

Summary of 2016 Information Regarding United States Counterterrorism Strikes Outside Areas of Active Hostilities

In accordance with Executive Order 13732, the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) is releasing today a summary of information provided to the DNI about both the number of strikes taken in 2016 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 1, 2016 and December 31, 2016	
Total Number of Strikes Against Terrorist Targets Outside Areas of Active Hostilities	53
Combatant Deaths	431-441
Non-Combatant Deaths	1

The assessment 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 assessment of non-combatant deaths can include 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

As described in last year’s report, the United States acknowledges that there are differences between U.S. Government assessments and reporting from non-governmental organizations. In 2016, the U.S. Government reviewed relevant and credible post-strike all-source reporting,

^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.

including information from non-governmental sources, about U.S. strikes against terrorist targets outside areas of active hostilities. No discrepancies were identified between post-strike assessments from the U.S. Government and credible reporting from non-governmental organizations regarding non-combatant deaths resulting from these strikes.

Although the U.S. Government has access to a wide range of information, the 2016 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 reviewing any new credible information regarding non-combatant deaths that may emerge and revising previous assessments, as appropriate.