

UNCLASSIFIED



**(U) Initial Findings of the
U.S. House of Representatives
Joint Task Force
on
U.S. Central Command
Intelligence Analysis**

August 10, 2016

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) Initial Findings of the House Joint Task Force on CENTCOM Intelligence Analysis

(U) Table of Contents

(U) Executive Summary

1. (U) Introduction

- a. (U) Allegations: CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate Leadership Directed a Positive Narrative Regarding Iraq and Syria
- b. (U) Joint Task Force Investigation
- c. (U) Description of Joint Task Force Review Efforts
- d. (U) Further Efforts

2. (U) Background: The Rise of ISIL and Deteriorating Security in Iraq

3. (U) Findings: Analytic Environment at the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate

- a. (U) CENTCOM Made Significant Process and Organizational Changes in its Intelligence Directorate
 - i. (U) Analytic Review Team
 - ii. (U) Intelligence Fusion Center
 - iii. (U) Daily Intelligence Summary
 - iv. (U) External Coordination
- b. (U) CENTCOM Senior Leaders Exercised Greater Control Over Analytic Products
 - i. (U) Reliance on Operational Reporting
 - ii. (U) “Softening” the Analysis and Increasing Uncertainty of Possible Outcomes
- c. (U) CENTCOM’s Analytic Positions Were More Positive Regarding the Efforts to Combat ISIL Than Those of IC Elements
- d. (U) Survey Results Demonstrated Leadership Deficiencies at CENTCOM
- e. (U) CENTCOM Senior Leaders Frequently Communicated Directly with the Director of National Intelligence
- f. (U) DOD Public Statements Were More Positive than Intelligence Supported

4. (U) Conclusions and Recommendations:

- a. (U) CENTCOM Should Formalize and Document its Analytic Processes and Procedures
- b. (U) DIA Should Improve Oversight of Defense Intelligence at the COCOMS
- c. (U) CENTCOM and IC Leaders Should Address the Command Climate at the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate
 - i. (U) CENTCOM
 - ii. (U) Intelligence Community
- d. (U) Continued Efforts by the DODIG

(U) Executive Summary

(U) The Joint Task Force was created by the Chairmen of the House Armed Services Committee, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense to investigate the allegations of a whistleblower that intelligence produced by U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) had been manipulated to present an unduly positive outlook on CENTCOM efforts to train the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and combat the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Although investigations into the whistleblower's allegations continue, the Joint Task Force has conducted sufficient investigation to reach certain interim conclusions. Those conclusions are contained in this report. However, the Joint Task Force awaits the completion of the ongoing Department of Defense Inspector General (DODIG) investigation into this matter.

(U) Based on its own investigation, the Joint Task Force has substantiated that structural and management changes made at the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate starting in mid-2014 resulted in the production and dissemination of intelligence products that were inconsistent with the judgments of many senior, career analysts at CENTCOM. These products were consistently more optimistic regarding the conduct of U.S. military action than that of the senior analysts. Based on specific case studies evaluated by the Joint Task Force, during the time period evaluated by the Joint Task Force, CENTCOM produced intelligence that was also significantly more optimistic than that of other parts of the Intelligence Community (IC) and typically more optimistic than actual events warranted. Additionally, many CENTCOM press releases, public statements, and congressional testimonies were also significantly more positive than actual events.

(U) The leadership environment within CENTCOM and its Intelligence Directorate deteriorated significantly following the 2013 departure of Marine General James Mattis and his senior intelligence leaders. Survey results provided to the Joint Task Force demonstrated that dozens of analysts viewed the subsequent leadership environment as toxic, with 40% of analysts responding that they had experienced an attempt to distort or suppress intelligence in the past year. While the Joint Task Force heard testimony that the environment slowly began to improve following the initiation of the DODIG investigation in mid-2015, many issues persisted until the arrival of Army General Joseph Votel and the new head of CENTCOM's intelligence directorate (also known as the J2).

(U) Starting in mid-2014, CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate leadership instituted various organizational and process changes that negatively affected the quality and timeliness of intelligence production. CENTCOM senior leaders claimed these changes were intended to improve analytic tradecraft and timeliness, but the changes ultimately were unsuccessful and had the opposite effect. Many of these changes in the review and coordination process have since been reversed.

(U) Furthermore, senior leaders also relied on details reported from coalition forces rather than more objective and better documented intelligence reporting. The Joint Task Force can find no justifiable reason why operational reporting was repeatedly used as a rationale to change the

UNCLASSIFIED

analytic product, particularly when the changes only appeared to be made in a more optimistic direction. By supplanting analytic tradecraft with unpublished and ad hoc operational reporting, Joint Intelligence Center (JIC) leadership circumvented important processes that are intended to protect the integrity of intelligence analysis.

