

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

APPENDIX: CASES OF SUSPECTED CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN US-LED COMBINED JOINT TASK FORCE ATTACKS IN SYRIA SINCE 23 SEPTEMBER 2014

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On 28 September 2016 Amnesty International sent a memorandum to the US Department of Defence raising a number of concerns and questions regarding 11 attacks carried out by the US-led Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) in Syria since 23 September 2014.

Amnesty International has to date documented and publicly reported on violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses committed by various parties to the armed conflicts in Syria, namely Syrian government and allied forces including Russia's Armed Forces, the armed group that calls itself the Islamic State (IS), the Kurdish-led forces of the Autonomous Administration and several armed opposition groups.

Amnesty International acknowledges that CJTF-OIR, also referred to here as Coalition forces, have stated their commitment to protecting civilians and that many strikes have indeed been precise.

However, Amnesty International is concerned that CENTCOM appears to be significantly underestimating the extent to which the operations it directs have caused harm to civilians and damage to civilian objects. There is compelling evidence indicating that hundreds of civilians have been killed and many others injured in air strikes by Coalition forces.

Based on Amnesty International's research and analysis, some attacks known or suspected to have been carried out by Coalition forces may have violated international humanitarian law. This concern is exacerbated by indications that those investigating such allegations on behalf of Coalition forces have ignored or dismissed evidence of violations resulting in civilian casualties and extensive damage to civilian objects and infrastructure. The oversight mechanisms in place to assess reports of civilian casualties and damage to civilian objects appear to be inadequate and to fall short of international standards as well as US law and policy, including President Obama's Executive Order 13732.¹

¹ The duty to investigate apparently unlawful killings and other violations derives from the right to an effective remedy: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 2. Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 146. The standards for investigating possible unlawful killings are articulated in the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, 1989; The White House Office of the Press Secretary, *Executive Order – United States Policy on Pre- and Post-Strike Measures to Address*

The memorandum focused on harm to civilians relating to 11 specific attacks since September 2014 which Coalition forces are either known to have conducted or believed to have conducted, based on available information related to strikes they conducted in locations nearby at a similar time. These incidents were in Kafr Daryan, Idlib governorate (23 September 2014); al-Bab, Aleppo governorate (28 December 2014); Bir Mahli, Aleppo governorate (30 April/1 May 2015); al-Raqqa city, al-Raqqa governorate (4 to 5 July 2015); Atmeh, Idlib governorate (11 August 2015); Ayn al-Khan, near al-Hawl, al-Hasakah governorate (7 December 2015); al-Bukamal, Deyr al-Zur governorate (16 May 2016); Ojqana, Aleppo governorate (3 June 2016); al-Hadhad, near Manbij, Aleppo governorate (11 June 2016); al-Tukhar, near Manbij, Aleppo governorate (19 July 2016); and al-Ghandoura, near Manbij, Aleppo governorate (28 July 2016).

On the basis of its review and analysis of available information, Amnesty International considers there to be credible evidence to support allegations that some 300 civilians were killed and many hundreds injured in these 11 attacks alone. While recognizing that CENTCOM has stated that internal investigations into at least two of these incidents (at al-Ghandoura and al-Tukhar) are ongoing, Amnesty International is concerned that, as of 26 September 2016, CENTCOM has conceded that only one civilian casualty was caused by its actions in these 11 incidents. Further, these 11 attacks appear to have violated international humanitarian law. In each of these attacks, available evidence indicates that necessary precautions to spare civilians was not taken. For several incidents, no military objective could be discerned and reports indicate that the only casualties were civilian. In any event, the loss of civilian life was so high in a few attacks that it is difficult to see how a significant enough military advantage could have been anticipated that would have outweighed the risk to civilians.

In conducting this research, Amnesty International has reviewed and analysed publicly available information concerning dozens of known or suspected attacks by Coalition forces in Syria since September 2014, including statements by CENTCOM, the Department of Defense, US Navy and other US officials concerning air strikes in Syria and investigations into allegations of civilian casualties. It has reviewed and sought further testimony and other information from human rights organizations, local and international monitoring groups and survivors and other witnesses to strikes and their immediate aftermath. On the basis of this research Amnesty International finds, as it did previously with regards US forces' operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, that adequate internal mechanisms do not exist to appropriately investigate allegations of civilian casualties and the extent to which such operations otherwise adhere to international humanitarian law and applicable international human rights law.²

Civilian Casualties in U.S. Operations Involving the Use of Force, July 2016, available at www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/01/executive-order-united-states-policy-pre-and-post-strike-measures

² Amnesty International has documented severe inadequacies in the US military's investigative and prosecutorial practices with regard to unlawful civilian casualties as a result of US operations in Afghanistan. These investigations have not provided an effective remedy to victims and their families and lack of independence is a major obstacle. See: Amnesty International, *Left in the dark: Failures of accountability for civilian casualties caused by international military operations in Afghanistan*, August 2014 (Index: ASA 11/006/2014), available at www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA11/006/2014/en/; Amnesty International, "Will I be next?" US drone strikes

Clearly, the confirmed and suspected attacks by Coalition forces outlined below represent just a fraction of those conducted to date. There is credible evidence indicating that hundreds more civilians have been killed in Syria, and yet more in Iraq, in other such attacks. According to Airwars, an NGO which monitors international air strikes against IS and comprehensively assesses reports of civilian casualties, the likely civilian death toll in Syria from air strikes by Coalition forces between 23 September 2014 and August 2016 is in the range of 804 to 1,213.³ Documentation by Syrian human rights organizations indicates similar numbers of civilian casualties.⁴ In contrast to such findings, however, CENTCOM acknowledges that a total of 55 civilians have been killed and 29 injured in both Iraq and Syria in almost two years of operations.⁵

In the memorandum Amnesty International requested from CENTCOM information relating to the purpose, intended targets and preparations for air strikes (including precautions in attack), investigations conducted into specific incidents, the nature of investigative processes and accountability mechanisms. Amnesty International queried how and why CENTCOM had appeared to dismiss or otherwise find “not credible” evidence of civilian casualties, including images of dead children, testimony from eye-witnesses and other information provided by local monitoring groups and others on the ground in Syria. It asked of CENTCOM how it made determinations to the effect that civilians were not present in certain locations at the time of attacks, and whether this was based on intelligence provided by allied armed groups, notably Kurdish forces, or the US’s own internal monitoring processes. Other questions asked by Amnesty International include why Coalition forces had deemed that particular targeted buildings were of a military nature, including bridges and a detention centre.

SPECIFIC INCIDENTS

1. KAFR DARYAN, IDLEB GOVERNORATE, 23 SEPTEMBER 2014

At least 13 civilians including women and children were killed and others injured in an attack carried out by US forces on Kafr Daryan in Idleb governorate at around 3.30am on the first night of

in Pakistan, October 2013, available at www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA33/013/2013/en/

³ Comprehensive information on alleged civilian casualties from US-led Coalition and Russian attacks on IS and others in both Syria and Iraq is available on the website of Airwars (www.airwars.org).

⁴ The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) told Amnesty International that they have the names of 614 civilians, including 209 children and 117 women, killed by Coalition attacks between 23 September 2014 and 26 September 2016. Electronic communication and phone call, 27 September 2016. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), 611 civilians were killed in the first two years of the Coalition’s military operations in Syria. SOHR, “The International Coalition completes its second year of intervention in Syria, killing more than 6200 persons, including 611 Syrian civilians”, 22 September 2016 (available at <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=51006>). The Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC) documented a total of 513 civilian deaths from Coalition attacks by 29 July 2016, as cited in *The Guardian*, “Civilian death toll on the rise from American-led airstrikes against Isis”, 29 July 2016 (available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/29/us-airstrikes-isis-death-toll>).

⁵ Terri Moon Cronk, “Centcom Assessing If Airstrike in Syria Accidently Claimed Civilian Lives”, US Department of Defense, 29 July 2016, available at www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/881021/centcom-assessing-if-air-strike-in-syria-accidently-claimed-civilian-lives/source/GovDelivery

US-led strikes in Syria, according to Syrian human rights organizations. Video clips and other images reviewed by Amnesty International show the purported aftermath of the strikes, including what appear to be dead and injured civilians, as well as destroyed and damaged buildings in a residential neighbourhood. Also found in Kafr Daryan were the remnants of what appears to be, based on the opinion of a weapons expert consulted by Amnesty International, part of a Tomahawk missile.

The Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC), an independent Syrian human rights organization established by award-winning human rights defender Razan Zeitouneh and others, promptly stated that most of the some 15 fatalities were civilian, including at least three children who the organization named.⁶ Local monitoring group Idleb News Network (ENN) published images of the three deceased children and named them; one image was of one of the children after their death⁷ and another was of the other two children while they were still alive.⁸ The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), another independent Syrian NGO, whose information has been cited by the US Ambassador to the United Nations, among many others, found that 13 civilians were killed, including five women and five children, naming 10 of them while noting that three women could not be identified.⁹ Names given by both organizations closely overlap. Testimony given to SNHR indicated that explosions within the target building, located in the east of the village, led to the collapse of an adjacent two-storey residential building, killing civilians inside. Residents told Human Rights Watch that a series of missiles killed at least nine civilians, including five children, who were inside two homes inside Kafr Daryan, around 1km away from buildings used by an armed group on the eastern edge of the village in which there were otherwise no military targets.¹⁰ The armed group was variously identified by the US Department of Defense as the Khorasan group, linked to al-Qa'ida, and by VDC and SNHR as Jabhat al-Nusra.¹¹ Through satellite image analysis, Amnesty

⁶ VDC, "VDC Press Declaration on the Strikes of the International Coalition on Syria: Serious Fears for the Loss Of Large Number of Casualties among Civilians", September 2014, available at www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/1411628008#.V7RIIsfkrLct

⁷ Idleb News Network Documentation Division, "The child Mahmoud Jumaa Muadh" (in Arabic), 23 September 2014, available at drive.google.com/file/d/0B5pudHajcbMuSno1TG5BcXpBMGM/view

⁸ Idleb News Network Documentation Division, "Binnish – Bsmila Abd al-Hammed Jahjah" (in Arabic), 23 September 2014, available at drive.google.com/file/d/0B5pudHajcbMudlxcT1c0cTNvUFU/view and Idleb News Network Documentation Division, "Binnish – Muhammad Abd al-Hamid Jahjah" (in Arabic), 23 September 2014, available at drive.google.com/file/d/0B5pudHajcbMuUEVrWUJD0XJkcnc/view

⁹ US Embassy of Damascus, "Remarks at a UN Security Council Open Debate on the Middle East", 22 October 2015, available at <https://damascus.usembassy.gov/statedept102615en3.html>; SNHR, "The International Alliance's Airstrikes Killed 24 Civilians and Destroyed a Number of Vital Buildings. In the same period of time, the Syrian Regime killed 1447 civilians, 26 October 2014", available at sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/The_International_Alliance%E2%80%99s.pdf; SNHR, "Air raids of Coalition Forces cause deaths among the ranks of civilians in Idleb" (in Arabic), 25 September 2014, available at sn4hr.org/arabic/2014/09/25/2130/

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, "US/Syria: Investigate Possible Unlawful US Strikes", 27 September 2014, available at www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/27/us/syria-investigate-possible-unlawful-us-strikes

¹¹ SNHR, *The International Alliance's Air strikes Killed 24 Civilians and Destroyed a Number of Vital Buildings. In the same period of time, the Syrian Regime killed 1447 civilians*, 26 October 2014 (available at sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/The_International_Alliance%E2%80%99s.pdf). VDC, "VDC Press

International identified a second potential strike location some 460m to the east of Kafr Daryan.

Reports vary on the number of armed group members killed. SNHR reported that 13 fighters were killed and named two of them. VDC named seven fighters killed.¹² A report by Orient News indicated that as many as 16 fighters were killed.¹³ Residents told human rights organizations that missiles hit at least two buildings used by Jabhat al-Nusra, but also destroyed at least one civilian home.

Amnesty International analysed several videos of the immediate aftermath that were posted within a few hours of the attack.¹⁴ In one of the videos, a body pulled from the rubble appears to be that of a young girl.¹⁵ Two photographs from before the attack of a girl and of a boy who were killed, said to be sister and brother and both named on the images and in the reports listed above, could not be found anywhere on-line before the date of this attack.¹⁶ The strike location appears to be in a residential neighbourhood, approximately 100m from a mosque, as confirmed by satellite imagery from 30 September 2014 (one week after the attack) obtained by Amnesty International. Several buildings intact in satellite imagery from August 2014 are either completely or partially destroyed in the imagery from 30 September. Through image analysis, Amnesty International identified a second potential strike location some 460m to the east of Kafr Daryan.¹⁷

Declaration on the Strikes of the International Coalition on Syria: Serious Fears for the Loss Of Large Number of Casualties among Civilians”, September 2014 (available at www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/1411628008#.V7RlSfkrLct). The Khorasan group is said to be, or to have been, a senior group of al-Qa’ida veterans predominantly from outside Syria. See Carnegie Middle East Center, “What Is the ‘Khorasan Group’ and Why IS the U.S Bombing it in Syria?”, 23 September 2014 (available at <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/56707>). The Jabhat al-Nusra armed group, formed in 2012 predominantly by Syrian nationals, became al-Qa’ida’s branch in Syria from 2013 although it later sought at least publicly to distance itself from al-Qa’ida. It is now called Jabhat Fatah al-Sham.

¹² List from VDC database of non-civilians killed in Kafr Daryan on 23 September 2014, available at bit.ly/2cBM3Wk

¹³ Orient News, “Civilian losses in bombing of International Coalition on the village of Kafr Daryan” (in Arabic), 24 September 2014, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AJrPiQksns

¹⁴ Salah Qowjo, “North Idlib Governorate, village of Kafr Daryan, aiding injured civilians from the air raids of the Western Coalition” (in Arabic), 23 September 2014, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=PT58aR641YM; Salah Qowjo, “North Idlib Governorate, recovering of civilian corpses from beneath the rubble” (in Arabic), 23 September 2014, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkuA3INULmw; Salah Qowjo, “North Idlib Governorate, ruins of the destruction created by the air raids of the Western Coalition on civilians” (in Arabic), 23 September 2014, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmCkAmFGell

¹⁵ See image at 1 min 46. Salah Qowjo, “North Idlib Governorate, recovering of civilian corpses from beneath the rubble” (in Arabic), 23 September 2014, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkuA3INULmw

¹⁶ Idlib News Network Documentation Division, “Binnish – Bismila Abd al-Hamid Jahjah” (in Arabic), 23 September 2016 available at drive.google.com/file/d/0B5pudHajcbMudlcxT1c0cTNvUFU/view; Idlib News Network Documentation Division, “Binnish – Muhammad Abd al-Hamid Jahjah” (in Arabic), 23 September 2016, available at drive.google.com/file/d/0B5pudHajcbMuUEVrWUJDOXJkcnc/view

¹⁷ Amnesty International can share the images on request.

The large number of civilian fatalities and injuries, and the damage to civilian objects raise questions as to whether this attack was proportionate. At the very least, the presence of large numbers of civilians in the vicinity and the recorded civilian casualties and damage suggest that necessary precautions to minimize harm to civilians may not have been taken.

CENTCOM acknowledged that US forces conducted the attack, but not that any civilians were killed. According to its statements, strikes were carried out that night against “ISIL targets”, including with sea-launched Tomahawk missiles and against targets of the Khorasan group. On 23 September 2014, CENTCOM announced that US forces took action “to disrupt the imminent attack plotting against the United States and Western interests conducted by a network of seasoned al-Qa’ida veterans – sometimes referred to as the Khorasan Group – who have established a safe haven in Syria... In total, U.S. Central Command conducted eight strikes against Khorasan Group targets west of Aleppo to include training camps, an explosives and munitions production facility, a communication building and command and control facilities.”¹⁸ According to the same statement, multiple missiles were launched from two US warships. The US Navy’s YouTube channel contains video clips dated 23 September 2014 purporting to show the USS Arleigh Burke and USS Philippine Sea launching multiple Tomahawk and land-attack missiles at ISIL targets.¹⁹ The US authorities stated that there was no evidence of civilian casualties. On 25 September 2014, the Pentagon’s chief spokesman stated: “we don’t have any credible operational reporting through operational channels that would sustain those allegations [of civilian deaths].”²⁰ He acknowledged that without “anybody on the ground going to these sites... it could be some time before we have any way to address these allegations”. According to the findings of an internal investigation made public in September 2015, “[A] review of BDA [bomb damage assessment] imagery did not credibly determine that civilians were present at the site. Open source images presented as casualties from the strikes actually came from previous GoS [Government of Syria] strikes.” As such, it concluded, “No further inquiry required.”²¹ No information was provided to indicate which “open source images” had been falsely presented.

