

U.S. military admits killing civilians in latest Syria raid



People inspect a destroyed house following an operation by the U.S. military in the Syrian village of Atmeh, in Idlib province, Syria, Thursday, Feb. 3, 2022. (Photo by AP)

Damascus, February 14 (RHC)-- U.S. military officials have finally admitted killing civilians in a raid inside Syria. There was growing criticism for claiming without evidence that the target had detonated a bomb killing himself and his entire family.

Laying out a chronology of the raid, the officials -- who spoke on condition of anonymity -- also conceded that they cannot be certain about their initial claim that the Daesh leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, detonated the bomb that killed him and his family at his residence in the Syrian village of Atmeh

near the Turkish border, AP reported Friday.

They, however, continue to claim -- without any evidence -- that the explosive was set off by him or someone else on the third floor of the building where he allegedly lived.

Speaking to a small group of reporters, two senior U.S. military officials involved in the planning or execution of the operation provided the most details to date on the February 2nd raid, still pushing back against local residents and other activist groups insisting that the American operation killed as many as 13 people, including civilians.

Sources on the ground in the Syrian northwestern border town told media outlets that at least 12 civilians were killed in the raid. UNICEF, the UN children's agency, also confirmed that six children were killed in the immediate area.

The officials also revealed that the U.S., which wanted to capture al-Qurayshi alive, had made plans to turn him over to another government. One official said the U.S. would have detained him temporarily, but there were no plans for a long-term U.S. detention. They declined to provide further details, saying they wanted to protect "government-to-government" discussions.

Previously, the Pentagon and U.S. President Joe Biden had insisted that al-Qurayshi blew up himself, his wife and two children. The military officials again reiterated on Thursday that they believe that is "the most likely scenario but have no evidence to back that up," according to the report.

The latest, though still shadowy, explanations were offered after the Biden administration and the Pentagon came under sharp criticism recently for failing to provide evidence of a number of national security claims, including proof of their efforts to avoid civilian casualties in operations such as the Syria raid, their account of an alleged suicide bombing in Afghanistan in August, and the persisting claims about a looming Russian invasion of Ukraine.

A prominent CNN news anchor also blasted last week the Biden administration's recent suggestion that journalists who don't trust their claims are siding with terrorists or foreign powers, pointing out that the US government has a long history of "lying to the American people."

The on-air criticism of the administration by Jake Tapper was prompted by two separate incidents earlier this month in which White House and State Department spokespersons clearly implied that journalists challenging the validity of their official statements were siding with Washington's enemies.

In one incident, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki was challenged by a reporter to offer evidence proving her claim that Daesh (ISIS) leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi had detonated himself with a suicide device during a U.S. raid in Syria.

"As our troops approached to capture the terrorist, in a final act of desperate cowardice, with no regard to the lives of his own family or others in the building, he chose to blow himself up," U.S. President Joe Biden also claimed.

The exchange between Psaki and the reporter onboard the presidential plane coincided with a similar argument over the reliability of information provided by the US government at the State Department, where Spokesman Ned Price claimed that Russia was preparing to stage a 'false flag' attack as a pretext to invade Ukraine.

"There's a long history in this country that long predates the existence of everybody at this table...of the U.S. Government lying to the American people," Tapper underlined during his news show early this month.

During the show, CNN contributor Abby Phillip also cited the U.S. military's drone strike in Kabul last August -- in which the administration originally claimed that Daesh terrorists were targeted but it was shortly proven that the strike had actually killed only civilians -- as an example of why journalists should question the government's claims.

Moreover, an AP journalist as well as several village residents have also confirmed seeing body parts scattered near the site of the U.S. commando raid in Syria. On Thursday, according to the AP report, the military officials further acknowledged they have no video of the house explosion in Syria or of the efforts to get civilians out of the house.

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