(U) Analytic integrity is crucial to good intelligence, and good intelligence is crucial to making informed policy judgments. To ensure analytic integrity going forward, the Joint Task Force makes the following recommendations and assessments:

- (U) The Joint Task Force is troubled that despite receiving the whistleblower complaint in May 2015 and receiving alarming survey results in December 2015, neither CENTCOM, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, nor the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) took any demonstrable steps to improve the analytic climate within CENTCOM. The survey results alone should have prompted CENTCOM and IC leaders to take corrective action without other inducements.
- (U) The new CENTCOM commander and Director of Intelligence should continue to address the significant deficiencies in the management of the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate.
- (U) The CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate should formalize and document its processes and procedures including those governing the coordination and review of intelligence assessments, the inclusion of operational reporting in intelligence products, the operation of the CENTCOM Intelligence Fusion Center, and mechanisms to properly align public statements and congressional testimony with intelligence assessments.
- (U) CENTCOM should ensure that analytic best practices are institutionalized to ensure continuity through leadership transitions.
- (U) The DIA should take ownership of its role as leader of the Defense Intelligence Enterprise, and significantly increase its analytic oversight and review of intelligence products generated by the Combatant Command (COCOM) intelligence centers. In particular, DIA should reexamine its role in ensuring analytic integrity, and increase the scope and power of formal review mechanisms, such as the Analytic Ombudsman.
- (U) The statements by senior IC leadership to downplay the significance of the incidents at CENTCOM were an inappropriate response from individuals charged with leading the IC in preserving analytic integrity.
- (U) The Joint Task Force did not receive access to all the materials it requested. The Joint Task Force expects the DODIG to review and assess further documents and internal e-mails, as well as the statements of many additional DOD employees, and to fully investigate any allegations of reprisals.

(U) Initial Findings of the House Joint Task Force on CENTCOM Intelligence Analysis**1. (U) Introduction****a. (U) Allegations: CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate Leadership Imposed a Positive Narrative Regarding Iraq and Syria**

(U) On May 28, 2015, an analyst assigned to CENTCOM filed a formal complaint with the DIA Inspector General (DIA IG) regarding a matter of “urgent concern” and requested that the DIA IG transmit his complaint to Congress. Initially, there was some question as to whether the Intelligence Community Whistleblower Protection Act (ICWPA) would apply because the whistleblower was a DIA employee at a COCOM. The DIA IG subsequently forwarded the complaint to the Inspector General for the Intelligence Community, who then forwarded it to the congressional intelligence committees. Based upon concerns with the Executive Branch’s interpretation of the ICWPA, the House-passed Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 definitively establishes that DIA employees at COCOMs are protected under the ICWPA.

(U) The complaint alleges that senior leaders within the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate and JIC, including the Director of Intelligence and other senior intelligence staff, violated regulations, tradecraft standards, and professional ethics by modifying intelligence assessments to present an unduly positive outlook on CENTCOM efforts to train the ISF and combat ISIL.

b. (U) Joint Task Force Investigation

(U) On December 11, 2015, the Chairmen of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the House Armed Services Committee, and the Subcommittee on Defense of the House Appropriations Committee established a Joint Task Force to investigate allegations that senior CENTCOM officials inappropriately manipulated intelligence products to more positively characterize efforts to combat ISIL. In addition to looking into the specific allegations, the Joint Task Force was tasked with examining whether these allegations reflect systemic intelligence problems at CENTCOM or any other relevant intelligence organizations. Representatives Ken Calvert, Mike Pompeo, and Brad Wenstrup were selected to comprise the Joint Task Force and undertake this investigation.

(U) This report presents the initial findings of the Joint Task Force. While the committees’ oversight work continues, the Joint Task Force believes it necessary to issue an initial report. The Joint Task Force’s work is only one component of broader oversight by the three committees and other bodies. Since mid-2015, the DODIG has been conducting an entirely separate but parallel “high priority” investigation into whether there was improper manipulation of intelligence and/or deviations from appropriate processes regarding intelligence analysis within the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate.¹ The substantial resources and forensic investigative capabilities of the DODIG will necessarily allow that office to produce a comprehensive report, which may also inform any future congressional action. Media outlets have also raised allegations of possible reprisals against individuals within the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate.² The Joint Task Force expects the DODIG to fully investigate the allegations of reprisals as part of their ongoing efforts, and will consider further investigation by

the committees based upon the results of the DODIG investigation.

(U) The Joint Task Force will continue its efforts and will carefully assess the DODIG report when that report is complete, as well as the various reports directed in Fiscal Year 2017 House-passed legislation.

c. (U) Description of Joint Task Force Review Efforts

(U) In undertaking its work, the Joint Task Force³ has conducted nearly 25 hours of classified transcribed interviews; travelled twice to CENTCOM headquarters for briefings, observations, and further discussions; received briefings in Washington; reviewed analytic products provided by the Department of Defense (DOD); and evaluated survey results and related material submitted in connection with the President's Fiscal Year 2017 budget request.