Amnesty International conducted an on-line search of images purporting to show casualties from the Kafr Daryan attack and did find one that appeared to have been used elsewhere, namely in a report by the Damascus Centre for Human Rights Studies (DCHRS) concerning killings, predominantly by

¹⁸ Kafr Daryan is some 40km west of Aleppo. America’s Navy, “US military, Partner Nations Conduct Airstrikes Against ISIL in Syria”, 23 September 2014, available at www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=83476

¹⁹ US Navy, “USS Arleigh Burke launches Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles to combat ISIL”, 23 September 2014 available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9034BawdX4&feature=youtu.be&html5=1&app=desktop; US Navy, “USS Philippine Sea launches Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles to combat ISIL”, 23 September 2014, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=6a-d671Jfdk

²⁰ US Department of Defense, “Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Adm. Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room”, 25 September 2014, available at www.defense.gov/News/News-Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/606932

²¹ Airwars, Declassified CENTCOM table of 45 alleged civilian casualty incidents in Iraq and Syria between 14 September 2014 and 30 April 2015, September 2015, available at airwars.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/centcom-civcas-investigations.pdf

Syrian government forces, across Syria on 20 September 2014.²² The image is of an infant who appears in several other on-line locations in clear relation to the attack on Kafr Daryan, including in the reports of SNHR.²³ No information is provided in the DCHRS report as to why the image is featured, but DCHRS confirmed to Amnesty International that the image it used was of an infant named Mahmoud Jumaa Muadh who was killed in Kafr Daryan by Coalition forces on 23 September 2014, adding that the DCHRS had documented his death in both its Arabic and English reports for killings on that day and in which it also included an additional image of the dead infant.²⁴ SNHR also confirmed to Amnesty International that it was confident that its own information was correct regarding the killing of Mahmoud Jumaa Maadh on 23 September 2014 in the US forces' attack on Kafr Daryan on 23 September 2014.²⁵ Amnesty International could not find any other "open source images" of casualties from other attacks misleadingly used in relation to this one.²⁶

2. AL-BAB, ALEPPO GOVERNORATE, 28 DECEMBER 2014

At least 51 detained civilians and captured fighters were killed in an air strike on an IS-controlled building in al-Bab town, some 40km north of Aleppo city in Aleppo governorate at around 7.40pm on 28 December 2014, according to Syrian human rights organizations. The building, known as the Saraya, had previously contained financial, administrative and security branches of the government but had been taken over and used by IS as its local headquarters and detention centre, mostly for people held in relation to alleged petty offences and acts violating the IS-imposed interpretation of Islamic law, in addition to a smaller number of detained fighters from other armed groups.

According to both VDC and SNHR, two missiles struck the building, after which IS forces imposed tight restrictions on access to the location. Nevertheless, both human rights organizations were able to carry out investigations through local contacts to establish names and numbers of casualties, and collect information on how many bodies were uncovered over subsequent days and where the bodies

²² Damascus Centre for Human Rights Studies (DCHRS), "Casualties report. Total Deaths: 71. Saturday 20/09/2014", 20 September 2014, available at www.dchrs.org/english/news.php?id=1852&idC=16#.V7rHFvkrLcvid=1852&idC=16#.V7boHfkrLcu

²³ SNHR, *The International Alliance's Air strikes Killed 24 Civilians and Destroyed a Number of Vital Buildings. In the same period of time, the Syrian Regime killed 1447 civilians*, 26 October 2014, available at sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/The_International_Alliance%E2%80%99s.pdf, with the appendix of names and hyperlink to the same image via p. 3: drive.google.com/file/d/0B5pudHajcbMuT1JY1BqY01vVik/view; Idleb News Network Documentation Division, "the child Mahmoud Jumaa Maadh" (in Arabic), 23 September 2014, available at drive.google.com/file/d/0B5pudHajcbMuSno1TG5BcXpBMGM/view

²⁴ Email correspondence on 10 September 2016. DCHRS explained that the image had been randomly selected for the report. DCHRS, "Casualty Report 23/9/2014", 23 September 2014, available at dchrs.org/news2.php?idC=18&id=2825 (English) and dchrs.org/news2.php?idC=18&id=2825 (Arabic).

²⁵ Communication via the internet, 24 August 2016.

²⁶ Airwars suggests that the following image may also have been misleadingly used after its initial posting on Twitter on 2 September 2014: @MaryamSaleh_, "Ma'arrat al-Nouman, Idleb: This man's four-year-old daughter, Fatima, was killed by an air strike this morning. Grief", 2 September 2014, available at twitter.com/MaryamSaleh_/status/506700720138354688/photo/1; in September 2016 Amnesty International could not find its presence on-line in relation to the Kafr Daryan attack.

were buried. According to SNHR, at least 51 detainees and two IS members were killed.²⁷ The research of VDC found that at least 60 detainees were killed, naming 31 of them, in addition to some seven IS guards.²⁸ It said that the majority of the detainees were civilians. An investigation by the McClatchy news organization established similar findings, while adding that among the prisoners killed there were captured fighters from armed groups fighting IS.²⁹

CENTCOM first declared that Coalition forces had carried out an attack in al-Bab that day on 10 January 2015, some 13 days after the incident and following “repeated enquiries” from McClatchy. A CENTCOM investigation found there to be “insufficient information to determine CIVCAS [civilian casualties]” from this attack.

Images shared on-line by VDC and others show that the Saraya building had been destroyed.³⁰ According to Amnesty International’s assessment, the images had not been on-line before September 2014. The building can be seen in publicly available satellite imagery before the attack but not in a satellite image seen by Amnesty International after that date. Based on its review of the information available, Amnesty International considers it likely that this attack killed dozens of civilians and captured fighters. Given the nature of the target, the loss of life of dozens of detainees should have been foreseen and it is unclear how it could have been anticipated that the military advantage of attacking a detention centre could outweigh the risk to the lives of so many civilians and *hors de combat* detainees. Further, the failure of CENTCOM to acknowledge strikes on al-Bab for 13 days displays a lack of transparency that is at odds with Executive Order 13732.

3. BIR MAHLI, ALEPPO GOVERNORATE, 30 APRIL/1 MAY 2015

At least 60 civilians, including women and children, were killed by suspected Coalition air strikes on the village of Bir Mahli, near Sareen, around 40km south of Kobani, at around midnight on the night of 30 April/1 May 2015, according to Syrian human rights organizations and local monitoring groups.³¹ According to survivors’ testimony and images of the location after the air strikes, at least

²⁷ SNHR, *The International Alliance Responsible for the Deaths of 103 Civilians, Including 11 Children and 11 Women: The International Alliance Victims Toll*, February 2015, available at sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/Toll_civilian_victims_of_international_coalition_forces_en.pdf

²⁸ VDC, “Statement on Targeting Detention Centre by the International Coalition Forces Al-Bab – Aleppo 28 Dec 2014”, February 2015, available at www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/1423064971#.V8_yxPkrLcs

²⁹ McClatchy DC, “US air strike in Syria may have killed 50 civilians”, 11 January 2015, available at www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24778273.html

³⁰ See images uploaded by Aleppo Lens in report by VDC, “Statement on Targeting Detention Centre by the International Coalition Forces Al-Bab – Aleppo 28 Dec 2014”, February 2015, available at www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/1423064971#.V7SGv_krLct; see also three similar images, apparently taken by Al-Bab City Youth Lens, in: SNHR, *The International Alliance Responsible for the Deaths of 103 Civilians, Including 11 Children and 11 Women: The International Alliance Victims Toll*, February 2015, p. 7, available at sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/Toll_civilian_victims_of_international_coalition_forces_en.pdf

³¹ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), “50 children and women from among 63 civilians, martyred in a massacre of coalition planes in the village of Bir Mahli, in north east Aleppo governorate” (in Arabic), 4 May 2015, available at bit.ly/2ctVNBX; SNHR, *More Evidences Proving the International Coalition’s Involvement in the Massacre of Bir Mahli Village*, 18 May 2015, available at sn4hr.org/wp-

six homes were destroyed. The small village lay close to areas being contested between IS and the Coalition-supported and predominantly Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). Most reports other than those of CENTCOM indicate that IS had no presence inside Bir Mahli and did not suffer losses in the strikes. Witnesses told monitoring groups that YPG forces occupied a hill overlooking the village and that tracer bullets were fired into the village shortly before the strikes, seemingly to guide them.

