

2 November 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR USAFCENT/CC

FROM: (b) (1) 1.4 Brig Gen Richard Coe and (b) (1) 1.4b

SUBJECT: (b) (1) 1.4a, (b) (1) 1.4b Executive Summary of Allegations of the Commander Directed Investigation (CDI) into Airstrikes in the Vicinity of Dayr az Zawr, Syria, on 17 September 16

1. (b) (1) 1.4a, (b) (1) 1.4b This CDI was convened to examine events surrounding Coalition airstrikes in the vicinity of Dayr az Zawr, Syria, on 17 September 2016, and Russian claims that these airstrikes targeted Syrian Regime/aligned forces. The CDI team, led by a USAF Brigadier General supported by (b) (1) 1.4b, consisted of (b) (1) 1.4b United States, and (b) (1) 1.4b personnel with recent, relevant operational experience as Commanders, Operators, ISR specialists, Legal Advisors, Target Engagement Authorities, and Inspectors within multi-national operations, including Operation Inherent Resolve.

2. (b) (1) 1.4a, (b) (1) 1.4b On 16 September 2016, a CFACC organic remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) was tasked to investigate (b) (1) 1.4c 3 kilometers southwest of Dayr az Zawr airfield (DAZ). The RPA arrived in the area (b) (1) 1.4c, (b) (1) 1.4g. The RPA crew identified a tunnel entrance, 2 tents, and 10 adult males. The 10 adult males were later joined by an additional 4 adult males (b) (1) 1.4c. The RPA then conducted a vehicle follow (b) (1) 1.4c.

On 17 September 2016, two CFACC organic RPAs were tasked to revisit the previously identified fighting positions. Two target areas were developed, approximately 3 and 6 kilometres southwest of DAZ, containing personnel, tanks, and armoured personnel carriers. The individuals wore a mix of traditional wear, civilian attire and military style clothing that lacked uniformity (b) (1) 1.4c.

Both target areas contained tunnels and defensive fighting positions. The Dynamic Targeting (DT) Cell obtained Target Engagement Authority (TEA) (b) (1) 1.4b; strikes began at 1355Z. At 1452Z, the Russians informed the CAOC that the strikes were hitting Syrian Regime forces. At 1456Z, the CAOC ceased fire and cleared coalition aircraft from the area.

3. (b) (1) 1.4a, (b) (1) 1.4b The investigation team interviewed 70 U.S. and coalition personnel involved in the coordination and execution of the 17 September 2016 airstrikes, reviewed the credibility assessment, intelligence reports, imagery of the strike area, tactical guidance applicable to the strike area, as well as the targeting process in place at the time of the airstrike. Having done so, our finding is that the decision to Positively Identify (PID) the targets as Da'esh military objectives was both reasonable and supported by the weight of the information available to the TEA (b) (1) 1.4b at the time, and that these targets were struck in accordance with the

law of armed conflict and the applicable rules of engagement for all nations involved. However, post-strike analysis shows it more likely than not that Syrian regime/aligned forces were struck. This assessment is based on review of open and multiple-source intelligence, hotline feedback from the Russians, and historical ground order-of-battle.

4. [REDACTED] While our investigation found no evidence of misconduct, there are a number of lessons to be learned and potential areas for improvement. Detailed recommendations reside within the body of our report; however, the following are worthy of note:

a. [REDACTED] CAOC Dynamic Targeting Process for Operation Inherent Resolve. The events of 16 and 17 September 2016 should have followed the procedures for on-call interdiction but did not. While the reasoning behind this approach might have been sound, the organization, process, and training within the CAOC was not adequately established to support this activity. For example, it is unclear who had the responsibility/authority to decide between continuing deliberate target development versus conducting a dynamic strike. (b) (1) 1.4c, (b) (1) 1.4g

Importantly, there was no single individual tasked with fusing this information and presenting the arguments for and against to the DT Chief, TEA (b) (1) 1.4b. While this target, both in terms of complexity and the use of CFACC organic ISR, was unusual, it is likely that this type of targeting will become increasingly common; **therefore, we highly recommend a formal review of the DT system to focus on organization, process, and training.**

