

COMMAND IN MIDDLE OF INTELLIGENCE SCANDAL ADMITS IT CAN'T VET A TWITTER PICTURE

As a number of outlets are reporting, CentCom released this statement yesterday afternoon.

U.S. Central Command was notified at approximately 1 p.m. today that a commander of a New Syrian Forces element operating in Syria surrendered some of his unit's Coalition-issued equipment to a suspected Al Nusra Front intermediary purportedly in exchange for safe passage within their operating area.

"Today the NSF unit contacted Coalition representatives and informed us that on Sept. 21-22 they gave six pick-up trucks and a portion of their ammunition to a suspected Al Nusra Front intermediary, which equates to roughly 25 percent of their issued equipment," said Col. Patrick Ryder, U.S. Central Command spokesperson. "If accurate, the report of NSF members providing equipment to Al Nusra Front is very concerning and a violation of Syria train and equip program guidelines."

Earlier this week, Al Nusra Front tweeted an image of a Coalition-issued rifle and claimed that the newest NSF members had handed over all their weapons upon re-entering Syria last week. Central Command conducted an analysis of the image depicted in the Tweet and determined the claim to be false. This determination was based on NSF members reporting that all personnel and equipment were under NSF control and

because the tweeted image was an old picture repurposed from the Facebook page of a previously deployed NSF fighter from a different training class.

“In light of this new information, we wanted to ensure the public was informed as quickly as possible about the facts as we know them at this time,” said Col. Ryder. “We are using all means at our disposal to look into what exactly happened and determine the appropriate response.”

That is, CentCom is explaining that when they claimed reports the rebels had handed over their weapons early in the week was a lie, they were wrong. They had based that assertion on the representations of our trained and vetted rebels, including the claim that a picture posted to Twitter was a recycled image (something that happens a lot in propaganda from Syria, from all sides). Given their caveat about whether this latest claim – that the rebels handed over six pick-ups and a bunch of ammunition – may not be accurate, it suggests they still don’t actually know. Which, in turn, suggests they didn’t have the means to vet the tweeted picture, nor do they have enough independent HUMINT coming from the region to be able to fact check what the latest batch of vetted and trained rebels tell them.

This may or may not have to do with the allegations that the intelligence at CentCom is cooked. It, at a minimum, speaks to collection *and* analysis issues, only the latter of which was covered in the complaint to the Inspector General.

Whatever the cause, though, it does raise real concerns about how blind CentCom is right now.