

# **Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**

Review of the Defence Annual Report 2015-2016 – 17 February 2017

## **ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Department of Defence

**Topic:** Coalition air strikes in Deir al-Zor

**Question reference number:** 19

**Senator:** Reynolds

**Type of question:** Written

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 28 March 2017

### **Question:**

**CHAIR:** Acknowledging security classifications, can Defence provide an overview of the findings from the Deir al-Zor airstrike Report, the report's recommendations and any lessons learnt from this incident.

### **Answer:**

The United States Central Command conducted an investigation into the coalition air strikes in Deir al-Zor (also spelt Dayr az Zawr) on 17 September 2016 (Syrian time) and released a redacted version of the executive summary of its findings on 29 November 2016, available at:

[www.centcom.mil/Portals/6/media/REDACTED\\_FINAL\\_XSUM\\_Memorandum\\_\\_29\\_Nov\\_16\\_\\_CLEAR.pdf](http://www.centcom.mil/Portals/6/media/REDACTED_FINAL_XSUM_Memorandum__29_Nov_16__CLEAR.pdf)

The ADF assisted the investigation, which was subject to legal review. The United States-led investigation found that the airstrikes were conducted in full compliance with the rules of engagement and the Laws of Armed Conflict, the decisions that identified the targets as Daesh fighters were supported by the information available at the time, and there was no evidence of deliberate disregard of targeting procedures or the rules of engagement. The investigation could not substantiate the identity of those killed or wounded. Post-strike analysis shows it is more likely than not that irregular forces aligned to the Syrian regime were struck.

The investigation made recommendations to refine the United States-led Combined Air and Space Operations Centre's targeting process, to further reduce the risk of errors. These recommendations relate to developing a more capable targeting cell, improving information-sharing among analysts, strengthening the process for implementing lessons learned, and the immediate passage of critical information under the Flight Safety Memorandum of Understanding. The Combined Air and Space Operations Centre has implemented the investigation recommendations.

Due to security classifications, Defence is unable to provide further details.