

The Islamic State (ISIS) in Texas?

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Global Research, October 18, 2014

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Region: [USA](#)

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A politician making a ludicrous claim that has no basis in fact about a major story of the day should be an easy factcheck. But ABC's This Week ([10/13/14](#)) reminded us that corporate news outlets are often not very good at this.

The claim in question came from Rep. Duncan Hunter (R.-Ca.), who declared, "I know that at least 10 ISIS fighters have been caught coming across the Mexican border in Texas." He added that "dozens more" evaded capture.

So members of the terrorist group that we're told is worse than Al-Qaeda managed to slip into Texas? I feel like we would have heard something about this, even in the dreaded "liberal media."

PolitiFact gave Hunter its worst grade ([10/10/14](#))-"PANTS ON FIRE"-since there is no evidence to support this rather wild claim. If terrorists were "caught," law enforcement would presumably have done the catching, and they deny anything like this has happened. Hunter's spokesman told PolitiFact that the lawmaker stands by his remarks, and suggested that they'd be vindicated eventually:

We make the point. Official channels deny. Then, maybe in a few years from now, the information will pop up on the front page of the Washington Post.

OK-his source is the Washington Post, maybe in a few years from now?



Duncan Hunter is concerned about ISIS fighters nobody else seems to be able to see.

So what did ABC do with this? Anchor Martha Raddatz teased the segment:

Up next, were ISIS terrorists caught sneaking across our southern border? Why one congressman's claims are raising alarms.

This was a bad sign, since Hunter's claims weren't really "raising alarms," except perhaps among people concerned that a lawmaker would utter something so unbelievable.

Raddatz continued by calling it "a high stakes faceoff over the ISIS threat." After playing a clip of Hunter, she wondered: "A stunning claim; but is it true?"

Not according to the Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson, who gets a soundbite. But then it's back to Hunter's camp:

RADDATZ: But Hunter insists he's right. His spokesman firing back: "It makes sense that the left hand of the DHS doesn't know what the right hand is doing. It's been that way for a long time." Did Congressman Hunter go too far with his new claims?

Then Raddatz turned it over to her roundtable guest, former George W. Bush adviser [Matthew Dowd](#), who gave this clear-as-mud accounting of the facts:

RADDATZ: No one seems to have any evidence to back up Hunter's claims. Is he just seizing on people's fears? They are pretty high this morning.

DOWD: Well, yeah, they're very high this morning. And I don't want to conflate the two things with Ebola and this, but many times fear doesn't have to be real to be powerful. And in the context of it, we don't often have to have facts to back up our fears. We respond to our fears.

I think everybody has the right to say what they want to say, but they have the responsibility to say what may be they believe to be factually correct. The congressman says he believes it to be factually correct. But at a time like this with terrorism and, as you say, with the Ebola thing, we should counsel our fears and look for the fact sets.

Huh?

The thing about factchecking is that the person making a claim actually has to have evidence that what they're saying is true; if they can't produce any, then there's not much left to say. Honestly believing that something false is true, or a spokesperson insisting that a lawmaker stands by a claim, doesn't actually matter. But ABC manages to cloud up an issue that should be crystal clear.

If ABC can't get an easy one right, can we really expect them to sort out the complicated stuff?

Correction: An earlier version of this post was illustrated with a photo of former Rep. Duncan Hunter, the current congressman of that name's father.

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