

**Davidson, Melissa MRS**

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**From:** Budd, Henry MR  
**Sent:** Friday, 20 October 2017 9:40 AM  
**To:** 'Payne, Marise (Private)'; Lees, Megan MS  
**Subject:** Air strike [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

**UNCLASSIFIED**

Minister

Please see below Departmental response to news.com.au:

Strike operations to destroy Daesh's combat capability and to enhance Iraqi ground force manoeuvre are crucial to the success of the campaign, but the despicable tactic of deliberately putting civilians in harm's way is designed to complicate and impede Coalition support to the Iraqi Security Forces on the front line.

The ADF is acutely aware of the brutal tactics used by Daesh and does its utmost to ensure civilians are clear of targeted locations before and during airstrikes.

The ADF takes all allegations of civilian casualties seriously.

The Australian Air Task Group undertakes a detailed and robust sovereign approval process prior to conducting any strikes, which ensures that Australia's legal obligations are applied.

The ADF thoroughly reviews every ATG strike following the return of the aircraft to ensure the strike accorded with pre-strike approvals.

In addition, all ADF personnel are required to report any evidence of possible civilian casualties or human rights violations by any nation, through their chain of command.

In accordance with these requirements, Australian personnel self-reported the strike on 07 June to Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve (JTF-OIR) for assessment. The strike on 30 Mar 17 was self-reported by JTF-OIR personnel and subsequently reported by ADF personnel through their chain of command.

Like Australia, JTF-OIR takes all reports of civilian casualties seriously and assesses all reports as thoroughly as possible, including those relating to Coalition partners like Australia. JTF-OIR investigations include interviewing witnesses and examining the site where possible, interviewing pilots and other personnel involved in the targeting process, reviewing strike and surveillance video, and analysing information provided by government agencies, non-governmental reports, partner forces, and traditional and social media. New information is considered when it becomes available to ensure a thorough and continuous review process.

As a member of the Coalition, the Australian release of public information is coordinated with JTF-OIR in consultation with other affected nations. On 25 August, JTF-OIR requested that Defence align the public release of information with the JTF-OIR monthly civilian casualty report on 6 October. On 26 September, JTF-OIR advised Defence of its intent to adjust the civilian casualty reporting cycle from start of the month to the end of the month, commencing on 29 September.

The following table outlines some key dates:

**30 March Airstrike:**

Date	Action
30 Mar	Air strike occurs.

2017	No Australian aircraft involved. ADF member involved in the target approval process. JTF-OIR personnel self-report the incident to JTF-OIR for further assessment.
31 Mar	Formal advice to government.
24 May	JTF-OIR credibility assessment report received. Based on the assessment referred for further concurrent ADF and JTF- OIR review.
31 May	Formal advice to Government on status of reviews.
31 Jul	ADF review complete. Advice provided to CDF
10 Aug	JTF-OIR assessment complete and advice provided to the ADF.
25 Aug	JTF-OIR requests public announcement not occur before 06 Oct to align Australian release with OIR monthly civilian casualty report.
15 Sep	Formal advice to Government.
26 Sep	JTF-OIR advises monthly civilian casualty report will be realigned from the start of the month to the end of the month and next release will occur on 29 September.

#### 7 June Airstrike

Date	Action
07 June 2017	Air strike occurs. Australian aircraft release single, precision guided weapon.
08 June	Post-strike analysis identifies people leaving the strike location. People, possibly civilians observed leaving the building. ADF personnel self-report the incident to JTF-OIR for further assessment.
23 Aug	Completed JTF-OIR credibility assessment report received by ADF. Based on the information available for this strike, it was assessed that it was more likely than not that a civilian – one person – was either seriously injured or killed as a result of that strike, but that all feasible precautions were taken to prevent civilian casualties. ADF review commenced.
12 Sep	ADF review completed.
15 Sep	Formal advice to Government

Representatives from News Corp, Fairfax Media, Australian Associated Press, West Australian Newspapers and the ABC attended a background situation briefing in Canberra on Friday 29 September.

As the Chief of Joint Operations explained during the briefing;

*"...we're adjusting because the OIR reporting – which you'd be aware occurs on a monthly basis – they've shifted their approach from reporting at the start of the month to the end of the month, so we had expected the next report to come out on 6 October.*

*That's what we were prepared for. They're actually going to release the report tonight, and we will consequently also make a public release of Australian involvement in two civilian casualty incidents."*

The OIR report was released at midnight AEST Saturday 30 September. The Chief of Joint Operations' briefing occurred under embargo to allow reporters to publish in a timely manner following the public release of information.

Defence acknowledges that the complex nature of civilian casualty reports means it can take significant time to assess and make public announcements on these matters. However, the priority is always to ensure a thorough and accurate assessment is conducted in consultation and coordination with our Coalition partners while maintaining the commitment to transparency with the Australian people.

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