

Civilians, including children, killed in U.S. special operations raid inside Syria

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Syrians gather on February 3, 2022 at the scene following an overnight raid by US special operations forces in Atme, in Syria's Idlib Province. (Photo by AFP)

Damascus, February 3 (RHC)-- Helicopter-borne U.S. special operations troops have carried out a rare commando raid in Syria's northwestern Idlib Province, killing at least 13 people, mostly women and children. The deadly raid took place in the town of Atme, close to the Syrian border with Turkey, on Wednesday night.

Citing local sources, the Doha-based Al Jazeera broadcaster said on Thursday that at least 13 people, including six children and four women, were killed in the U.S. attack in Idlib, the last militant-held stronghold after almost 11 years of foreign-backed war on Syria.

One resident said emergency rescuers pulled out the bodies of the victims from the rubble of a multi-story building. "We woke up at 1 a.m. to the sound of helicopters ... and then at around 3 o'clock we heard a barrage of attacks," Abu Fahed al-Homsi, a displaced Syrian who lives a block away from the target, told Al Jazeera on Thursday. "We saw a house that was targeted and damaged roads, but we still have no idea what was going on."

Heavy gunfire was also heard during the raid, which according to Reuters was believed to have targeted a suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated militant, but there was no other information on his identity and fate.

In a statement, the Pentagon said the "mission was successful." "U.S. Special Operations forces under the control of U.S. Central Command conducted a counterterrorism mission this evening in northwest Syria. The mission was successful. There were no U.S. casualties."

American helicopter loudspeakers blared warnings in Arabic for women and children inside the house to evacuate, according to social media and witness accounts. After about two hours, a major battle erupted in the area.

One of the helicopters used in the operation experienced a mechanical problem and then had to be blown up on the ground by U.S. forces, an American official said.

Later, U.S. President Joe Biden claimed that a U.S. counterterrorism operation in northwestern Syria successfully took Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS) leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi "off the battlefield."

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