Local and national human rights and monitoring groups largely concur that there were 64 identified civilian fatalities, including at least 30 children, adding that other bodies remained under the rubble of civilian buildings. Several families suffered multiple fatalities. These include 14 members of the family of Ali al-Shawakh al-Salibi; 12 members of the family of Jumaa al-Shawakh al-Salibi; nine members of the family of Ali al-Mohammed al-Ali; and seven of the family of Eid al-Mustafa al-Shawakh al-Ali. Video clips and still images posted on social media and in human rights reports reviewed by Amnesty International purport to show multiple civilian fatalities, including at least several children.³² Amnesty International has been unable to speak with eyewitnesses directly but has reviewed three interviews of survivors recorded by others in which the testimony given corroborates the information above.³³ Due to the lack of geographical reference points in the videos Amnesty International was unable to geolocate them, but through conducting standard on-line and social media research methodologies on the video clips the organization found that none of them was available before the date of the attack.

Amnesty International was able to trace, through analysis of geographic reference points, one video clip purporting to show the digging of a mass grave for victims of the attack to Marwah, a village located some 7km south of Bir Mahli and named by SNHR as one of the locations of such graves. Further, a review by Amnesty International of a series of aerial images of the Bir Mahli area, including a satellite image taken approximately one week after the attack, indicates four strike

[content/pdf/english/Massacre_of_Ber_Mahli_Village_en.pdf](#); and SNHR, *169 Civilians including 42 children and 30 women have been killed by the International Coalition Forces*, 6 May 2015, available at [sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/169_Civilians_have_been_Killed_by_the_International_Coalition_Forces.pdf](#); VDC table of civilian deaths that day, available at [bit.ly/2cM1VVB](#); DCHRS, "Report on the massacre by International Coalition Forces in the village of Bir Mahli in eastern Aleppo governorate (in Arabic)", 1 May 2015, available at [bit.ly/2cykzjl](#). Further reports and images are hosted on the Airwars website, [airwars.org/civcas-2015/](#)

³² Yousef, "Sireen massacre" (in Arabic), 4 May 2015, available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=snZvOA5z4EI](#), published at 12pm local time on 4 May 2015; the same video with a title slide was uploaded one hour later by Abu Obeida al-Raqqawi, "Massacre of Saudi Planes in Aleppo Governorate (Bir Mahli village) 169 civilian victims, among them 42 children and 30 women" (in Arabic), 4 May 2015, available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8CWqq_Ygbl](#); and DCHRS, "Report on the massacre by International Coalition Forces in the village of Bir Mahli in eastern Aleppo governorate" (in Arabic), 1 May 2015, available at [bit.ly/2cykzjl](#)

³³ SNHR, "Aleppo-Beir Mahli: witness (1) of the massacre committed by the International Coalition Aircrafts", 14 May 2015, available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDQrWD_XHlw&feature=youtu.be](#); SNHR, "Aleppo-Beir Mahli: witness (2) of the massacre committed by the International Coalition Aircrafts", 14 May 2015, available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kc0OU8bpKdQ&feature=youtu.be](#); SNHR, "Aleppo-Beir Mahli: testimony of a girl that survived the massacre committed by the international [coalition forces]", 14 May 2015, available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9atF5MH6Gs&feature=youtu.be](#)

locations and nine to 10 houses being completely flattened.

The Coalition first commented on the incident on 3 May 2015 when CENTCOM confirmed that “Coalition forces conducted airstrikes in the vicinity of Birmahle, destroying several ISIL fighting positions and striking more than 50 ISIL fighters,” and that it had “no indication that any civilians were killed in these strikes”.³⁴ The statement went on to say that “prior to the airstrikes, Kurdish forces, who held the town before leaving after being attacked by ISIL, reported there were no civilians present in that location and that there had not been any civilians present for two weeks prior to the Coalition airstrikes.” A preliminary internal CENTCOM “credibility assessment” found that the “allegation [of civilian casualties was] initially not determined credible”, it was revealed in September 2015.³⁵

Amnesty International is concerned that Coalition forces appear to have either mistakenly carried out a large-scale attack on an entirely civilian area having failed to take adequate steps to positively identify a military objective prior to attacking or to have carried out a grossly disproportionate attack against suspected IS targets. In addition, CENTCOM appears to have dismissed evidence indicating scores of civilian casualties.

4. AL-RAQQA CITY, AL-RAQQA GOVERNORATE, 4 TO 5 JULY 2015

Sixteen bridges in and around al-Raqqa city were destroyed by Coalition forces on 4 and 5 July 2015. At least six of them were pedestrian bridges predominantly used by civilians, according to local and national human rights and monitoring groups as well as local media.³⁶ Local activists and media reports stated that some of the bridges were critical for the transfer of food and other goods in and out of the city. An investigation by BuzzFeed found that a family of seven, including two children, who were living under one of the 16 bridges after being internally displaced from Palmyra, were killed in one of the bridge strikes, according to a relative of the deceased.³⁷ A Syrian human rights lawyer told Amnesty International that many civilians spent time under bridges in the al-Raqqa area, since they provide, on the one hand, some shelter and, on the other, a place to relax,

³⁴ AFP, “US says no Syrian civilians killed in coalition air strike”, 4 May 2015, available at www.yahoo.com/news/us-says-no-syrian-civilians-killed-coalition-air-013528860.html?ref=gs

³⁵ Airwars, “Declassified CENTCOM table of 45 alleged civilian casualty incidents in Iraq and Syria between 14 September 2014 and 30 April 2015”, September 2015, available at airwars.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/centcom-civcas-investigations.pdf

³⁶ The SNHR identified seven bridges destroyed on 5 July 2015, six of them pedestrian. SNHR, *Civilian's Death toll due to the International Coalition Airstrikes*, pp. 28- 29, 11 August 2015, available at sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/civilian_killed_by_the_international_coalition_forces_en.pdf; Alkawakibi Organization for Human Rights, “al-Raqqa, a number of raids yesterday targeted bridges on the outskirts of Raqqa city and the governorate”, 5 July 2015, available at www.facebook.com/AlKawakibiOrganization/posts/458374987669832; Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, “A number of raids yesterday targeted bridges on the edges of Raqqa city and its governorate”, 5 July 2015, available at www.facebook.com/Raqqa.SI/posts/1025442670800317

³⁷ BuzzFeed, “The U.S.-led Fight Against ISIS has Killed Far More Civilians than it Admits”, 2 September 2015, available at www.buzzfeed.com/mikegiglio/the-us-led-coalition-bombing-syria-has-killed-more-civilians?utm_term=.lj9EdBBMN

given limited alternatives in IS-controlled areas.³⁸ A local activist told Amnesty International that, according to several eyewitnesses, the bombing of al-Farwasiya bridge, north-west of al-Raqqa city, caused several deaths and injuries among civilians only, as well as damage to homes near the bridge.³⁹ He said that the targeting of the bridges which connected the city with the agricultural areas outside it was a “humanitarian disaster” for farmers and others impacted by the inability to transport their goods.

According to a statement issued by CENTCOM on 5 July 2015, the Coalition carried out 18 strikes in al-Raqqa governorate on 4 July, striking “an ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL vehicles and 16 ISIL bridges”.⁴⁰ CENTCOM also released aerial footage showing air strikes on several of the bridges.⁴¹ CENTCOM issued another statement on 22 January 2016, adding that on 4 July 2015, “near Ar Raqqa, Syria, during strikes against 16 ISIL bridges, it was assessed one civilian in a truck with a trailer was likely killed.”⁴²

Amnesty International is concerned that some of the bridges were primarily for civilian use and may have been civilian objects. Military objectives are limited to those objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose partial or total destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage. The six pedestrian bridges that were reportedly destroyed may not have met the two-part test for military objectives. Even a bridge that does meet the definition of military objective may only be attacked if the military advantage anticipated outweighs the likely harm to civilians. The assessment of anticipated harm should include the effect that such destruction would have on the ability of the civilian population to access supplies necessary for their survival. The reliance of the civilian population on bridges for obtaining access to food and other essential supplies means that their destruction may have been disproportionate. Further, while the evidence is limited, the apparent civilian deaths and damage to homes as a result of the strike on al-Farwasiya bridge raise questions as to whether adequate precautions were taken in planning and executing this attack.

