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## **US SAYS 33 AFGHANISTAN CIVILIANS DIED IN SPECIAL FORCES RAID LAST YEAR**

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The US military in Afghanistan has confirmed that dozens of civilians were killed during a special forces raid near the northern city of Kunduz last year, but ruled that the US troops had acted in self-defense.

The investigation followed claims that civilian deaths resulted from airstrikes called in to support Afghan and US forces who came under fire in the provinces village of Buz-e Kandahari. The strikes targeted two senior Taliban commanders.

The two Taliban figures, responsible for violence in Kunduz the previous month, were killed in the operation.

According to a US military statement, the investigation determined, regrettably, that 33 civilians were killed and 27 wounded as troops responded to fire from Taliban who were using civilian houses as firing positions.

After the raid, Kunduz residents carried over a dozen corpses of the dead, including children and family members of the Taliban fighters, toward a local governors office in a show of rage.

Regardless of the circumstances, I deeply regret the loss of innocent lives, the statement quoted Gen John Nicholson, commander of US forces in Afghanistan. On this occasion the Taliban chose to hide amongst civilians and then attacked Afghan and US forces.

I wish to assure President [Ashraf] Ghani and the people of Afghanistan that we will take all possible measures to protect Afghan civilians, Nicholson added. We will continue to assist the Afghan security forces in their efforts to defend their country.

But a Kunduz province official told the Associated Press that the Afghan civilian death toll in the US military inquiry was lower than what local authorities had found.

More than 50 people, including women and children, were killed in the Afghan and US forces attack in Buz-e Kandahari, said Toryalia Kakar, a deputy provincial council member.

Kakar urged the United States to compensate the victims families, who he said not only lost their loved ones but also saw their homes and property destroyed in the airstrikes.

The Taliban briefly overran the city of Kunduz in September 2015, in a show of strength by the insurgents that also highlighted the troubles facing local Afghan forces, 15 years after the US-led invasion of the country. The Taliban captured and held parts of Kunduz a year earlier as well,

before the city was fully liberated weeks later with the help of US airstrikes.

In the 2015 operation, a US air force special operations AC-130 gunship attacked a Kunduz hospital run by the medical charity Doctors Without Borders, killing 42 people. Sixteen US military personnel, including a two-star general, were later disciplined for what American officials described as mistakes that led the strike. Doctors Without Borders has called the attack a war crime and demanded an independent investigation.

After the firefight last November, Ghani criticized the Taliban for using women and children as a shield during the raid in Buz-e Kandahari. He also announced a local investigation had begun.

The US military statement further added that its investigation had concluded that US forces acted in self-defense in the joint Afghan-American raid in the village.

As an indication of the ferocity of the fire faced by friendly forces from the Taliban-occupied houses, two US soldiers and three Afghan Army Commandos were killed, it said. In addition, four US soldiers and 11 commandos were wounded.

The raid also killed 26 Taliban fighters and wounded around 26 other insurgents, the US military report said.

However, Kakar, the Kunduz official, disputed that death toll, saying not more than 10 Taliban fighters had died.

The investigation concluded that US air assets used the minimum amount of force required and that the civilians who were wounded or killed were probably inside the buildings from which the Taliban were firing. In addition, the US military said a Taliban ammunition cache was struck and exploded, which also destroyed multiple civilian buildings and may also have killed civilians.

It has been determined that no further action will be taken because US forces acted in self-defense and followed all applicable law and policy, the statement concluded.

Natos combat operations ended in Afghanistan at the end of 2014, a move that put Afghan forces in charge of the countrys security. Since then, Afghan forces have suffered heavy casualties battling the Taliban, which has tried to expand its footprint across much of the country. Nato and US casualties have been few.

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Kaynak/Source: