Asked about the new revelations, and whether or not he felt vindicated, President Donald Trump said he did feel somewhat vindicated. Earlier in the week, he had told FOX News Channel's Tucker Carlson that he expected "interesting developments" to unfold in the days ahead.

Democrats and the liberal mainstream media, who had just been celebrating that "Trump was under investigation" and that there was "no evidence to support his [wiretapping] tweets], had a complete meltdown. The committee's ranking Democrat, Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), blasted Nunes for taking the information to the president:

This afternoon, Chairman Devin Nunes announced he had some form of intercepts revealing that lawfully gathered intelligence on foreign officials included information on U.S. persons, potentially including those associated with President Trump or the President himself. If accurate, this information should have been shared with members of the committee, but it has not been. Indeed, it appears that committee members only learned about this when the chairman discussed the matter this afternoon with the press. The

chairman also shared this information with the White House before providing it to the committee, another profound irregularity, given that the matter is currently under investigation. I have expressed my grave concerns with the Chairman that a credible investigation cannot be conducted this way.

As to the substance of what the chairman has alleged, if the information was lawfully gathered intelligence on foreign officials, that would mean that U.S. persons would not have been the subject of surveillance. In my conversation late this afternoon, the chairman informed me that most of the names in the intercepted communications were in fact masked, but that he could still figure out the probable identity of the parties. Again, this does not indicate that there was any flaw in the procedures followed by the intelligence agencies. Moreover, the unmasking of the U.S. person's name is fully appropriate when it is necessary to understand the context of collected foreign intelligence information.

Because the committee has still not been provided the intercepts in the possession of the chairman, it is impossible to evaluate the chairman's claims. It certainly does not suggest—in any way—that the president was wiretapped by his predecessor.

“Wiretapping” is an antiquated term based on the process used with analog telecommunications equipment to listen in on conversations. Today, every conversation is automatically captured by the telecommunications companies and can be searched for key words, phrases or voice patterns by the various entities of the intelligence community—and its foreign partners, like the British GCHQ.

But federal law prohibits surveillance of Americans without a warrant, and when an American citizen is determined to have been captured in a conversation with a foreign entity, the details are to be limited in nature, unless they are critical

to national security. Even then, the identity of the citizen is supposed to be “masked”—identified only as “a U.S. person.”

“Unmasking” a U.S. citizen without a warrant is illegal. Sharing intelligence gathered about a U.S. citizen is also illegal, and punishable by up to 10 years in prison. That is why Nunes described these new revelations as “deeply troubling.”

But there’s still a lot we don’t know about this situation. So, let’s open the reporter’s notebook and go through that, bit by bit:

Who—

- was conducting the surveillance (NSA, CIA, FBI)?
- ordered the surveillance?
- authorized the surveillance (usually, a FISA Court judge)?
- was the target of the surveillance?
- was “incidentally” captured?
- collected the information?
- disseminated the information?
- received the intercepts?
- read or received the intercepts, but didn’t have proper clearance to do so?

What—

- was the substance of the conversations captured between Trump staffers and the foreign nationals being targeted?
- was the national security importance of those conversations that prompted detailed reporting?
- did President Trump know about the conversations that were being intercepted?
- information was shared outside the intelligence community?
- role did the Obama administration play in all of

this?

- role did the Clinton campaign play in all of this?

Where—

- were these Trump staffers when their conversations were intercepted?
- did the calls being target originate from?

When—

- was the surveillance ordered?
- was the surveillance authorized?
- did the surveillance begin?
- did the surveillance end?
- did the heads of the intelligence community agencies learn of the intercepts?
- did they plan to tell Congress and the public about the intercepts?

Why—

- was the surveillance ordered?
- was the surveillance authorized?
- were Trump staffers “incidentally” intercepted?
- were U.S. citizens’ conversations recorded in detail if they were not the target of the surveillance?
- were the intercepts so detailed as to allow someone to know the identity of the Americans involved, even if they weren’t “unmasked”?
- were the intercepts disseminated throughout the intelligence community?
- were the intercepts shared with the press?
- did the intelligence chiefs deny there was any surveillance of President Trump and his staffers?
- didn’t the intelligence chiefs announce the “incidental” intercepts?

As you can see, there is still much to be investigated. So far, news reports suggest the NSA has been cooperating with the investigation, but the FBI may not. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) has already suggested that if inquiries aren't answered by the end of the week, a joint select panel may have to be convened with subpoena powers to compel the intelligence community to answer those questions. {eoa}