5. ATMEH, IDLEB GOVERNORATE, 11 AUGUST 2015

An air strike at around 8.20pm on 11 August struck buildings in Atmeh in Idlib governorate. As a result of the strike, a building used by an armed group and two adjacent civilian homes were

³⁸ Communication via the internet, 30 July 2016.

³⁹ Communication via the internet, 22 August 2016.

⁴⁰ The attacks were on the night of 4 July and morning of 5 July 2015. CENTCOM, “Military airstrikes continue against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq”, 5 July 2015, available at www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/904129/july-5-military-air-strikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-and-iraq/; AFP, “Heavy US-led Raids on ISIS Syria Stronghold Kill Dozens”, 5 July 2015, available at www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/mideast-africa/2015/07/05/heavy-us-led-raids-isis-syria-stronghold-kill-dozens/29734837/

⁴¹ Airwars, “DOD 102569902”, 7 July 2015, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8ZrII9N8xw&feature=youtu.be

⁴² CENTCOM, “CENTCOM releases results of Iraq and Syria civilian casualty assessments”, 22 January 2016, available at www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/904498/jan-22-centcom-releases-results-of-iraq-and-syria-civilian-casualty-assessments/

destroyed. In total, eight civilians, including six children, were killed and at least five others were reportedly injured, including a pregnant woman who lost six children in the attack, according to survivors and Syrian human rights organizations and media reports.⁴³ After initially denying involvement, CENTCOM acknowledged that Coalition forces carried out the strike but disputed that there were any civilian casualties. Some 10 fighters were killed in the attack, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).⁴⁴

Those killed instantly were five children from one family from Atmeh in one house and three members (a mother, her 17-year-old daughter and adult son) of a family displaced from Ariha in the other. A sixth child from the first family, a girl aged two, died of her injuries two weeks later in hospital in Turkey. The five siblings killed in the air strike were aged between four and 10 years. A video uploaded onto YouTube on 13 August contains footage of the aftermath of the air strike and an interview with a doctor who describes the civilian fatalities, five children from one family and three members of the second, displaced family. He adds that the buildings were completely destroyed and that efforts to recover the bodies of the victims continued from the time of the strike until 3am.⁴⁵⁴⁶ Satellite images obtained and reviewed by Amnesty International indicate the complete destruction of the two houses, in addition to the building used by the armed group. An interview carried out by Syrian journalist Hadi Alabdallah with the grandfather and father of the six deceased siblings, as well as a woman in hospital purportedly injured in the attack, provides very similar information.⁴⁷ An image in the report by SNHR of the six siblings when they were alive could not be found on-line by Amnesty international at any date before the incident, nor could accompanying images of casualties from the attack.⁴⁸ Other videos purporting to show the aftermath

⁴³ SNHR, *International Coalition Forces targets Armed Opposition Groups for the third time*, 10 September 2015, available at sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/International_Coalition_Forces_Targets_Armed_Opposition_Groups_en.pdf; BuzzFeed, "The U.S.-Led Fight Against ISIS Has Killed Far More Civilians Than It Admits", 2 September 2015, available at www.buzzfeed.com/mikegiglio/the-us-led-coalition-bombing-syria-has-killed-more-civilians?utm_term=.rfNe5N1ZA#.diKjpdNPV

⁴⁴ Voice of America, "US May Investigate Claims of Civilian Deaths in Coalition Airstrikes", 13 August 2015, available at www.voanews.com/a/us-may-investigate-claims-of-civilian-deaths/2916256.html

⁴⁵ Amnesty International mistakenly stated in its memorandum that a sixth sibling, a girl aged two, died of her injuries two weeks later in hospital in Turkey. Her uncle assured Amnesty International that the girl was seriously injured but did not die.

⁴⁶ SMART News Agency, "Victims from air raids on the border town of Atmeh in Idlib governorate" (in Arabic), 13 August 2015, available at www.youtube.com/watch?t=43&v=oDJtt-ZLJ2E

⁴⁷ Hadi Alabdallah, "Emotional interview with grandfather and father of the child martyrs that were targeted by International Coalition during bombing on the border town of Atmeh" (in Arabic), 12 August 2015, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=45VIWun-2ao&feature=youtu.be

⁴⁸ SNHR, *International Coalition Forces targets Armed Opposition Groups for the third time*, 10 September 2015, p. 9, available at sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/International_Coalition_Forces_Targets_Armed_Opposition_Groups_en.pdf

of the attack could not be found on-line by Amnesty International prior to 11 August 2015.⁴⁹

Talha al-Amouri, a resident of Atmeh and brother-in-law of the six children's mother, told Amnesty International that his sister-in-law was eight months' pregnant at the time of the attack and had a stillbirth as a consequence of it. He said that missiles destroyed a building owned by the family and used, with their consent, by the Jaysh al-Sunna armed group, as well as two adjacent buildings about 15m away that the family lived in and also owned. He said that he and his brother Mowiya al-Amouri had left home shortly before the attack to go to a nearby shop. He told Amnesty International:

I was about 50m away when the air strike happened... Five missiles fell in total. The first fell 10m away from the house, the second and third fell on and next to the house and the last two fell on the building used by Jaysh al-Sunna. We own the building and Jaysh al-Sunna is using it to produce mortar shells but they don't pay us rent... We found the women quicker under the rubble; the children took a while to find. The [dead] children [of my brother and sister-in-law] had shrapnel injuries. The neighbours had no such injuries but their heads had exploded.⁵⁰

The attack reportedly killed 10 Jaysh al-Sunna fighters in addition to destroying the building the armed group used.⁵¹ A local man interviewed by SNHR is among several who stated that shell casings were manufactured in the building but that there were no explosives. A video clip of the aftermath of the strike in which multiple intact shell casings are visible appears to support this.⁵²

"How could they have known that there was an ammunitions factory but not that there were homes with civilians nearby?" Talha al-Amouri asked Amnesty International.

CENTCOM initially denied carrying out the attack, apparently due to confusion over the spelling of "Atmeh".⁵³ On 3 September 2015, CENTCOM confirmed to BuzzFeed that coalition forces carried

⁴⁹ Hadi Alabdallah, "Bombing by international coalition forces on positions of Jaysh al-Fateh in the border town of Atmeh, and interview with commander of Jaysh al-Sunna explaining the details" (in Arabic), 12 August 2015, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzephk-40TY

⁵⁰ Conversation via the internet, 14 October 2015.

⁵¹ Syria Observatory for Human Rights, "After a year of US-led coalition airstrikes, 'Islamic State' loses about 15 square kilometers out of its-held areas in Syria 23 September 2015", 26 September 2015, available at www.syriahr.com/en/?p=33155; Middle East Eye, "Five sisters among 8 civilians killed in US-led strike on Syrian village", 12 August 2015, available at www.middleeasteye.net/news/us-led-coalition-kills-8-civilians-atmeh-1783446219

⁵² Hadi Alabdallah, "Bombing by international coalition forces on positions of Jaysh al-Fateh in the border town of Atmeh, and interview with commander of Jaysh al-Sunna explaining the details" (in Arabic), 12 August 2015, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzephk-40TY

⁵³ "At first U.S. officials denied having launched an air strike on the village... But later they confirmed the raid, saying there had been confusion over the spelling of the village's name, which in English can also be rendered as 'Atmeh', 'Atma' or 'Atima'." Voice of America, "US May Investigate Claims of Civilian Deaths in Coalition Airstrikes", 13 August 2015, available at www.voanews.com/a/us-may-investigate-claims-of-civilian-deaths/2916256.html

out the air strike, saying that it had destroyed a weapons store and had not caused civilian casualties. On 27 October 2015, CENTCOM said in response to a query from Airwars that, based on the evidence available to it, allegations that the attack had caused civilian casualties were “unfounded and deemed not credible”.

