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US Intel Chief: We Underestimated ISIS Capabilities

By Jason Ditz

September 19, 2014

Discussing the new ISIS war in an interview with David Ignatius, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper drew parallels between the new war and the US war in Vietnam.

“We underestimated the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese and overestimated the will of the South Vietnamese. In this case, we underestimated ISIS and overestimated the fighting capability of the Iraqi army,” insisted Clapper.

“It boils down to predicting the will to fight, which is an imponderable,” he added, saying that US intelligence had offered “anticipatory intelligence” about the ISIS surge in Iraq, but had underestimated how big it would be and how fast Iraq would be beaten back.

Clapper’s comments were unusually direct on the intelligence failures in the lead up to the ISIS war, and the comparison to the Vietnam War is likely to result in some uncomfortable questions for other administration officials.