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Trump 'Wiretap' Truther Rand Paul Now Thinks Obama Spied on Him, Too

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In a speech at the CATO Institute in Washington DC on Friday, Senator Rand Paul intends to explain why he believes that he and other U.S. lawmakers may have been spied on by the Obama administration.

Paul is a steadfast supporter of President Trump's false claim that his campaign was "wiretapped" by the Obama White House and now believes that he, too, may have been on the receiving end of some malicious bugging.

The Senator revealed his concerns via Twitter on Friday, announcing that he had "formally requested" information about whether he was a surveillance target. A letter from Paul was reportedly sent to the White House, as well as both intelligence committees. Paul's office declined to provide Gizmodo with a copy of the letter, but a spokesman said that he intended to "blast it far and wide" this afternoon. (Circa will apparently receive a copy first.)

Paul's surveillance allegations are a "last minute addition" to his CATO speech, which had already been booked for the organization's 40th anniversary event, the spokesman said.

Friday morning, Circa published excerpts from another letter that Paul reportedly sent to the President Trump nearly a month ago. It claims that an "anonymous source" informed him that his name, as well as the the names of other members of Congress, were "unmasked, queried or both, in intelligence reports of intercepts during the prior administration."

"In light of the revelations that the names of persons associated with the Trump campaign were unmasked," Paul wrote, "I believe the allegations that myself and other elected members of the legislative branch may have also been unmasked or caught in the intelligence gathering warrants investigation." Paul's letter to Trump was also reportedly copied to White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, as well as senior Trump advisor Steve Bannon.

According to Circa, Paul believes the National Security Agency specifically responsible. The agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Allegations that the names of Americans were improperly unmasked in intelligence reports surfaced after Trump falsely claimed that President Barack Obama put a "tap" on his phones at Trump Tower in New York. FBI Director James Comey has publicly denied any such wiretapping occurred, as did NSA chief Michael Rogers, House Speaker Paul Ryan, and former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper.

The term “unmasking” typically refers to a process whereby a senior official requests to see the name of US citizen blacked out in an intelligence report. American names are frequently swept up in foreign intercepts. This is referred to as “incidental collection.” To comport with the Fourth Amendment, US intelligence analysts are required to black out the names of any US persons collected. Senior White House officials may request to have a name unmasked, however, under certain circumstances; typically this is done only when it’s necessary to help understand the intelligence.

Unmasking the name of a US person additionally requires approval from one of 20 high-ranking NSA officials.

In a second tweet on Friday, Paul also questioned whether the Obama administration may have spied on journalists, clergy, lawyers, and federal judges, though he provided no evidence to support his theory.

In an interview with Fox News in March, Paul claimed that “everybody admits that somebody spied on Mike Flynn, and he was part of the Trump campaign. So, it sounds like what the president said has already been proven true.” But that’s incredibly misleading.

Flynn was intercepted because he was communicating with a Russian ambassador, and the NSA targets the communication of all Russian officials, among other foreigners. That is the agency’s purpose. Flynn also lied about the substance of those conversations, which is why he was fired after only three weeks on the job.

The president’s claim is that the Obama administration specifically “wiretapped” the phones in his private office. That, simply put, never happened.