The attack appears to have been directed at a military target, and to have struck and destroyed it, but to have also destroyed neighbouring homes and killed nine civilians within them. As such, the attack may have been disproportionate. The existence of two civilian homes a mere 15m from the military target should have necessitated precautions necessary to minimize risk of loss of civilian life and destruction of civilian objects.

6. AYN AL-KHAN, NEAR AL-HAWL, AL-HASAKAH GOVERNORATE, 7 DECEMBER 2015

Coalition air strikes took place in the vicinity of the village of Ayn al-Khan, near al-Hawl in al-Hasakah governorate, in the early hours of 7 December 2015, and killed 40 civilians and injured at least 30 others, according to Syrian human rights organizations and other sources. Multiple sources reported that a fighter plane and combat helicopter attacked the area, some 12km south-east of al-Hasakah city, as part of a Coalition-backed operation with YPG forces against IS targets. Amnesty International has not found clear information, other than that provided by CENTCOM, indicating the extent to which IS forces were harmed in the attack.

According to SNHR, among others, a small group of six IS fighters moved into a house on the edge of the small village of Ayn al-Khan just five days earlier. On 7 December 2015, a position of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a coalition of armed groups in which the Kurdish-led YPG forces play a significant role, 1.5km away from the village, was hit by a mortar and in apparent response the SDF fired a missile at Ayn al-Khan. The villagers were then prevented by IS forces from leaving the village, SNHR reported.⁵⁴ According to testimony given to the McClatchy media outlet by local activists and a relative of five of those killed, villagers had an altercation with IS fighters as a result of which IS reinforcements headed to the village. At around midnight, suspected Coalition forces carried out air strikes which destroyed at least two houses in which dozens of civilians were sheltering. The relative said that IS fighters were also killed but no numbers were specified.⁵⁵ According to SOHR, “all the deaths were civilians”.⁵⁶

SNHR identified 40 civilian fatalities from the strikes, including 19 children, nine women and 12

⁵⁴ SNHR, *New attacks by the International Coalition Forces result in losses and civilian victims*, 13 February 2015, available at sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/68_civilians_killed_in_new_attacks_by_international_coalition_forces_en.pdf; SNHR and other sources subsequently published a list of 40 of the dead civilians on 7 December 2015, available at drive.google.com/file/d/0B701jbPlaDd0VVfHWGFoa2d5Z00/view; Union of Hasakah Youth, 7 December 2015, available at www.facebook.com/HASAKHNEWS/posts/1622250528013969; Airwars, “Reported civilian and ‘friendly fire’ deaths from Coalition air strikes 2015”, available at airwars.org/civcas-2015/

⁵⁵ McClatchy DC, “U.S. coalition investigating reports its airstrikes killed at least 36 Syrian civilians”, 7 December 2015, available at www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article48523710.html

⁵⁶ SOHR head Rami Abdel Rahman cited in *The Guardian*, “At least 26 Syrian civilians killed in suspected US-led airstrike”, 7 December 2015, available at www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/07/syrian-civilians-killed-us-airstrike

men. One video purporting to show the aftermath of the incident, of which Amnesty International could not find any version posted prior to this attack, shows one charred dead body.⁵⁷ GlobalPost, Al Jazeera, the BBC and *The Guardian* are among the media outlets that investigated the incident and made similar findings.⁵⁸ One survivor and eyewitness told Amnesty International that his wife, mother, two children and aunt were among those killed.⁵⁹ The survivor described the air strike:

It was past midnight. We were sleeping. We were suddenly wakened by a huge explosion. The house shook and began to crumble. The windows shattered. There was shrapnel in the walls. I ran out and saw my neighbour's house completely destroyed. He told me: 'Abu Khalil, I managed to rescue my wife and son but I can't find my six-month-old baby. Help me!' I could hear people calling from underneath the rubble. My neighbour's mother was crying out. She's 70. I pulled her out, along with a boy and his mother. They were all OK. My mother and my aunt both came running to help dig through the rubble. But while we did this, a helicopter – sounded like an Apache – came overhead. It fired. They had machine-guns with explosive bullets. I was hit. At this point I had a two-month-old baby boy in my arms who I had rescued. The hit caused me to fall and drop him. I still have the shrapnel in my body. I fell into the hole made by the air strike. That was what saved me. The helicopter circled round and fired a second time. My mother, aunt, wife and children – a daughter who was four years old, and a son who was two and a half – were all killed. The woman and her son who I'd rescued were killed. Everyone but me was killed. Three powerful rockets were used in the first air strike. They left a 2m deep hole in the ground... until the Kurdish militia filled it. On the first day, they [the Kurdish forces] didn't let anyone go near the place or take pictures. On the second day, they allowed civilians near the site but not to take pictures. People from the village later spoke to a commander of the YPG who claimed that they warned coalition forces of civilians in the area but that the Coalition did not listen. A total of 19 people died in that one house – including my cousin and my brother's children. It was the Americans. For the past year and a half the only aircraft that fly over our area have been American.

CENTCOM announced that Coalition forces had carried out operations in the vicinity of al-Hawl during that period. It said that, on 6 December 2015, “Near Al Hawl, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and three ISIL vehicles”.⁶⁰ It stated that, on 7 December 2015, “Near Al Hawl, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL

⁵⁷ SNHR, “Hasakah-Ein Khan: victim of Intl Coalition shelling on the village, 7 Dec 2015”, 7 December 2015, available at www.sn4hr.org/wp-video/watch.php?id=233&token=F1Fsw0M9P7nPZZW8gqCFBsXZOx4ZSUjn

⁵⁸ GlobalPost, “The US is killing more civilians in Iraq and Syria than it acknowledges”, 1 February 2016, available at www.globalpost.com/article/6727117/2016/01/31/us-killing-far-more-civilians-iraq-and-syria-it-says; Al Jazeera, “Tens killed in international coalition bombing on al-Hasakah” (in Arabic), 7 December 2015, available at bit.ly/2cwUQ38; *The Guardian*, “At least 26 Syrian civilians killed in suspected US-led airstrike”, 7 December 2015, available at www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/07/syrian-civilians-killed-us-airstrike

⁵⁹ Phone call, 31 May 2016.

⁶⁰ CJTF-OIR, “Military Strikes Continue Against ISIL Terrorists in Syria and Iraq”, 7 December 2015, available at www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/1/Documents/Strike%20Releases/2015/12Dec/20151207%20Strike%20Release%20Final.pdf?ver=2016-03-08-213006-130

fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle”.⁶¹ CENTCOM promptly stated that the allegations of civilian casualties were being investigated.⁶² In February 2016 the GlobalPost reported on the incident, saying: “The US military emphatically denied that they bombed al Khan on Dec. 7, though a spokesman said there were airstrikes in the area of al Hawl, a small town a few miles away. But when the spokesman showed us a map marking the location of the airstrike, it was in the same area where a group of local activists had told us al Khan was located. This was where the locals said [to GlobalPost] the rocket attack had taken place.”

Amnesty International is concerned that, despite evidence indicating multiple civilian casualties, CENTCOM has not acknowledged them. The attack appears to have been indiscriminate and may have resulted from a misidentification of a military objective. Even if a military objective was present in the vicinity, the heavy loss of civilian life suggests a failure to take necessary precautions or a decision to proceed with an attack which was foreseeably disproportionate.