(U) The Joint Task Force interviewed five CENTCOM analysts. In order to further understand the CENTCOM analytic process, the Joint Task Force also interviewed two individuals whose positions gave them special insight into the command's analytic activities and the operations of the Intelligence Directorate. Furthermore, the Joint Task Force interviewed one uniformed and two civilian senior leaders of the Intelligence Directorate. The Joint Task Force also spoke by phone with the analyst who originally broached concerns.⁴ The Joint Task Force prioritized interviews with analysts other than the original complainant so it could discern the extent to which others in the organization had similar impressions as those expressed in the whistleblower's formal written complaint.

(U) Additionally, the Joint Task Force requested interviews with four more analysts whose positions provided them with visibility into the allegations. These analysts declined to be interviewed. Although they did not express their reasons for declining, the Joint Task Force is concerned that some of the analysts may have done so out of fear of potential reprisals for their testimony. For example, as the Joint Task Force's interviews were commencing, the Director of the DIA publicly characterized reports of the whistleblower's allegations as exaggerations.⁵ It must also be noted that, pursuant to longstanding arrangements between DOD and the Armed Services Committee, DOD insisted on having department officials present during Joint Task Force interviews.

(U) The Joint Task Force also reviewed finished intelligence analysis including various monthly, weekly, and daily intelligence products. The Joint Task Force focused its evaluation on products produced during four specific campaigns in Iraq. Though the Joint Task Force requested the production of a significant number of intelligence products from these campaigns, DOD has produced only a portion of the requested reports to date. The Joint Task Force also reviewed press statements and congressional testimony by CENTCOM officials, as well as analytic objectivity survey results provided by the ODNI.

d. (U) Further Efforts

(U) Through the course of the investigation, many interviewees identified various intelligence products that had not been provided to the Joint Task Force. While the Joint Task Force has requested these products, they have not been provided at this time. The committees

therefore expect that the Analytic Line Review directed in the report to accompany the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2017 will further address the specific discrepancies in analytic lines between CENTCOM and other IC components. The committees expect this review to include a detailed assessment of line-in/line-out changes made or directed by CENTCOM leadership.

2. (U) Background: The Rise of ISIL and Deteriorating Security in Iraq

(U) Following the withdrawal of U.S troops from Iraq in December 2011, the security situation in Iraq continued to pose significant challenges for the Iraqi government. As neighboring Syria devolved into civil war in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring, the Iraqi government continued to struggle to achieve political unity among Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish factions, resulting in rising tensions throughout 2012 and 2013. Islamist forces began capturing significant territory across Syria and Iraq in early 2014, culminating in the fall of Mosul to ISIL in early June 2014.

(U) In August 2014, the United States, under the operational control of CENTCOM, started conducting airstrikes in Iraq against ISIL and in support of the ISF and Kurdish forces.⁶ With the renewed U.S. involvement in combat in Iraq, the intelligence assessments of the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate began to assess the operational situation on the ground; implicit in these evaluations was an indirect evaluation of the effectiveness of U.S. strategy and efforts against ISIL. In May 2015, ISIL forces captured the city of Ramadi, losses that were not reversed until the ISF ultimately restored control of Ramadi in December 2015. As of July 2016, Mosul remains under ISIL control, over two years after it was initially overrun.

(U) Given these ongoing conflicts, the timeframe covered by the allegations represents a particularly urgent period at CENTCOM. The operational tempo within the Intelligence Directorate was (and remains) especially high, even for a workforce which has already been working at an accelerated pace for over a decade.

3. (U) Findings: Analytic Environment at the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate

a. (U) CENTCOM Made Significant Process and Organizational Changes in its Intelligence Directorate

(U) Throughout the Joint Task Force interviews, many analysts described multiple organizational and process changes which senior leaders instituted within the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate from June 2014 into early 2015. Although many interviewees recounted changes that slowed the intelligence output at a crucial time, there was disagreement on the putative reasons for the changes. While the whistleblower and some analysts described the changes as a method to increase leadership control of analytic products, other analysts disagreed, explaining that they viewed the changes as a legitimate response to the increased pace of production occasioned by the ISIL threat, coupled with preexisting efforts to improve the consistency and quality of CENTCOM's intelligence products. Some analysts were unable to ascribe motives to the changes, but agreed that the rationale for them was not clearly understood in the JIC. Some analysts, including the whistleblower, stated that the effect of these changes was

to slow the review process or to alter the analysis such that the final products no longer reflected the views or analytic judgment of senior, career intelligence analysts. For instance, senior leaders could now more directly modify key analytic judgements made by career analysts.

