

Summary of Information Regarding U.S. Counterterrorism Strikes Outside Areas of Active Hostilities

In accordance with the President’s direction and consistent with the President’s commitment to providing as much information as possible to the American people about U.S. counterterrorism activities, the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) is releasing today a summary of information provided to the DNI about both the number of strikes taken by the U.S. Government against terrorist targets outside areas of active hostilities and the assessed number of combatant and non-combatant^a deaths resulting from those strikes. “Areas of active hostilities” currently include Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

Summary of U.S. Counterterrorism Strikes Outside Areas of Active Hostilities between January 20, 2009 and December 31, 2015	
Total Number of Strikes Against Terrorist Targets Outside Areas of Active Hostilities	473
Combatant Deaths	2372-2581
Non-Combatant Deaths	64-116

The assessed range of non-combatant deaths provided to the DNI reflects consideration of credible reports of non-combatant deaths drawn from all-source information, including reports from the media and non-governmental organizations. The assessed range of non-combatant deaths includes deaths for which there is an insufficient basis for assessing that the deceased is a combatant.

U.S. Government Post-Strike Review Processes and Procedures

The information that was provided to the DNI regarding combatant and non-combatant deaths is the result of processes that include careful reviews of all strikes after they are conducted to assess the effectiveness of operations. These review processes have evolved over time to ensure that they incorporate the best available all-source intelligence, media reporting, and other information and may result in reassessments of strikes if new information becomes available that alters the original judgment. The large volume of pre- and post-strike data available to the U.S. Government can enable analysts to distinguish combatants from non-combatants, conduct detailed battle damage assessments, and separate reliable reporting from terrorist propaganda or from media reports that may be based on inaccurate information.

Discrepancies Between U.S. Government and Non-Governmental Assessments

^a Non-combatants are individuals who may not be made the object of attack under applicable international law. The term “non-combatant” does not include an individual who is part of a belligerent party to an armed conflict, an individual who is taking a direct part in hostilities, or an individual who is targetable in the exercise of U.S. national self-defense. Males of military age may be non-combatants; it is not the case that all military-aged males in the vicinity of a target are deemed to be combatants.

In releasing these figures, the U.S. Government acknowledges that there are differences between U.S. Government assessments and reporting from non-governmental organizations. Reports from non-governmental organizations can include both aggregate data regarding non-combatant deaths as well as case studies addressing particular strikes, and generally rely on a combination of media reporting and, in some instances, field research conducted in areas of reported strikes. Although these organizations' reports of non-combatant deaths resulting from U.S. strikes against terrorist targets outside areas of active hostilities vary widely, such reporting generally estimates significantly higher figures for non-combatant deaths than is indicated by U.S. Government information. For instance, for the period between January 20, 2009 and December 31, 2015, non-governmental organizations' estimates range from more than 200 to slightly more than 900 possible non-combatant deaths outside areas of active hostilities.

Consistent with the requirements applicable to future reporting under Section 3(b) of the Executive Order "United States Policy on Pre- and Post-Strike Measures to Address Civilian Casualties in U.S. Operations Involving the Use of Force," the information we are releasing today addresses general reasons for discrepancies between post-strike assessments from the United States Government and credible reporting from non-governmental organizations regarding non-combatant deaths and does not address specific incidents. There are a number of possible reasons that these non-governmental organizations' reports of the number of non-combatants killed may differ from the U.S. Government assessments, based on the information provided to the DNI.

First, although there are inherent limitations on determining the precise number of combatant and non-combatant deaths, particularly when operating in non-permissive environments, the U.S. Government uses post-strike methodologies that have been refined and honed over the years and that use information that is generally unavailable to non-governmental organizations. The U.S. Government draws on all available information (including sensitive intelligence) to determine whether an individual is part of a belligerent party fighting against the United States in an armed conflict; taking a direct part in hostilities against the United States; or otherwise targetable in the exercise of national self-defense. Thus, the U.S. Government may have reliable information that certain individuals are combatants, but are being counted as non-combatants by non-governmental organizations. For example, further analysis of an individual's possible membership in an organized armed group may include, among other things: the extent to which an individual performs functions for the benefit of the group that are analogous to those traditionally performed by members of a country's armed forces; whether that person is carrying out or giving orders to others within the group; or whether that person has undertaken certain acts that reliably connote meaningful integration into the group.

Second, according to information provided to the DNI, U.S. Government post-strike reviews involve the collection and analysis of multiple sources of intelligence before, during, and after a strike, including video observations, human sources and assets, signals intelligence, geospatial intelligence, accounts from local officials on the ground, and open source reporting. Information collected before a strike is intended to provide clarity regarding the number of individuals at a strike location as well as whether the individuals are engaged in terrorist activity. Post-strike collection frequently enables U.S. Government analysts to confirm, among other things, the

number of individuals killed as well as their combatant status. The information is then analyzed along with other all-source intelligence reporting. This combination of sources is unique and can provide insights that are likely unavailable to non-governmental organizations.

Finally, non-governmental organizations' reports of counterterrorism strikes attributed to the U.S. Government—particularly their identification of non-combatant deaths—may be further complicated by the deliberate spread of misinformation by some actors, including terrorist organizations, in local media reports on which some non-governmental estimates rely.

Although the U.S. Government has access to a wide range of information, the figures released today should be considered in light of the inherent limitations on the ability to determine the precise number of combatant and non-combatant deaths given the non-permissive environments in which these strikes often occur. The U.S. Government remains committed to considering new, credible information regarding non-combatant deaths that may emerge and revising previous assessments, as appropriate.

###