



Rand Paul: 'I'm Worried That I Could be Targeted by My Own Intelligence Community'

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Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) said Thursday that he's worried that he's a surveillance target of the U.S. intelligence community, while pointing to the events surrounding former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn's dismissal.

President Trump dismissed Flynn in February after revelations that he misled Vice President Mike Pence, White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus and Press Secretary Sean Spicer about communications with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak concerning U.S. sanctions. Intelligence officials reportedly recorded Flynn's conversations prior to his taking office, which allowed the administration to discover the contradictions.

"Should a national security advisor's conversation with a foreign leader be eavesdropped on, then leaked to the media?" Paul asked during a conversation at the Cato Institute concerning Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. "That leak to the media shows that they are powerful enough – he was taken down by an intelligence community operative in our country. ... I'm worried that I could be targeted by my own intelligence community."

The Kentucky lawmaker added that eavesdropping and subsequent leaking to the press needs to be punished, regardless of politics. He said millions of Americans are changing their behavior because of the intelligence community's surveillance program, and "that's wrong." He also noted that 10 members of Congress communicating with Israeli leaders were recently subject to surveillance.

FISA Section 702 allows agencies to track international communications with foreign targets suspected of terror plots and other harmful acts. The intelligence community targets foreigners, but data from American citizens, including emails, may be collected incidentally if the Americans are in contact with the foreign surveillance targets. According to Paul, intelligence officials can gather information from Americans if they simply mention a foreign target, which could include anyone from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to the nondescript mention of a "Baghdadi."

"So you could be involving basically every single American on this," said Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), who has collaborated with Paul in fighting the surveillance program.

Lawmakers on the House Judiciary Committee have demanded that Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats provide an estimate for the number of Americans who are subject to the 702 program, which expires on Dec. 31. After a missed April deadline for the estimate, Coats appeared before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in June, when he told Senate lawmakers that producing a public estimate would be “infeasible” given the sheer volume of data collected. The House Judiciary Committee is currently weighing reauthorization for Section 702.

Paul said the intelligence community has the attitude that “if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear,” which he described as a “bizarre notion” made under the assumption that government always does good, ignoring the abuses of surveillance.

Wyden criticized the Obama administration for supporting this “false dichotomy” that the American public can’t have both 100 percent security and privacy. He quoted President Obama, who suggested that a safe country is worth the cost of losing some amount of privacy. Wyden predicted that the Trump administration will try to expand surveillance efforts, specifically the ability to issue national security letters to obtain Americans’ browsing history. The Obama administration made multiple attempts to allow NSL retrieval of browsing data.

If the Trump administration makes a similar effort, or attempts to weaken encryption, Wyden said, “I will close down the United States Senate over that issue, in order to try to block it,” a comment that was met with a round of applause.

“You can have policies that make us safer and protect our liberties, and foolish policies often give you less of both,” he said.