(U) There was also a full leadership turnover within the Intelligence Directorate during the summer of 2014. Although General James Mattis, the previous CENTCOM commander, was forced to depart abruptly in early 2013, his Intelligence Directorate leadership remained in place under his replacement, Army General Lloyd Austin, through the first half of 2014. In May 2014 a new Vice Director of Intelligence arrived at CENTCOM. A new Director of Intelligence arrived in early June 2014, just days before the fall of Mosul and after only a “quick” overlap visit with his predecessor. The JIC commander also changed in August 2014, just two months into the crisis. While there was continuity within the JIC senior analyst corps, the full turnover of Intelligence Directorate leadership within a three-month span during the start of the crisis likely contributed to confusion and uncertainty regarding newly-implemented processes and procedures.

(U) These changes, including the establishment of the Intelligence Fusion Center and changes to the analytic review process, are detailed below:

i. (U) Analytic Review Team

(U) In 2014 the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate established an Analytic Review Team (ART) to improve the quality and consistency of the JIC’s products. Initially a single individual, the team grew to a handful of senior reviewers selected by the JIC’s senior intelligence analyst for their knowledge of “quality tradecraft” used in producing lengthy finished intelligence products. The ART offered a way to supplement the senior analyst's effort to provide “coaching” and “feedback” when reviewing products, especially (but not exclusively) those written by less experienced analysts.

(U) However, interviewees reported to the Joint Task Force that there was some resistance within the JIC to the establishment of the ART. At least initially, the ART's engagement slowed the final production of some products. Certain analysts, including those with longer tenures at CENTCOM, also objected to having their work subjected to a layer of scrutiny beyond a three-tier review process that had prevailed at CENTCOM for many years. One interviewee reported the potential for “personality conflicts” between analysts and ART members. In addition, the manner in which ART members were selected was informal, and the manner in which the ART was established and managed may have set conditions for resentment and confusion.

ii. (U) Intelligence Fusion Center

(U) In June 2014, with the ISIL threat apparent, CENTCOM established an intelligence “fusion center,” a specially equipped JIC facility staffed around-the-clock, to serve as a “focal point” for ISIL-related intelligence. Interviewees recalled only informal communications noting the center’s establishment, and some were also uncertain about the center’s organizational structure, responsibilities, and how it was determined which JIC analysts would participate. The establishment of the Intelligence Fusion Center also removed some analysts who had the most experience with respect to ISIL and Iraq,

including those whose analytic views often conflicted with those of CENTCOM's senior intelligence leaders, from the production of daily intelligence products. This impact was especially significant given the critical analytic tasks of the Intelligence Fusion Center at this time of paramount importance in the theater.

iii. (U) Daily Intelligence Summary

(U) During the period in question, the Fusion Center produced a daily intelligence summary (INTSUM) for the CENTCOM Commander to encapsulate the most recent intelligence reporting. Following the fall of Mosul in June 2014, these summaries grew in length from a few pages to well over ten pages in length. During the height of the crisis in Iraq in October 2014, Intelligence Directorate senior leadership increased their personal involvement in the daily editing and production of the INTSUM, including by directing changes to the format and function of the INTSUM, which was reduced to two to three pages in length and refocused to address more strategic topics. In some analysts' minds, senior leaders changed the size and scope of the INTSUM in order to be able to better control the content of the product. Other analysts explained that the retooling was a legitimate improvement to better address the needs and interests of the CENTCOM commander and other senior customers.

iv. (U) External Coordination

(U) Similarly, interviewees described changes to the process (known as "coordination") in which CENTCOM proffered comments on draft intelligence products produced outside the command. Coordination is an important practice within the IC which ensures analysts are able to hear alternate viewpoints before producing finished analysis. Public statements by CENTCOM representatives emphasized close collaboration with other elements of the IC,⁷ but many interviewees indicated that in late 2014, senior CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate leaders instructed analysts to cease all external coordination with other IC analysts. The authority to coordinate was restricted to senior officials only, including to leaders of the Fusion Center. Other special arrangements were also put into place to notify the Director of Intelligence in the event that analysts sought to formally "dissent" from analysis produced elsewhere. The restrictions on collaboration have since been partially rescinded.

(U) Some interviewees reported that they considered these changes to be minor "refinements" or clarifications to established procedures that were justified as an effort to "synchronize" the assessments that the Fusion Center was producing around the clock. The policy was also said to be necessary because products likely to have wide dissemination or flag-officer readership warranted Intelligence Directorate senior staff involvement.

