

DID DEVIN NUNES JUST REVEAL NSC IS MONITORING AGENCY RESPONSE TO CONGRESS?

Multiple outlets this morning are covering Devin Nunes' admission that he was on "White House grounds" last Tuesday, leading up to his Wednesday announcement that Trump officials' identities may (or may not have) been unmasked in intelligence reports unrelated to Russia.

One source told CNN that Nunes, a California Republican, was seen on the White House grounds the day before his announcement. In a phone interview, Nunes confirmed to CNN that he was on the White House grounds that day – but he said he was not in the White House itself. (Other buildings, including the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, are on the same grounds.)

No one in the White House was aware that he was there, Nunes said.

The California Republican said he was there for additional meetings "to confirm what I already knew" but said he wouldn't comment further so as to not "compromise sources and methods."

He told CNN he wanted to "reiterate this has nothing to do with Russia."

Nunes went to the building because he needed a secure area to view the information, he told CNN. A government official said Nunes was seen Tuesday night at the National Security Council offices of the Eisenhower building which, other than the White House Situation Room, is the main area on the

complex to view classified information in a secure room.

Nunes explained to Eli Lake he couldn't use HPSCI's own SCIF, just two miles away, because it didn't have networked access to the reports that he was being shown.

In an interview Monday, Nunes told me that he ended up meeting his source on the White House grounds because it was the most convenient secure location with a computer connected to the system that included the reports, which are only distributed within the executive branch. "We don't have networked access to these kinds of reports in Congress," Nunes said. He added that his source was not a White House staffer and was an intelligence official.

Laura Rozen notes that Nunes' former aide, Michael Ellis, now works as NSC Deputy Legal Adviser.

New special assistant to the president, NSC deputy legal adviser Michael Ellis served as Nunes' aide, HPSCI gen. counsel til early March 3/

Whether or not Ellis is Nunes' source, it seems clear that someone in the EEOB first told, then shared, intercepts with Nunes.

That raises questions about how said source obtained the intercepts. That's true particularly given that by Nunes' later admission that some of the names weren't unmasked per se, but rather described in such a way that would make the US person (that is, the Trump associate) clear, so it's not like the NSC could just search on all of Trump's top aides to find out if their names had been unmasked.

Remember, too, that this takes place against the background of HPSCI's requests to NSA, CIA, and

FBI for details on all the US persons who had been unmasked between June 2016 and January 2017. NSA had provided a partial response (basically deferring an answer until they could do more research) before last week's hearing and Nunes' press conference. But it's not clear whether FBI intended to reply – it would have several possible reasons for refusing to do so, both to protect an ongoing investigation but also because unmasking is not the question to ask FBI, database searches are (it's not clear how many of HPSCI's Republicans understand this, which is pathetic).

In any case, NSA and CIA (at least) are already in the process of responding to this request. But someone worked his or her own angles to respond to the same request for Nunes.