

INVESTIGATION INTO
29 AUG CIVCAS IN AFGHANISTAN

The Secretary of Defense directed this investigation into the strike by US Forces on 29 Aug 21, in Kabul Afghanistan, that led to the death of 10 Afghan civilians.

The independent investigation conducted by Lt Gen Said, the Department of the Air Force Inspector General, carefully reviewed all the evidence and interviewed 29 individuals, including 22 directly involved in the strike, under oath. The investigation did not rely on previous reviews and analysis and independently reconstructed the events that led to the strike. The Report of Investigation is classified because the required detailed analysis included highly classified information.

The investigation concluded:

1. As the Department has already acknowledged, 10 Afghan civilians were killed in the strike, including 3 men and 7 children
2. Individuals directly involved in the strike interviewed during the investigation, believed at the time that they were targeting an imminent threat. The intended target of the strike, the vehicle, its contents and occupant, were genuinely assessed at the time as an imminent threat to US forces and mission at Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA). The assessment which was primarily driven by interpretation of intelligence and observed movement of the vehicle and occupants over an 8-hour period was regrettably inaccurate
3. In fact, the vehicle, its occupant and contents did not pose any risk to US forces
4. In addition, the assessment prior to strike, of individuals in the target area was inaccurate
5. The authorities and Rules of Engagement utilized to execute the regrettable strike were understandable based on the information available at the time and the perceived very high threat to US forces at HKIA
6. The investigation found no violation of law, including the Law of War. Execution errors combined with confirmation bias and communication breakdowns led to regrettable civilian casualties
7. The overall threat to US forces at HKIA at the time was very high. Intel indicated attacks were imminent. Three days prior, such an attack resulted in the death of 13 service members and at least 170 Afghan civilians. The events that led to the strike and the assessments of this investigation should be considered with this context in mind

The investigation made several recommendations for refinement of processes and procedures leading up to strikes in time-constrained scenarios and urban terrain, including:

- Implementing procedures to mitigate risks of confirmation bias
- Enhancing sharing of overall mission situational awareness during execution
- Review of pre-strike procedures used to assess presence of civilians.

The classified Report of Investigation has been provided in full to operational commanders so they can assess additional lessons-learned and as appropriate, implement corrective measures.

The classified Report of Investigation has also been provided in full to the Chain of Command to assess accountability, as appropriate.

Initial reviews conducted immediately following the strike were conducted in a compressed timeframe, with the sincere aim to provide information as quickly as possible, but failed to accurately assess all the facts. Initial inaccurate public messaging, was based on what at the time was genuinely believed to be sufficiently accurate reviews and information.

While this investigation had the benefit of considerable time to assess information available during the strike, those executing it didn't. What is clear now, is understandably less so in real-time