7. AL-BUKAMAL, DEIR EL-ZOUR GOVERNORATE, 16 MAY 2016

An air strike in the early hours of 16 May 2016 hit the home of a prominent figure in IS in al-Bukamal. At least four civilians, including a woman and three young children, were killed in the attack and three or more others were injured, according to Syrian human rights groups including the Justice for Life Observatory in Deir Ezzor, SNHR, SOHR, Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently and media reports. The attack took place in a residential area of the town, near the post office and telecommunications building. The strikes hit two houses belonging to the brothers Fawaz al-Rawi and Qutayba al-Rawi.⁶³ The Justice for Life Observatory in Deir Ezzor stated that at 2.45am a particularly powerful strike hit the house of Fawaz al-Rawi, a leading IS official responsible for financial affairs, destroying it and seriously damaging neighbouring homes. It said that Fawaz al-Rawi was not at home at the time and that his sister and three children of his brother Qutayba were killed. The DeirEzzor is Being Slaughtered Silently local monitoring group published very similar information on 16 May 2016.⁶⁴ SNHR published an image of two of the deceased young children taken when they were still alive.⁶⁵ There were no reports of any IS casualties. Images of the strike’s

⁶¹ CJTF-OIR, “Military Strikes Continue Against ISIL Terrorists in Syria and Iraq”, 7 December 2015, available at www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/1/Documents/Strike%20Releases/2015/12Dec/20151208%20Strike%20Release%20Final.pdf?ver=2016-03-08-212957-617

⁶² Spokesperson cited in *The Guardian*, “At least 26 Syrian civilians killed in suspected US-led air strike 7 December 2015”, 7 December 2015, available at www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/07/syrian-civilians-killed-us-airstrike

⁶³ Justice for Life Observatory in Deir Ezzor, “Deaths from bombing of international coalition in the city of al-Bukamal”, 17 May 2016, available at jfldz.org/?p=2908; SNHR, “Children died in International Coalition forces shelling on Al Boukamal city in Deir Ez-Zour governorate in May 16”, 16 May 2016, available at sn4hr.org/blog/2016/05/17/children-died-international-coalition-forces-shelling-al-boukamal-city-deir-ez-zour-governorate-may-16/; SOHR, “Eight martyrs in air strikes and missiles targeting civilians in Deyr al-Zur and Al-Bukamal” (in Arabic), 16 May 2016, available at bit.ly/2cbfGwA; Shaam Network, “Air strike kills a whole family in Al-Bukamal in Deyr al-Zur” (in Arabic), 16 May 2016, available at bit.ly/2ci7kHI

⁶⁴ DeirEzzor is Being Slaughtered Silently, www.facebook.com/DeirEzzor.S.S/posts/1039126849512376 (the link is no longer working but Amnesty International has a copy on file).

⁶⁵ SNHR, “Children died in International Coalition forces shelling on Al Boukamal city in Deir Ez-Zour

aftermath clearly show a telecommunications tower very close by.

According to a CENTCOM update on 16 May 2016, Coalition forces carried out a strike “Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL financial headquarters.”⁶⁶

On the basis of the available information, Coalition forces were most likely responsible for this attack in which only civilians were killed, according to multiple sources. Since all indications are that at least four civilians were killed, and the apparent intended target was not present, the attack raises concerns regarding whether adequate precautions were taken. It is also unclear whether Fawaz al-Rawi’s activities amounted to direct participation in hostilities.

8. OJQANA, NEAR MANBIJ, ALEPPO GOVERNORATE, 3 JUNE 2016

Air strikes on the village of Ojqana, some 12km south-east of Manbij, killed up to 23 civilians from three related families, including at least 11 children and six women, and injured more than a dozen others during the night of 2-3 June 2016 according to monitoring groups from the Manbij area, Syrian human rights organizations and media reports. These organizations identified up to 23 civilian fatalities from the families of Saad Allah al-Husseyin al-Hilal, Bahjat al-Husseyin al-Hilal and Fouad al-Husseyin al-Hilal and reported 15 other civilians with serious injuries.⁶⁷ Images of the 11 children reported to have been killed, taken while they were still alive, were shared by Manbij Mother of the World monitoring group.⁶⁸ SNHR said that the victims were killed in their homes.⁶⁹ No fatality among IS members or other damage to IS forces was reported for this incident.

From late May 2016 IS forces in the Manbij area were subjected to repeated Coalition air strikes and ground attacks led by the SDF, including on 3 June 2016. One monitoring group from the Manbij area told Amnesty International that the survivors, relatives and witnesses did not want to

governorate in May 16”, 16 May 2016, available at sn4hr.org/blog/2016/05/17/children-died-international-coalition-forces-shelling-al-boukamal-city-deir-ez-zour-governorate-may-16/

⁶⁶ CENTCOM, “Military air strikes continue against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq”, 16 May 2016, available at www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/904592/may-16-military-air-strikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-and-iraq/

⁶⁷ Syrian Revolution Network, “List of massacres committed by the planes of the international coalition against the sons of Ojqana village, in the south-east of the province of Manbij city, in Aleppo governorate on 3 June [2016]” (in Arabic), 11 June 2016, available at www.facebook.com/Syrian.Revolution/photos/a.10150397575815727.619133.420796315726/10157230454840727/?type=3&theater; Manbij Coordinators Committee (in Arabic), available at www.facebook.com/manbej.coordination/posts/906939572748419 (the link no longer works but Amnesty International has a copy on file); Quentin Somerville, @sommervillebbc, 11 June 2016, available at twitter.com/sommervillebbc/status/741681925006430209

⁶⁸ Manbij Mother of the World, www.facebook.com/alduania/photos/a.202439253428835.1073741829.174781746194586/291818817824211/?type=3&theater (the link no longer works but Amnesty International has a copy of the image on file).

⁶⁹ SNHR, *No less than 204 massacres in the first half of 2016, including 33 massacres in June*, p. 11, 8 June 2016, available at sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/204_massacres_in_the_first_half_of_2016_en.pdf

speaking out about this incident because they feared repercussions from the SDF.⁷⁰

CJTF-OIR press releases stated that on 2 June 2016 10 strikes were carried out on IS targets “near Manbij” and on 3 June 2016 eight strikes were carried out on IS targets “near Manbij”.⁷¹

Based on the available information, Amnesty International is concerned that the strikes in Ojqana on 3 June, which appear to have been carried out by Coalition aircraft, resulted in heavy civilian casualties possibly due to a failure to adequately distinguish between civilians and military targets, resulting in an indiscriminate attack.

9. AL-HADHAD, NEAR MANBIJ, ALEPPO GOVERNORATE, 11 JUNE 2016

Ten civilians from one family were killed in suspected Coalition air strikes on the village of al-Hadhad, some 6km north-east of Manbij, on 11 June 2016, according to monitoring groups from the Manbij area and national human rights organizations and media reports. The victims were identified as the family of Mahmoud al-Khataf, including his two sons and their wives and their children, and one other woman. No casualty among IS members or other damage to IS forces was reported.⁷²

CJTF-OIR stated that on 11 June 2016 Coalition forces conducted 11 air strikes on IS targets “near Manbij”.⁷³

Based on the available information, Amnesty International is concerned that the strikes on al-Hadhad on 11 June appear to have been carried out by Coalition forces and that necessary

⁷⁰ Communication over the internet, 24 June 2016.

⁷¹ CJTF-OIR, “Military Strikes Continue Against ISIL Terrorists in Syria and Iraq”, 3 June 2016, available at www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/1/Documents/Strike%20Releases/2016/06June/20160603%20Strike%20Release%20Final.pdf?ver=2016-06-03-082007-143; and CJTF-OIR, “Military Strikes Continue Against ISIL Terrorists in Syria and Iraq”, 4 June 2016, available at www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/1/Documents/Strike%20Releases/2016/06June/20160604%20Strike%20Release%20Final.pdf?ver=2016-06-04-064248-437

⁷² Manbij Mother of the World, 11 June 2016, www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=291997557806337&id=174781746194586 (the link no longer works but Amnesty International has copies of the information on file); Shaam Network (in Arabic), 11 June 2016, available at www.facebook.com/ShaaamNetwork.Arabic/posts/1200349663348939; Halab Today TV (in Arabic), 11 June 2016, available at www.facebook.com/HalabTodayTV/posts/1406338816050219; Syrian Revolution Network, @RevolutionSyria, “Aleppo governorate Manbij – Martyrdom of 10 people from one family as a result of the bombing of international coalition planes in the village of al-Hadhad. All the victims are displaced people from village of al-Khattaaf” (in Arabic), 11 June 2016, available at twitter.com/RevolutionSyria/status/741780592895918080; Syrian Human Rights Committee, “Daily report on violations against human rights in Syria, on day of 11-6-2016” (in Arabic), 12 June 2016, available at www.shrc.org/?p=26370

⁷³ CJTF-OIR, “Military Strikes Continue Against ISIL Terrorists in Syria and Iraq”, 12 June 2016, available at www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/1/Documents/Strike%20Releases/2016/06June/20160612%20Strike%20Release%20Final.pdf?ver=2016-06-12-091939-110

precautions to positively identify a military objective were not taken and may have resulted in an indiscriminate attack that killed civilians.

