

JAMES CLAPPER: UNMASKING AND/OR JEFF SESSIONS?

I'm traveling so I'll have to lay out my thoughts about the Comey firing later.

But for the moment I want to point to a detail in Monday's hearing that deserves more attention now.

Early in the hearing, Chuck Grassley asked both Sally Yates and James Clapper if they have ever unmasked a Trump associate or member of Congress. Yates said no, but Clapper revealed he had unmasked someone, but couldn't say more.

GRASSLEY: OK. I want to discuss unmasking.

Mr. Clapper and Ms. Yates, did either of you ever request the unmasking of Mr. Trump, his associates or any member of Congress?

CLAPPER: Yes, in one case I did that I can specifically recall, but I can't discuss it any further than that.

GRASSLEY: You can't, so if I ask you for details, you said you can't discuss that, is that what you said?

CLAPPER: Not – not here.

Grassley returned to the issue for clarification later on. Clapper said he had asked to have the identity of *both* a member of Congress *and* a Trump associate unmasked. But then he said he had only asked on one occasion.

GRASSLEY: Mr. Clapper, you said yes when I asked you if you ever unmasked a Trump associate or a member of Congress. But I forgot to ask, which was it? Was it a Trump associate, a member of Congress, or both?

CLAPPER: Over my time as DNI, I think the answer was on rare occasion, both. And, again, Senator, just to make the point here, my focus was on the foreign target and at the foreign target's behavior in relation to the U.S. person.

GRASSLEY: OK. How many instances were there, or was there just one?

CLAPPER: I can only recall one.

Finally, Lindsey Graham returned to the issue at the close of the hearing. Clapper confirmed he had made a request to unmask a Trump associate and a member of Congress.

You made a request for unmasking on a Trump associate and maybe a member of Congress? Is that right, Mr. Clapper?

CLAPPER: Yes.

Obviously, there's plenty of room for confusion in these exchanges, and Clapper has a history of sowing confusion in Congressional testimony.

But if it is true that he has only unmasked one person but that he has unmasked both a Trump associate and a member of Congress, it would suggest he unmasked the identity of a member of Congress who is a Trump associate.

If that's right, there are several possibilities for who it could be: transition official Devin Nunes, national security advisor Richard Burr, and national security official Jeff Sessions.

But the most likely is Sessions, because we know he was talking to Sergey Kislyak and the intelligence community has pulled their collection on Kislyak.

Even if that's the case, it's unsurprising Sessions' communications with Kislyak have been reviewed and unmasked.

Still, it is a data point from Monday's hearing that makes Sessions' role in the firing of Jim

Comey worth noting.