b. [REDACTED] Information Flow. (b) (1) 1.4c, (b) (1) 1.4g

[REDACTED] it appears several breakdowns in the flow of information into and around the CAOC led to a number of misconceptions. Through a mix of human factors, to include confirmation bias, the (b) (1) 1.4c [REDACTED] adding weight to its credibility. Similarly, th (b) (1) (B), (b) (1) 1.4.(c), (b) (1) 1.4.(g) [REDACTED] likely influencing the PID decision. There were also pieces of information within the CAOC that did not reach the right decision makers. The (b) (1) 1.4c, (b) (1) 1.4g [REDACTED] product showed a different area of influence layout around the DAZ airfield than the classified map, (b) (1) 1.4g, (b) (1) 1.4c. (b) (1) 1.4c, (b) (1) 1.4g [REDACTED] was discussed at lower levels, but did not reach the DT Chief or TEA. Moreover, concerns raised by the Distributed Ground Station (DGS) during pre and post-strike approval that the ground force could not be Da'esh were not communicated to the DT Chief or TEA. Finally, a possible flag was called out in the south target area 30 minutes prior to the strike and the call went unacknowledged due to human factors, to include task saturation and target fixation. **These issues should be incorporated into the DT system review and personnel should be reminded of the importance of accurately characterizing, labelling, and sharing intelligence with decision makers and continuing to voice existing concerns.**

c. Proximity to Syrian Regime Forces. Dynamic Targeting in the region south of DAZ airfield was (b) (1) 1.4a and it appears many personnel were not fully appreciative of the risks associated with the close proximity to Syrian Regime forces. The ground force was PID'd as Da'esh (b) (1) (B), (b)(1)1.4.(c), (b)(1)1.4.(g)

However, the debate centered on *whether they could be* Syrian regime rather than *what if they were*. This moved the focus to *what could be seen* on the ground rather than *what we knew* about the ground situation. (b) (1) (B), (b)(1)1.4.(c), (b)(1)1.4.(g)

(b) (1) 1.4c

Indeed, if the aperture had been opened, it is possible that while a valid PID enabled the targets to be struck, a decision not to strike or seek further confirmation may have been taken. **How to** (b) (1) (B), (b)(1)1.4.(a), (b)(1)1.4.(g) **better fuse all available information should be factored into the DT review.**

d. Lessons Process. During our investigation, we asked many individuals within the CAOC what they and their organization had learned from these events and what changes had been put into place. While some had identified lessons, how these were being shared and learned was uncertain. With the high turnover of personnel, **we recommend review and formalization of the Lessons Process.**

e. United States/Russian Hotline. 17 September 2016 saw the first use of the United States/Russian Hotline to inform of an impending strike. While this was intended as a notification, individuals outside of the Battle Cab, to include (b) (1) 1.4c (b) (1) 1.4, perceived this as a positive ground deconfliction measure. Although not causal, as the TEA (b) (1) approval had already been provided, this misconception could influence (b) (1) 1.4b approval in the future. This issue has already been raised with the CAOC. Additionally, when the Russians initially called at 1425Z, they elected to wait to speak to their usual point of contact (POC) rather than pass the information immediately to the Battle Director. This led to a delay of 27 minutes, during which 15 of the 37 strikes were conducted. This is unfortunate but it would have been even more so had the Russians not called. In accordance with the Flight Safety Memorandum of Understanding, we recommend both parties pass critical information immediately rather than wait for established POCs. Moreover, the changing nature of operations in Syria, characterized by increased complexity, congestion and uncertainty on the ground warrants **a review/update of the Flight Safety Memorandum of Understanding.**

f. Incorrect Information Passed to the Russians. As part of the notification to the Russians, the CAOC passed that the strikes would occur 9 kilometres south of *DAZ "airfield"*. However, this information was incorrect, as the strikes were planned approximately 3 to 6 kilometres south of *the airfield* and 9 kilometres south of *Davr az Zawr City*. This may have affected the Russian response to the notification and caused considerable confusion in the DT process. **The CDI team recommends standardization of the TEA strike brief coordination sheets/process across the entire Operation Inherent Resolve battlespace.**

(b) (1) 1.4a, (b) (1) 1.4b, (b) (1) 1.4c

5 (b) (1) 1.4a, (b) (1) 1.4b, (b) (1) 1.4c Sir, we appreciated the opportunity to learn from investigating these events and we greatly appreciated the cooperation of your team. For follow-on questions, please contact Brig Gen Coe at, (b) (6), (b)(3) 10 USC 130b or (b) (5), (b)(3) 10 USC sec. 130b, or DSN (b) (1) 1.4a, (b) (1) 1.4b, (b) (1) 1.4c

(b) (6)

RICHARD A. COE  
Brigadier General, USAF

(b) (6), (b)(3) 10 USC sec. 130c

(b) (1) 1.4b

(b) (1) 1.4a, (b) (1) 1.4b, (b) (1) 1.4c