

# Obama orders probe of “faulty intelligence” on ISIS

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President Barack Obama said Sunday that he has ordered top Pentagon officials to pursue an investigation into whether military intelligence reports on the so-called war against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have been altered to provide an overly optimistic assessment of US actions.

Speaking to reporters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Obama said: “I don’t know what we’ll discover with respect to what was going on in Centcom [the US Central Command, which oversees American military operations in the region]. What I do know is my expectation—which is the highest fidelity to facts, data, the truth.”

The US president added that he did not want intelligence “shaded by a desire to tell a feel-good story.”

Obama’s statements came in response to questions regarding a *New York Times* article published Sunday that disclosed an investigation prompted by charges leveled by intelligence analysts. They said that their reports had been altered by superiors anxious to “mask some of the American military’s failures in training Iraqi troops and beating back the Islamic State,” enabling them to “paint a more optimistic picture of America’s role in the conflict than was warranted.”

The *Times* reported that the Pentagon’s inspector general has recently “seized a large trove of emails and documents” as part of the probe.

The investigation concerns the most controversial allegations of manipulating intelligence to serve political ends since the infamous case of the fabricated evidence of “weapons of mass destruction” used to justify the criminal US war against Iraq in 2003.

It has been ongoing since last summer after a group of some 50 Centcom intelligence analysts led by Gregory Hooker, the command’s senior intelligence

analyst, brought their concerns to the inspector general.

The disputed intelligence involves a series of apparent debacles for US imperialism in Iraq and Syria beginning with ISIS overrunning Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city, in June of 2014. Analysts claimed that their superiors altered reports describing the rout of US-trained Iraqi government troops to read that these forces, who in many cases abandoned their weapons and shed their uniforms, had “redeployed.”

The changing of intelligence reports to fit a more “positive” account of the US anti-ISIS intervention has extended into the assessment of the some 8,000 airstrikes carried out by US warplanes along with a small number by Washington’s allies.

Fox News cited Pentagon sources as saying that emails sent to the analysts demanded that they “cut it out” and “toe the line” when it came to presenting intelligence reports that contradicted the Pentagon’s and the Obama administration’s official story that the US intervention was succeeding in containing and rolling back ISIS.

According to a source cited by the Daily Beast website last September, analysts used the word “Stalinist” to describe the atmosphere within the Centcom command structure.

“Many described a climate in which analysts felt they could not give a candid assessment of the situation in Iraq and Syria,” the Daily Beast reported. “Some felt it was a product of commanders protecting their career advancement by putting the best spin on the war.”

The *Times* advanced other explanations for the falsification of intelligence reports, including fears “that reporting bad news might anger the White House” and “an institutional bias that makes it hard for the military to criticize its own operations.”

There is, however, a far more plausible reason for

altering the intelligence reports. It is fundamentally the same motive for the fabrication of intelligence in the run-up to the US invasion of Iraq: to provide a false pretext for a US war of aggression.

In 2003, the American people were told that the US was going to war against Iraq because of an imminent danger posed by “weapons of mass destruction” and supposed ties between Baghdad and Al Qaeda. Both were lies told to justify a war for regime change, aimed at installing a puppet government in Baghdad and assuring US dominance over the country’s oil wealth.

Since 2011, the Obama administration has given a series of shifting rationales for US intervention in Syria. First, it was a matter of “human rights” and “democracy.” Then in September 2013, a bombing campaign aborted only at the last minute was justified on the basis of false reports that the government of President Bashar al-Assad had carried out poison gas attacks in the suburbs of Damascus.

Now, the US is intervening with airstrikes and the imminent deployment of Special Operations troops on the ground in Syria in the name of combating ISIS.

As in the case of the original invasion of Iraq, all of these are phony pretexts. Just as in 2003, Washington is engaged in a war for regime change, this time aimed at toppling Assad and imposing a US puppet regime in Damascus, thereby depriving both Russia and Iran of a Middle Eastern ally and furthering Washington’s drive to assert its hegemony over the entire region.

It is this contradiction between Washington’s real and stated aims that underlies the crisis over military intelligence that has erupted at Centcom.

The campaign against ISIS has been a phony war from the start. US imperialism had no issues with the atrocities carried out by the Islamist militia so long as they were confined to Syria, where ISIS constituted one of the principal proxy forces in the Western-backed war for regime change.

Weapons and funding funneled into Syria by Washington’s key allies in the region—Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey—found their way to ISIS under the watchful eye of the CIA.

ISIS was in every respect a reactionary force that bore the stamp “Made in the USA.” It emerged in the first instance as a result of the US war on Iraq and the subsequent American occupation that stoked sectarian tensions in the pursuit of a divide-and-rule strategy. It

was strengthened by the 2011 US-NATO war to topple and murder Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi. That military intervention relied upon similar Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias, many of whose members—along with huge stocks of captured Libyan weapons—were subsequently dispatched to Syria.

Only after the ISIS offensive turned eastward, overrunning approximately one third of Iraqi territory, did the Obama administration announce a new intervention, ostensibly to “degrade and ultimately destroy” ISIS. More recently, Obama has described the US’ goal as to “contain” the Islamist militia.

Washington’s campaign against ISIS has been conducted from the start with a principal focus on not strengthening the Syrian government in its fight to defeat the group and similar Al Qaeda-linked forces such as the al-Nusra Front.

This explains why more than a year of US airstrikes have done next to nothing to decrease the number of ISIS fighters or to drive them back from significant territory in either Iraq or Syria.

Similar motives lie behind the effective withdrawal of Washington’s allies from this supposed air war, with Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni oil monarchies having stopped their participation months ago as they turned their weapons against the people of Yemen. Turkey, meanwhile, has directed its airstrikes almost exclusively against Kurdish fighters in Iraq and Syria, who constitute among the most effective combatants against ISIS.

None of this is based on the Obama White House being misled by phony intelligence. The intelligence has merely been altered to suit the narrative of the phony war against ISIS.



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