10. AL-TUKHAR, NEAR MANBIJ, ALEPPO GOVERNORATE, 19 JULY 2016

At least 73 civilians were killed and some 30 others injured in air strikes on the village of al-Tukhar, some 12km north of Manbij, early in the morning of 19 July 2016, according to monitoring groups from the Manbij area, national human rights organizations and media outlets. The incident may represent the greatest loss of civilian life in Syria from any attack believed to have been conducted by Coalition forces.⁷⁴

The organizations indicated that as many as 203 civilians may have been killed, providing the names of dozens of civilian fatalities and sharing images of multiple dead bodies, all appearing to be civilian and including children. Amnesty International reviewed the images and could not find any version of them on-line prior to the incident.⁷⁵ An edited video, possibly created by IS, contains many images of victims and damaged infrastructure and includes the digging of a mass grave which appears similar to that in the aforementioned images.⁷⁶ Satellite imagery from 21 July 2016 analysed by Amnesty International indicates nine locations in which houses were severely damaged or destroyed – although given other fighting and air strikes in the area they cannot be conclusively linked with the same air strikes.

CJTF-OIR stated on 20 July 2016 that Coalition forces struck a number of IS positions “near Manbij” on 19 July 2016.⁷⁷ It subsequently stated that Coalition forces had conducted strikes in the vicinity of al-Tukhar and that it was carrying out an investigation into the allegations of civilian

⁷⁴ Amnesty International, “Alarm over reports of high civilian death toll from US-led air strikes on Manbij”, 19 July 2016, available at www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/syria-high-civilian-death-toll-from-us-led-coalition-airstrikes-on-manbij

⁷⁵ SOHR, “At least 56 casualties -including children- in bombing by the international coalition’s warplanes at the northern countryside of Manbij”, 19 July 2016, available at www.syriaahr.com/en/?p=48400; VDC, “The Attack on Tokhar Village in the City of Manbij – Aleppo”, 28 July 2016, available at www.facebook.com/vdcsy/posts/1385021918180705; Manbij Mother of the World, 19 July 2016, several Facebook post links naming people killed in the al-Tukhar attacks are no longer working but Amnesty International has copies of them on file; Manbij Mubasher, several Facebook post links naming people killed in the al-Tukhar attacks are no longer working but Amnesty International has copies of the information on file; SNHR, “At least 65 civilians died in International Forces selling [sic] massacre of Al Takhour village in Aleppo governorate in July 19”, 19 July 2016, available at <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/07/19/least-65-civilians-died-international-coalition-forces-selling-massacre-al-takhour-village-aleppo-governorate-july-19/>; Halab News, “90 martyrs... entire families fall victim to the massacres of the coalition in besieged Manbij, which is cut off from the world” (in Arabic), 19 July 2016, available at halabnews.net/?p=77035

⁷⁶ Amaq Agency, “Eyewitness accounts from the massacre committed by American airplanes in Tukhar al-Kabir village north of Manbij yesterday” (in Arabic), 20 September 2016. It was available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bx9rT36G1q8 but has since been removed. It is on file with Amnesty International.

⁷⁷ CJTF-OIR, “Military Strikes Continue Against ISIL Terrorists in Syria and Iraq”, 20 July 2016, available at <http://www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/1/Documents/Strike%20Releases/2016/07/July20160720%20Strike%20Release%20Final.pdf?ver=2016-07-20-063540-023>

casualties caused that day.⁷⁸ Syria's state news agency, SANA, blamed the attack on Coalition forces, in particular French forces, without explaining any grounds for the specific attribution.⁷⁹ Speaking anonymously to the media, US officials claimed that IS fighters had been instructed to pose as civilians and that 85 IS fighters were killed.⁸⁰

More than 70 civilian fatalities, including some 27 children and nine women, were identified, either individually named or as among the numbered members of specific families. Further dead bodies reportedly remained under the rubble of the destroyed buildings, which were said to be homes and/or a school in which displaced families were sheltering. Eyewitnesses to the strikes and their aftermath told VDC that civilians were taking refuge in civilian homes three to four kilometres from the fighting, far from any IS forces. The SDF announced that they had provided Coalition forces with information on purported IS vehicles inside the village, but that they believed the village was empty.⁸¹ The attacks appear to have been conducted without adequate precautions taken to safeguard civilians and may have amounted to indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks.

11. AL-GHANDOURA, NEAR MANBIJ, ALEPPO GOVERNORATE, 28 JULY 2016

At least 28 civilians including at least seven children were killed and at least 25 others injured in air strikes on al-Ghandoura village, some 25 km north-west of Manbij, at around 12pm on 28 July 2016, according to Syrian human rights organizations and monitoring groups. Coalition forces were immediately suspected of carrying out the attack, and on the same day CENTCOM announced that it had begun an assessment to determine if Coalition forces were responsible for civilian deaths, arguably reflecting, as a senior US military official told Airwars, "a more pro-active approach" to investigating civilian casualty allegations.⁸²

⁷⁸ Operation Inherent Resolve, "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Col. Garver via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq", 3 August 2016, available at www.inherentresolve.mil/News/Article/902714/departement-of-defense-press-briefing-by-col-garver-via-teleconference-from-bagh/platform/hootsuite/

⁷⁹ Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), "Syria calls on the Security Council to condemn the massacre committed by French planes against Syrian civilians in the village of Tokhan al-Kubra, north of Aleppo" (in Arabic), 19 July 2016", available at sana.sy/?p=406706

⁸⁰ The Washington Post, "500-pound bombs struck their targets in a Syrian village. But who was killed?", 26 August 2016, available at www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/the-500-pound-bombs-struck-their-targets-in-a-syrian-village-but-whom-did-they-kill/2016/08/26/30324884-649d-11e6-be4e-23fc4d4d12b4_story.html

⁸¹ Democratic Union Party of Syria, Manbij Military Council Official Statement, "Statement of the Military Council to Manbij and its countryside" (in Arabic), 19 July 2016, available at pydrojava.com/?p=12536

⁸² CENTCOM, "July 28: U.S. Central Command Statement on civilian casualty allegations near Manbij, Syria", 28 July 2016, available at www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/926170/july-28-us-central-command-statement-on-civilian-casualty-allegations-near-manbj/; "A senior US military official told Airwars that the Coalition's internal monitoring had already raised concerns relating to the al Ghandoura strike – and that the decision to proceed almost immediately to an investigation represented a more pro-active approach to civilian casualty allegations". Airwars, "Reported civilian and 'friendly fire' deaths from Coalition airstrikes 2016", available at airwars.org/civcas-2016/

The bodies of most if not all the seven children reported to have been killed were photographed.⁸³ The strikes reportedly hit the public market, as shown in a video clip which Amnesty International was able to geolocate in al-Ghandoura's central main street and other images of the immediate aftermath of the attack in which dead bodies and significant destruction is clearly visible.⁸⁴ One child victim shown in several on-line images of the attack's aftermath is also clearly visible at the start of the video clip. Amnesty International was unable to find any of the images on-line before the date of the incident. SOHR indicated that a further 13 others had been killed but had not been identified, whether as civilian or otherwise.⁸⁵

Amnesty International is concerned that the loss of civilian life in the strike resulted from a failure by the Coalition forces to take necessary precautions and the attack may have been disproportionate or otherwise indiscriminate.

⁸³ Wakalt Manbij, "Al-Ghandoura wiped out: Horrific massacre as a result of bombing by international coalition forces. Victims until now number 35 and the number is expected to rise because of injuries 28 July 2016" (in Arabic), 28 July 2016, available at www.facebook.com/WakaltManbij/posts/1063230627088718

⁸⁴ Step News Agency, "Step: Witness the massacre committed by coalition planes in the town of al-Ghandoura in Manbij countryside" (in Arabic), 28 July 2016, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5CCo54svFU; al-Tukhar al-Kabir, "Al-Ghandoura: Pictures of the ruins in al-Ghandoura" (in Arabic), 29 July 2016, available at www.facebook.com/Altokhar/posts/1023656477732446

⁸⁵ SOHR, "The number of casualties of al-Ghandour massacre at the countryside of Manbij rises; it was carried out by the international coalition's warplanes", 28 July 2016, available at www.syriahr.com/en/?p=48868