WHY WAS PETRAEUS FACT-FINDING WHILE CIA WAS SPINNING "FACTS"?

The WSJ has a story that captures a lot of what I've been pointing to in Petraeus Surge-Out. It explains how the investigation played out even as career CIA people objecting to Petraeus' regimented management style. It describes Petraeus' intent to stay on nevertheless. And it shows—as I have—how Petraeus was dealing with the investigation even as CIA was attempting to push back on claims it had botched the Benghazi response.

It describes how this all played out in the weeks before Petraeus resigned:

> At CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., officials began debating whether the CIA should be more active in countering the criticism. Mr. Petraeus, in particular, advocated a more aggressive defense.
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> As questions mounted, a Fox News report Oct. 26 alleged that the CIA delayed sending a security force to protect U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and others who were under attack. Mr. Stevens and three other Americans died.
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> The CIA denied the report, then began pulling together its own timeline of events.
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> **The Pentagon, the State Department and other agencies objected to Mr. Petraeus's decision to mount a solo defense. "We conveyed our objections. Multiple agencies did," a senior military official said**.
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> Mr. Petraeus's decision to release the CIA's timeline to the press didn't sit well with Mr. Clapper, who was unaware

> it would be made public, officials said. Other agencies saw **Mr. Petraeus's decision as a step aimed at presenting the CIA and Mr. Petraeus in the best light and forcing them to accept the brunt of the criticism**.
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> At CIA headquarters, officials believed it was important to make their case. "Clearly, when people are insinuating things about a situation that just aren't true, there has to be a response," a senior U.S. official said. The official added that the briefing was considered effective. "**The record was corrected**," he said."Smart people can disagree on the best way to do this, while at the same time agreeing that something must be done."
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> Meanwhile, one week after the turf fight over the CIA's release of its Benghazi timeline, the FBI told Mr. Clapper about Mr. Petraeus's extramarital affair, said officials familiar with the timeline. [my emphasis]

But this account misses some crucial details of the timeline, which are all important as the Benghazi hearings play out this week.

First, remember that Paula Broadwell made one of the first responses to the Fox story, though she seemingly confirmed their report that (among other things) the CIA delayed its response because it had prisoners.

Consider Petraeus' actions two weeks ago. The FBI interviewed him in a scandal he believed he could survive. And then—seemingly almost immediately—he hopped on a plane for a "fact-finding" trip in anticipation of this week's testimony. That conveniently put him out of the country as CIA conducted the spin campaign that—as WSJ reports—top officials and DOD, DNI, and State objected to.

But here's the most important bit: The CIA put

out information at a time and in a manner the rest of the national security establishment objected to. It claimed—and WSJ's sources still claim—that "the record was corrected," implying that the CIA offered the truth in its spin on November 1.

If so, then why was Petraeus on a fact-finding trip at all? If they knew enough to know what the record showed, then why did Petraeus have to fly to Libya to find out what the record showed?

The answer may be as simple as Petraeus was just getting out of town to avoid any responsibility for a spin campaign that other NatSec officials objected to. It may be he went on a junket (ha!) to reflect on whether his diddling might sully his pristine image.

But I doubt that. Given the importance the Intelligence Committees have placed on the report from Petraeus' trip, and the reluctance CIA has shown in turning over that report, and Petraeus' initial reluctance to testify to Congress about what he learned on his fact-finding trip, it seems highly likely that "the record" as reflected in that trip report does not match "the record" the CIA is so satisfied that it fed to reporters (to the WSJ team's credit, they were by far the least credulous about the CIA's so-called record).

One of two possibilities must be correct: The CIA deliberately put out a timeline it knew to be incomplete—if not deceptive—at a time and in a way that the rest of the NatSec establishment objected to (which might explain why it is so reluctant to give the now-revised timeline to Congress, because it will be caught in deception). Or, Petraeus' trip to Libya and other countries had nothing to do with what he claimed it did, fact-finding on Benghazi in anticipation of this week's hearings.

The reporters who attended the November 1 briefing appear to have been suckered into reporting on CIA's claimed timeline even while Petraeus was actively trying to learn what that

timeline really was. They really ought to ask CIA why that timeline was presented as settled fact, then.