(U) To other interviewees, however, these were substantial procedural revisions which had the consequence of slowing or halting CENTCOM's coordination in violation of analytic best practices. In their view, the coordination restrictions diminished the overall quality of analysis on ISIL across the IC, as products were not able to fully (if at all) incorporate CENTCOM analysts' subject matter expertise.

b. (U) CENTCOM Senior Leaders Exercised Greater Control Over Analytic Products

(U) Following the fall of Mosul and the start of U.S.-led offensive efforts, the Intelligence Directorate senior leadership increased their involvement in the review and editing of various intelligence assessments, including the daily INTSUM and externally coordinated products. Interviewees explained that senior leadership regularly performed line-in/line-out edits and wording changes which were perceived by analysts as more frequent than previous Intelligence Directorate leadership. Many survey comments from CENTCOM analysts described how the increased involvement by senior leaders hampered the pace of output and led to delays in the review and production of many intelligence products. Analysts were waiting in line for a substantial period of time for senior leadership feedback before products were able to be released.

(U) Although all interviewees agreed that senior editing of the INTSUM and other products significantly increased, senior leaders in the JIC disagreed with many line analysts and their managers as to the motivation, propriety, and result of a modified editing process. Senior leaders viewed these changes in control as productive, and explained their increased involvement based upon enhanced visibility of CENTCOM products during the crisis, and generally characterized their involvement as focused on improving analytic tradecraft and the production process. Intelligence Directorate leadership also justified and defended their assessments claiming unique knowledge of the operational situation based upon their insight from senior-level CENTCOM meetings and interactions with representatives of other directorates at CENTCOM and forward-deployed personnel.

(U) The Joint Task Force identified two consistent themes in senior-level edits:

i. (U) Reliance on Operational Reporting

(U) Interviewees indicated that Intelligence Directorate senior leaders regularly pressed CENTCOM analysts to better align their products with, or incorporate inputs from, operational reporting. Senior leaders voiced their opinions that CENTCOM analysts did not adequately account for operational details and observations provided by U.S. and coalition units directly engaged in countering ISIL or working with those who were. Analysts indicated that senior leaders often countered intelligence reporting with such information, although it was not reflected in serialized intelligence reporting. While senior leaders denied that operational reporting was biased in a particular direction, multiple analysts disagreed, noting that the deference to operational reporting resulted in analysis that was more positive regarding the capabilities of the ISF and the progress of the fight against ISIL than could be justified or supported by the vetted, serialized intelligence reporting on which analysts customarily rely. According to multiple interviewees, operational reporting was used as a justification to alter or “soften” an analytic product so it would cast U.S. efforts in a more positive light. No interview provided any instances where operational reporting was used as a justification to come to a more pessimistic conclusion. Additionally, numerous interviewees indicated that analytical products which conflicted with operational reporting were routinely subject to more stringent scrutiny than those that did not.

ii. (U) “Softening” the Analysis and Increasing Uncertainty of Possible Outcomes

(U) Additionally, analysts indicated that CENTOM Intelligence Directorate leadership consistently “softened” intelligence assessments to provide more uncertainty regarding possible outcomes. Analysts described the leadership as risk-averse and unwilling to accept uncertainty in intelligence analysis—which by its very nature deals in probabilities and contingencies rather than certainties. Survey results also indicated that multiple analysts felt that assessments were frequently edited to more positively reflect the situation on the ground.

c. (U) CENTCOM’s Analytic Positions Were More Positive Regarding the Efforts to Combat ISIL Than Those of IC Elements

(U) DOD provided the Joint Task Force with a limited set of CENTCOM finished intelligence products and coordinated analytic positions. Based upon the Joint Task Force’s review of these CENTCOM analytic positions, there was a consistent trend that across four specific campaigns against ISIL in Iraq throughout 2014 and 2015, assessments approved by the J2 or JIC leadership were consistently more positive than those presented by the IC. Additionally, the selected ISIL weekly and monthly products for CENTCOM senior-leader consumption were generally more positive than similar products not produced for, and unlikely to be seen by, the CENTCOM Commander. While a full examination of the analytic assessments requires classified details, public statements by IC leaders provide an unclassified reference point for IC judgments. In February 2015, the Director of the DIA stated that “defeats of the Iraqi Security Forces and the collapse of multiple army divisions highlight large-scale institutional deficiencies” and in March 2015 the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency stated that “ISIL is well-armed and well-financed. Its fighters are disciplined, committed, and battle hardened...[and ISIL] will not be rolled back overnight.”⁸

d. (U) Survey Results Demonstrated Leadership Deficiencies at CENTCOM

(U) The annual Analytic Objectivity and Process Survey , directed by the ODNI, was conducted from August through October 2015, and included responses from 125 analysts and managers within CENTCOM. The survey results were significantly worse than those of other IC agencies or COCOMs, and showed that a substantial number of CENTCOM respondents felt their supervisors distorted, suppressed, or substantially altered analytic products. Over 50% of analysts responded that CENTCOM procedures, practices, processes and organizational structures hampered objective analysis, and 40% responded that they had experienced an attempt to distort or suppress intelligence in the past year. Yet despite receiving these results in December 2015, CENTCOM and IC leaders did not take corrective actions to address many of the issues identified in the survey results.⁹

(U) In addition to generating the numerical summary-level results, the survey allowed participants to add comments regarding their responses. The Joint Task Force was provided with a redacted copy of these comments, in which all information that could specifically identify the respondents had been removed. Of the 71 comments, 32 included direct allegations of distortion of intelligence to fit a positive narrative, and an additional 26 comments raised broader tradecraft or process concerns. Of note, four separate comments alleged that products were delayed or altered to avoid conflicting with senior officials’ testimony to Congress.

e. (U) CENTCOM Senior Leaders Frequently Communicated Directly with the Director of National Intelligence

(U) The CENTCOM Director of Intelligence or his deputy had, and continue to have, secure teleconferences with the Joint Staff Director of Intelligence and senior ODNI leaders—frequently including the Director of National Intelligence (DNI).¹⁰ These calls took place several times per week before daily intelligence briefings by the DNI to the President. Senior CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate leaders reported that neither the Director of the DIA nor other COCOM Directors of Intelligence have participated in these calls.

(U) The frequency of these interactions could have provided CENTCOM leaders with outsized influence on the material presented to the President outside of formal coordination channels. These frequent interactions are at odds with the DNI James Clapper's testimony to Congress that "intelligence assessments from CENTCOM...come to the national level only through the Defense Intelligence Agency."¹¹

f. (U) DOD Public Statements Were More Positive than Intelligence Supported

(U) Throughout the first half of 2015, many CENTCOM press releases, statements, and congressional testimonies were significantly more positive than actual events. For example, a CENTCOM official stated publicly that a major military assault to take back Mosul could begin as early as April or May 2015,¹² and General Austin claimed that ISIL was in a "defensive crouch" in testimony to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.¹³ As of August 2016, Mosul remains under ISIL control and there has been no major military assault to retake it.

(U) Similarly, press statements issued in the spring of 2015 claimed that "ISIL is on the defense."¹⁴ Shortly thereafter another official stated "[ISIL] is losing ground" and declared "the strategy of the international coalition supporting Iraqi forces against ISIL has forced the terrorist group into a defensive position."¹⁵ Just a week later, ISIL forces overran the ISF positions in Ramadi, taking over the city and causing the ISF to retreat.

(U) Although no interviewee remembered the process of preparing the specific press releases and congressional testimony highlighted here, interviewees described a process in which congressional testimony and public affairs statements did not necessarily reflect contemporaneous intelligence assessments. In particular, the Joint Task Force was dismayed to learn that Intelligence Directorate senior leaders seemed unfamiliar with General Austin's statements to Congress that ISIL was in a "defensive crouch" and indicated this characterization did not reflect their best assessments at the time.

(U) Because press releases and congressional testimony reflected the viewpoints of CENTCOM writ large, such statements were often issued without considering (or by disregarding) the recommendations or input of the Intelligence Directorate. Interviewees reported that they could proffer items for inclusion in prepared statements, but had no control over the use of their comments, and indeed frequently never knew the extent to which their comments had or had not been incorporated into final public expressions.

4. (U) Conclusions and Recommendations:

(U) The Joint Task Force finds that the changes made at the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate starting in mid-2014 resulted in the production and dissemination of intelligence products that were inconsistent with the judgments of many senior, career analysts at CENTCOM. Across the four campaigns analyzed by the Joint Task Force, these products also consistently described U.S. actions in a more positive light than other assessments from the IC and were typically more optimistic than actual events warranted.

(U) The leadership environment within CENTCOM and its Intelligence Directorate deteriorated significantly following the departure of General James Mattis and his senior intelligence leaders. Survey results provided to the Joint Task Force demonstrated that dozens of analysts viewed the subsequent leadership environment as toxic, with 40% of analysts responding that they had experienced an attempt to distort or suppress intelligence in the past year. While the Joint Task Force heard testimony that the environment slowly began to improve following the initiation of the DODIG investigation in mid-2015, many issues persisted until the arrival of General Joseph Votel and the new J2.

(U) Starting in mid-2014, CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate leadership instituted various organizational and process changes that negatively affected the quality and timeliness of intelligence production. CENTCOM senior leaders claimed these changes were intended to improve analytic tradecraft and timeliness, but many analysts perceived them as an intentional effort to bias the intelligence analysis. These changes ultimately were unsuccessful and had the opposite effect. Many of these changes in the review and coordination process have since been reversed.

(U) Senior leaders and policy makers rely on intelligence to make informed judgments, and unbiased intelligence is crucial to their ability to make good decisions. The leaders in the IC, including those within the combatant commands, must ensure that the intelligence analysis they produce is free from improper influence.

