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U.S. Africa Command Civilian Casualty Assessment; Third Quarter Report

This is the second civilian casualty assessment report since U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) began releasing quarterly reports in April. As part of the command's commitment to improving transparency and accountability in our assessment and reporting of civilian casualty allegations, USAFRICOM has made several procedural improvements this quarter.

By **U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs**, United States Africa Command Jul 28, 2020

Editor's Note: Clarification to paragraph 2, under Completed Assessments: "USAFRICOM substantiates the death of one (1) civilian and three (3) injured, who were not visible when we delivered the strike against the targeted individual."

This is the second civilian casualty assessment report since U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) began releasing quarterly reports in April. As part of the command's commitment to improving transparency and accountability in our assessment and reporting of civilian casualty allegations, USAFRICOM has made several procedural improvements this quarter.

Since the last report, the command has improved its ability to receive future civilian casualty allegations by enhancing its ability for the public to submit civilian casualty allegations in native languages on the command's website. The public reporting function was redesigned to make it more visible, user-friendly, and accessible.

A key feature to the website is its multiple language capability. This improvement is one way USAFRICOM continues to increase the communication flow between critical stakeholders and the command's civilian casualty assessment team.

USAFRICOM continues its commitment to degrading the capability of al-Shabaab to conduct external operations planning. Strikes are conducted in support of the Federal Government of Somalia, and support U.S. national security interests.

In many cases, the command's information collection efforts are based on layered and reliable intelligence sources that are not available to the public.

Prior to this quarter's report, there were 38 allegations related to 7 alleged incidents still open and under assessment.

During this quarter, USAFRICOM received 12 new allegations related to 4 separate alleged incidents.

Currently, four incidents remain open and under review, including 3 from the previous report. USAFRICOM completed its reassessment of 7 civilian casualty incidents, including 4 that were reported as open in the previous report. USAFRICOM assesses that one of these resulted in civilian casualties.

After a thorough assessment of the facts and circumstances following an airstrike on Feb. 2, 2020, USAFRICOM substantiates the allegations of the death of one civilian and three injured.

"Our goal is to always minimize impact to civilians. Unfortunately, we believe our operations caused the inadvertent death of one person and injury to three others who we did not intend to target," said U.S. Army Gen. Stephen Townsend, commander, U.S. Africa Command. "We work hard to prevent civilians from getting hurt or killed during these operations designed to bring increased security and stability to Somalia."

The Feb. 2, 2020, civilian casualty incident has been reported to the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu, the U.S. Congress, and the Federal Government of Somalia.

“We will continue our campaign to disrupt and degrade al-Shabaab,” said Townsend. “We will provide as much information to the public as possible while maintaining operational security. We are committed to minimizing civilian casualties and will continue to thoroughly assess all allegations.”

Discrepancies between USAFRICOM civilian casualty assessments and NGO Reports

USAFRICOM assessments of civilian casualty allegations sometimes differ from other organizations, including Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) for a number of reasons.

As noted, the command’s information is based on reliable layered intelligence sources that are not available to the public. This can contribute to perceived discrepancies between the command’s findings and those of others.

Ground conditions in USAFRICOM’s area of responsibility and the activities of violent extremist organizations (VEO) often limit outside access to areas where USAFRICOM conducts military operations or airstrikes. Nevertheless, USAFRICOM uses all reasonably available tools to conduct assessments of civilian casualty allegations, including intelligence, open source reporting, and inputs from the public and the NGO community.

Definition of “civilian” and “combatant”

Consistent with the Department of Defense Law of War Manual “civilian” and “combatant” are defined as follows:

Civilian: Persons who are not combatants (members of military/security forces or members of either a declared hostile force or an organized armed group of a party to an armed conflict). Civilians may lose their protection against attacks if demonstrating hostile intent, engaging in a hostile act, or for such time as they take direct part in hostilities; but they retain or regain such protection when they cease said conduct, or if they become wounded, sick, detained, or surrender, and thereby are unable to continue said conduct. All personnel in the USAFRICOM area of responsibility are protected civilians, unless they are positively identified as legitimate military targets.

Combatant: Persons with direct participation in an armed conflict, or persons whose hostile actions have purposefully and materially supported hostilities against the U.S. Individuals who are formally or functionally part of a non-State armed group that is engaged in hostilities may be made the object of attack because they likewise share in their group’s hostile intent.

U.S. Africa Command Civilian Casualty Assessment Quarterly Report

Summary of Results

This report reflects results of civilian casualty assessments previously reported as open that remain under assessment or are now closed, and allegations the command received during the reporting period.

Completed Assessments

Note: Where unsubstantiated findings occur, it means insufficient evidence exists to validate or substantiate the allegation. When new information is received, an allegation can be reassessed. However, until that occurs, the assessment is considered complete.

1. September 23, 2019 (**Unsubstantiated**) USAFRICOM received an allegation from a foreign Non-Government Organization claiming seven (7) civilians were killed and one (1) injured as a result of a U.S. airstrike in the vicinity of Awdheegle and Dara Salaam, Somalia, on March 11, 2019. USAFRICOM received a duplicate allegation of this incident on January 21, 2020, from a foreign Non-Government Organization. After review, the allegations were assessed unsubstantiated. On March 11, 2019 an airstrike was executed on eight al-Shabaab members in two known al-Shabaab compounds who were attacking partner forces. Pre-strike observation of the attack, partner force reporting, and U.S. intelligence confirmed the presence of al-Shabaab and that the eight individuals targeted were al-Shabaab members. It is assessed with a high degree of confidence that no civilian casualties occurred as a result of U.S. military action.
2. February 3, 2020 (**Substantiated**) Between Feb. 3 and June 17, 2020 USAFRICOM received eight total allegations as a result of a U.S. airstrike in the vicinity of Jilib, Somalia, on February 2, 2020. After a thorough assessment into the facts and circumstances following the Feb. 2, 2020 airstrike, USAFRICOM substantiates the death of one (1) civilian and three (3) injured, who were

not visible when we delivered the strike against the targeted individual.

