

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

KEITH B. ASHDOWN, STAFF DIRECTOR
GABRIELLE A. BATKIN, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

September 25, 2015

The Honorable James R. Clapper
Director of National Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20511

Dear Mr. Clapper:

We write to express our concern about recent allegations of manipulation of intelligence reporting to reflect the President's narrative that the U.S. is winning the war against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and al Nusra.¹ We request your help in assessing these claims.

According to news reports, intelligence analysts allege that you influenced U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Intelligence Directorate leadership to ignore or inappropriately alter intelligence assessments that did not conform to the Administration's narrative of success in the war against ISIL and al Nusra.² According to one such article, you maintained a near-daily dialogue with the director of the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate that potentially influenced him and his civilian deputy to discount conflicting information from their subordinate analysts.³

According to the reports, intelligence analysts at CENTCOM experienced a culture of suppressing dissent within the Intelligence Directorate, creating an environment that no longer allows analysts to give a candid assessment of the situation in Iraq and Syria to senior policy makers.⁴ Such was the culture of suppression that some who complained were purportedly urged to retire, and did.⁵ In July, finding no reprieve from complaints made to CENTCOM leadership, two senior intelligence analysts at the organization filed a formal complaint with the Inspector General of the Department of Defense with 50 other analysts supporting the complaint.⁶

¹ E.g., Spencer Ackerman, *US Spy Chief's 'Highly Unusual' Reported Contact with Military Official Raises Concerns*, THE GUARDIAN, September 11, 2015, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/sep/10/james-clapper-pentagon-military-official>; Editorial, *Centcom's Intel Massage*, WALL ST. J., Sept. 18, 2015, available at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/centcoms-intel-massage-1442616260>; Shane Harris & Nancy A. Youssef, *50 Spies Say ISIS Intelligence Was Cooked*, THE DAILY BEAST, September 9, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/09/exclusive-50-spies-say-isis-intelligence-was-cooked.html>; see also, e.g., Mark Mazzetti & Matt Apuzzo, *Inquiry Weighs if ISIS Analysis was Distorted*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 26, 2015, at A1, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/26/world/middleeast/pentagon-investigates-allegations-of-skewed-intelligence-reports-on-isis.html>.

² Ackerman, *supra* note 1; Harris & Youssef, *supra* note 1.

³ Ackerman, *supra* note 1.

⁴ Harris & Youssef, *supra* note 1.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ E.g., *id.*; Mazzetti & Apuzzo, *supra* note 1.

These allegations are very troubling. Our nation is supported by a community of dedicated and hard-working intelligence analysts known for their integrity and reasoned, objective reporting. That reporting serves as an essential basis for informed policy decisions. Manipulating, ignoring, or intimidating analysts to alter their work to reflect a political narrative does a disservice to our country. These actions, if accurate, will have long-term negative effects on the culture at the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate, its intelligence assessments, and policy decisions based on those assessments. Allegations that you are inappropriately influencing one intelligence agency also raise questions about the potential for inappropriate influence of other agencies in the Intelligence Community (IC).

Therefore, for these reasons, the Committee is conducting an inquiry into these allegations. In order to assist the Committee in this inquiry, we respectfully request that you provide the following information and documents as soon as possible, but no later than October 9, 2015:

1. As principal advisor to the President on intelligence matters and head of the IC, what is your assessment of the current status of ISIL and al Nusra in Iraq and Syria? What is your assessment of the effectiveness of U.S. efforts to combat ISIL and al Nusra to date?
 - a. For example, in your estimate or assessment, have U.S. and coalition efforts against ISIL and al Nusra within Iraq and Syria significantly diminished the groups' ability to reinforce their base or project force outside the region or required them to change their operations?
 - b. In your estimate or assessment, has the limited nature of the U.S. effort against ISIL in Iraq and Syria created an environment in which the U.S. faces a greater ISIL threat projecting outside the region?
 - c. What are the common dissenting views to the estimates and assessments above from analysts in the IC?
2. What is your response to the allegations regarding your improper influence of the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate?
3. What is your response to the allegations regarding a culture within CENTCOM's Intelligence Directorate of suppressing dissenting views and those views inconsistent with the President's narrative on the wars against ISIL and al Nusra?
4. What was the frequency and nature of your interactions with Army Major General Steven Grove and Gregory Ryckman?
5. When did you and when did your staff first learn of the allegations regarding your improper influence of the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate and how did you learn of them?

6. What steps have you taken and what steps do you plan to take to address the allegations regarding your improper influence of the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate? How do you and your subordinates cultivate dissenting views among analysts in the IC?
7. What is the nature and status of any investigations within the IC about the allegations regarding your improper influence of the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate?
8. Will the Intelligence Community Whistleblowing and Source Protection Office (ICW&SP) conduct an investigation into the allegations regarding your improper influence of the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate?
9. Please provide the Committee with an unredacted copy of the report(s) of each investigation(s) ICW&SP or any other IC member conducts into the allegations regarding your improper influence of the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate, upon conclusion of the investigation(s).
10. Please produce copies of each complaint your office has received regarding improper alteration of intelligence assessments or influence in the production and review of intelligence assessments at the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate for the past 12 months.
11. Please produce a copy of your schedule that includes meetings or communications with Army Major General Steven Grove or Gregory Ryckman for the past 12 months.
12. Please produce all communications and documents memorializing communications between you and Army Major General Steven Grove or Gregory Ryckman for the past 12 months.
13. Please produce all documents and communications sent or received by you or ODNI staff referring or relating to allegations of your improper influence of the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate.

For purposes of this request, please refer to the definitions and instructions in the enclosure. Additionally, to the extent possible, please provide an unclassified response to this letter. Should a complete response necessitate production of classified information, you may provide that to us under separate cover via the Office of Senate Security. In addition, we request that you make your staff available for a briefing following your response to these questions and keep the Committee apprised of any IC investigation(s) into the allegations regarding the Administration's improper influence of the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate on an on-going basis.

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is authorized by Rule XXV of the Standing Rules of the Senate to investigate "the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of all agencies and departments of the Government."⁷ S. Res. 445 (108th Congress)

⁷ S. Rule XXV(k); *see also* S. Res. 445, 108th Cong. (2004).

affords the Committee broad legislative, oversight, and investigative jurisdiction over issues of national security and inspectors general. S. Res. 73 (114th Congress) authorizes the Committee to examine “the efficiency and economy of operations of all branches of the Government including the possible existence of fraud, misfeasance, malfeasance, collusion, mismanagement, incompetence, corruption or unethical practices . . .” as well as “the efficiency and economy of operations of all branches and functions of the Government with particular reference to the effectiveness of present national security methods, staffing, and processes, as tested against the requirements imposed by the rapidly mounting complexity of national security problems”⁸

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Elizabeth McWhorter or William McKenna of Chairman Johnson’s staff at (202) 224-4751 and Taryn Frideres of Senator Ernst’s staff at (202) 224-3254. Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
Chairman



Joni Ernst
U.S. Senator

cc: The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Minority Member

Enclosure

⁸ S. Res. 73 § 12, 114th Cong. (2015).