To that end, the Joint Task Force recommends the following:

a. (U) CENTCOM Should Formalize and Document its Analytic Processes and Procedures

(U) The CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate leadership implemented significant changes in the organization of the CENTCOM JIC and the analytic review and coordination processes. In nearly every case, the changes seem to have been developed reactively by JIC leadership and were not formally documented. While the changes may have been justifiable, the lack of clarity in their implementation and documentation appears to have generated significant confusion and dissatisfaction amongst the analytic workforce.

(U) The CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate leadership also restricted interagency coordination on analytic products and instituted overly burdensome review processes to allow detailed analytic edits by senior leadership. These additional levels of analytic editing and restrictions on coordination were inconsistent with analytic best practices and hampered the

dissemination of intelligence assessments regarding ISF and ISIL. Additionally, these restrictions damaged the customary coordination processes between CENTCOM analysts and the wider IC, creating unnecessary stovepipes that centralized information within senior CENTCOM leadership channels. Senior leadership involvement sometimes resulted in delays to the publication of intelligence products that could otherwise have provided critical warning to the CENTCOM commander, the IC, and national policy-makers.

(U) Furthermore, senior leaders also relied on their knowledge of details reported from coalition forces rather than more objective and better documented intelligence reporting. The Joint Task Force can find no justifiable reason why operational reporting was repeatedly used as a rationale to change the analytic product, particularly when the changes only appeared to be made in a more optimistic direction. By supplanting analytic tradecraft with unpublished and ad hoc operational reporting, JIC leadership circumvented important processes that are intended to protect the integrity of intelligence analysis.

(U) If CENTCOM leaders derived unique knowledge from their contact with forward deployed U.S. personnel and coalition forces, it is difficult to explain why these insights were not more broadly shared across the IC to inform assessments by other agencies. By using operational reporting to supplant detailed analytic intelligence efforts, CENTCOM risks wasting significant taxpayer resources on the salaries of hundreds of intelligence analysts.

(U) Consistent with the direction contained in the Fiscal Year 2017 House-passed legislation, the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate should formalize and document its processes and procedures, including those governing the coordination and review of intelligence assessments, the inclusion of operational reporting in intelligence products, the operation of the CENTCOM Intelligence Fusion Center, and mechanisms to properly align public statements and congressional testimony with intelligence assessments. CENTCOM also should ensure that analytic best practices are institutionalized to ensure continuity through leadership transitions.

b. (U) DIA Should Improve Oversight of Defense Intelligence at the COCOMs

(U) DIA provides the analytic workforce within COCOM intelligence centers, including the CENTCOM intelligence analysis staff, and is responsible for promulgating IC analytic standards across the Defense Intelligence Enterprise. However, from the outset of this investigation, DIA senior leadership has distanced itself from the issues identified within CENTCOM, and has taken no action to resolve the difficult workplace environment for DIA employees at CENTCOM. If a member of the Defense Intelligence Enterprise begins to deviate from those analytic standards in a significant way—such as barring analysts from coordinating with other agencies on draft analysis—DIA has a responsibility to ensure there has not been a detrimental effect on the quality of defense intelligence. The Joint Task Force recommends that DIA take ownership of its role as leader of the Defense Intelligence Enterprise, and significantly increase its analytic oversight and review of intelligence products generated by the COCOM intelligence centers. In particular, DIA should work to strengthen formal mechanisms for ensuring analytical integrity, particularly the Analytic Ombudsman. The Joint Task Force intends to further review the role of DIA in ensuring analytic integrity, including through the actions recommended in Fiscal Year 2017 House-passed legislation.

c. (U) CENTCOM and IC Leaders Should Address the Command Climate at the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate

i. (U) CENTCOM

(U) There remains significant dissatisfaction within the CENTCOM workforce with analytic objectivity and processes at CENTCOM, particularly with the involvement of senior leadership of the Intelligence Directorate. Over the last two years, the organizational culture within the CENTCOM Intelligence Directorate has been perceived as toxic by a large portion of the workforce.¹⁶ Additionally, constant leadership micromanagement, review, and editing of analytic products ultimately chilled analytic dissent and resulted in a workforce that felt obligated to seek outside support in improving a very challenging work environment.

(U) Senior leaders stated their actions were consistent with analytic tradecraft best practices and that they were unaware of the significant concerns within their workforce until they were confronted with the DODIG investigation. As the survey results indicate, this lack of awareness demonstrates—at the very least—a severe disconnect between Intelligence Directorate leadership and JIC personnel. Yet despite the demonstrated outcome that CENTCOM intelligence products have been more positive than those of the IC, CENTCOM leadership continues to reject the argument that the operational reporting on which they based their analysis was biased toward more positive assessments of the ISF. While the full details remain classified, historical events have also demonstrated that these changes by CENTCOM leadership were generally more optimistic than actual events. Further, Intelligence Directorate leadership failed to recognize that the cumulative effects of their actions degraded analytic products and the climate within their organization.