3. February 25, 2020 **(Unsubstantiated)** USAFRICOM received five allegations from online media sources and social media accounts claiming one (1) civilian was killed as a result of a U.S. airstrike in the vicinity of Jilib, Somalia, on February 24, 2020. After review, the allegations were assessed to be unsubstantiated. On February 24, 2020 an airstrike was executed against an individual which U.S. intelligence, compiled over the course of several years, confirmed was an al-Shabaab commander. The strike was conducted in a remote area where effects were confirmed to be limited to the individual. It is assessed with a high degree of confidence that no civilian casualties occurred as a result of U.S. military action.
4. March 28, 2020, **(Unsubstantiated)** USAFRICOM received one allegation from an online media source claiming two (2) civilians were killed as a result of a U.S. airstrike in the vicinity of Buulo Fulaay, Somalia, on March 27, 2020. After review, the allegation was assessed to be unsubstantiated. On March 27, 2020 an airstrike was executed on two individuals which U.S. intelligence confirmed were al-Shabaab members. The airstrike was executed after the two fighters departed a known al-Shabaab compound on a motorbike. The strike was conducted in a remote area where the effects were confirmed to be limited to the individuals. It is assessed with a high degree of confidence that no civilian casualties occurred as a result of U.S. military action.
5. April 6, 2020, **(Unsubstantiated)** USAFRICOM received four allegations from online media sources and social media accounts claiming three (3) civilians were killed and one (1) civilian injured as a result of a U.S. airstrike in the vicinity of Jilib, Somalia, on April 6, 2020. After review, the allegations were assessed to be unsubstantiated. Contrary to the allegations stating the airstrike targeted civilians, including a child and an elderly woman, an airstrike was executed on April 6, 2020 against five adult males which U.S. intelligence confirmed were al-Shabaab members. No civilians were observed in the area before or after the strike. Strike images confirmed that the effects were limited to the five al-Shabaab members. It is assessed with a high degree of confidence that no civilian casualties occurred as a result of U.S. military action. Additionally, the sources of the allegations are known al-Shabaab media and propaganda outlets, or are sympathetic to al-Shabaab. The sources used photos that were published in 2019.
6. April 11, 2020 **(Unsubstantiated)** USAFRICOM received two allegations from an online media source and social media account claiming one (1) civilian was killed as a result of a U.S. airstrike in the vicinity of Jamaame, Somalia, on April 10, 2020. After review, the allegations were assessed to be unsubstantiated. On April 10, 2020 an airstrike was executed on an al-Shabaab member complicit in the murder of at least six Somali National Army (SNA) soldiers. Immediately prior to the strike, the al-Shabaab member displayed the murdered bodies of SNA soldiers, posing with al-Shabaab flags prominently displayed in the background. This was in an area where al-Shabaab had previously conducted executions and displayed deceased SNA soldiers. The al-Shabaab member then departed the village and the strike was conducted in a remote area where the effects were confirmed to be limited to the individual. It is assessed with a high degree of confidence that no civilian casualties occurred as a result of U.S. military action.
7. May 12, 2020, **(Unsubstantiated)** USAFRICOM received one allegation from an online media source claiming an unspecified number of civilians were killed as a result of a suspected U.S. airstrike in the vicinity of Araboow, Somalia, on May 11, 2020. After review, the allegation was assessed to be unsubstantiated because no U.S. military strike took place on the alleged date or at the alleged location.

Open incidents

1. February 18, 2020, USAFRICOM received three allegations from an online media source and social media account claiming two (2) civilians were injured as a result of a U.S. airstrike in the vicinity of Jilib, Somalia, on February 17, 2020.
2. February 28, 2020, USAFRICOM received three allegations from an online media source and social media accounts claiming two (2) civilians were injured as a result of a U.S. airstrike in the vicinity of Qunyo Barrow, Somalia, on February 28, 2020.
3. March 10, 2020, USAFRICOM received two allegations from online media sources claiming four (4) civilians were killed as a result of a U.S. airstrike in the vicinity of Janaale, Somalia, on March 10, 2020. USAFRICOM received four duplicate allegations of this incident from online media sources on March 11, 2020, that changed the number of civilians killed to a range from four (4)

to up to ten (10) civilians. USAFRICOM received three additional duplicate allegations of this incident from online media sources on March 12, 2020, claiming six (6) civilians were killed, and one duplicate allegation from an online media source on March 19, 2020, claiming two (2) civilians were killed. USAFRICOM received a duplicate allegation of this incident on April 1, 2020 from an online media source. USAFRICOM received a duplicate allegation of this incident from a Non-Government Organization on May 15, 2020, claiming the airstrike killed six (6) civilians. USAFRICOM received a duplicate allegation of this incident from an online media source on June 17, 2020, claiming the airstrike killed six (6) civilians.

4. May 18, 2020, USAFRICOM received five allegations from an online media source and social media accounts claiming either five (5) or six (6) civilians were injured as a result of a U.S. airstrike in the vicinity of Qunyo Barrow, Somalia, on May 17, 2020.

ecoi.net summary:



Quarterly report on ongoing and completed civilian casualty allegations and assessments from air strikes carried out by US armed forces (up to 18 May 2020)

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