(U) Interviewees described the leadership environment in 2014 as significantly more insular than under previous CENTCOM commanders, and the Joint Task Force heard multiple reports of strongly negative reactions by senior leadership to bad news being reported in intelligence. Whistleblower allegations, survey results, and analysts' comments in multiple interviews and meetings all indicate significant deficiencies in the leadership of CENTCOM that need to be addressed by the new CENTCOM commander and the new Director of Intelligence.

ii. (U) Intelligence Community

(U) The Joint Task Force is troubled that despite receiving the whistleblower complaint in May 2015 and receiving alarming survey results in December 2015, neither CENTCOM, DIA, the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, nor ODNI have taken any demonstrable steps to improve the analytic climate within CENTCOM. The survey results alone should have prompted CENTCOM and IC leaders to take corrective action without other inducements. During interviews, however, multiple Intelligence Directorate senior leaders challenged the legitimacy of the survey results rather than taking responsibility for them. This is, unfortunately, characteristic of the IC's response to the situation at CENTCOM: leadership within CENTCOM, ODNI, and DIA attempted to

diminish the significance of the allegations and the survey comments, despite significant evidence indicating widespread problems with morale. DNI Clapper downplayed reports of potential issues at CENTCOM, referring to them as “media hyperbole”¹⁷ and attributing the complaints to disgruntled analysts. These statements, and others, by senior IC leadership to downplay the significance of the incidents at CENTCOM were an inappropriate response from individuals charged with leading the IC in preserving analytic integrity.

d. (U) Continued Efforts by the DODIG

(U) The Joint Task Force’s efforts were limited, and the Joint Task Force did not receive access to all the materials it requested. The Joint Task Force expects the DODIG to review and assess further documents and internal e-mails, as well as the statements of many additional DOD employees, and to fully investigate any allegations of reprisals.

(U) The Joint Task Force expects to continue its oversight work following the conclusion of the DODIG investigation and other ongoing efforts.

UNCLASSIFIED

¹ Email captioned "Re: Update on DoD IG investigation into intel analysis by CENTCOM." from Department of Defense Inspector General staff to Joint Task Force Staff, January 12, 2016.

² Shane Harris and Nancy A. Youssef, "Intel Analysts: We Were Forced Out for Telling the Truth About Obama's ISIS War," *The Daily Beast*, Apr 4, 2016 and Nancy A. Youssef, "She Spoke Up About Cooked ISIS Intel. They Booted Her—for Cursing," *The Daily Beast*, May 9, 2016.

³ Except where otherwise specified, "Joint Task Force" refers to the three appointed members and/or the assigned staff.

⁴ Several staff members also met with the original complainant on September 22, 2015, before the formation of the Joint Task Force, although that meeting did not result in a transcribed interview.

⁵ Stars and Stripes, "General slams claims that CENTCOM manipulated Iraq, Syria intelligence," March 2, 2016, <http://www.stripes.com/news/general-slams-claims-that-centcom-manipulated-iraq-syria-intelligence-1.397194>

⁶ CENTCOM Press Release, "U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL near Mosul Dam," Aug 19, 2014, www.centcom.mil/news/news-article/u.s.-military-conducts-airstrikes-against-isil-near-mosul-dam.

⁷ CNN, "Questions surround Pentagon's ISIS assessments," August 26, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/26/politics/ig-investigation-isis-intelligence/>

⁸ Statement for the Record by Lt Gen Vincent Stewart, Director DIA before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Feb 26, 2015 and remarks at the Council of Foreign Relations of the Honorable John Brennan, Director, Central Intelligence Agency, Mar 13, 2015.

⁹ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "IC Analytic Objectivity & Process Survey: Key Objectivity Results from US Combatant Command Respondents," Dec 2015.

¹⁰ Letter from Director of National Intelligence James Clapper to Senator Ron Johnson and Senator Joni Ernst, Sep 29, 2015.

¹¹ Testimony of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sep 29, 2015.

¹² Dan Lamothe, "Military Assault on Iraqi City of Mosul could begin in April," *The Washington Post*, Feb 19, 2015.

¹³ Testimony of CENTCOM Commander General Lloyd Austin before the House Armed Services Committee, Mar 3, 2015 and testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Mar 26, 2015.

¹⁴ CENTCOM News Articles, "ISIL on Defensive in Iraq, CENTCOM spokesman says" Apr 27, 2015, <http://www.centcom.mil/news/news-article/isil-on-defensive-in-iraq-centcom-spokesman-says>.

¹⁵ CENTCOM News Articles, "ISIL losing ground, forced into defensive position, CJTF-OIR official says," May 6 2015, <http://www.centcom.mil/news/news-article/isil-losing-ground-forced-into-defensive-position-cjtf-oir-official-says>.

¹⁶ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "IC Analytic Objectivity & Process Survey: Key Objectivity Results from US Combatant Command Respondents," Dec 2015.

¹⁷ Testimony of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sep 29, 2015.