

Beat: Politics

U.S. drone strike in southern Afghanistan kills toddler

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USPA News - A child was killed Thursday and two women were injured when a U.S. drone targeted a suspected militant riding a motorcycle in southern Afghanistan, coalition officials acknowledged on Friday as Afghanistan's leader vowed not to sign a security agreement with the U.S. The incident happened when an unmanned U.S. drone fired at least two missiles at a suspected militant in Garmsir district of Helmand province, which is located in Afghanistan's volatile southern region that was the birthplace of the Taliban movement two decades ago. The first missile missed the militant, striking a house and killing a child inside.

The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) confirmed the incident, saying the airstrike targeted a "known insurgent." Provincial officials said the airstrike was targeting a Taliban commander who was eventually killed when the drone fired a second missile a short time later. Afghan President Hamid Karzai strongly condemned the airstrike, in which a 2-year-old child was killed and two women were injured, one of them critically. "This attack shows that American forces do not have any kind of respect for the lives and safety of Afghan people," he said. "For many years, our innocent people have been sacrificed in the name of a `war on terror,' and they have had no safety in their homes," Karzai added. He said he would not sign any security agreement with the United States as long as "such arrogance and oppression" continues. In a statement, ISAF said it "deeply regrets" the civilian casualties and promised to carry out an immediate investigation in partnership with Afghan authorities. "Coalition officials will work with Afghan officials to determine what happened and why," the coalition said, extending its "deepest sympathies" to the families and loved ones of those killed and wounded. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), at least 1,319 civilians were killed and 2,533 others were wounded as a result of the conflict in Afghanistan during the first six months of this year. The figures showed an increase of 14 percent in deaths over the same period in 2012, owing mainly to the increased use of IEDs by insurgents. There are currently more than 86,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, including some 60,000 U.S. troops and 7,900 British soldiers. The UN Security Council last month extended ISAF's authorization for a final time, as all foreign combat troops are due to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014, but a bilateral security agreement is awaiting Karzai's signature to help shape the presence of U.S. troops after 2014. In June, Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced the fifth and final phase of security transition in which coalition forces hand over control of the remaining 95 districts - including Taliban stronghold areas in the south and east - to Afghan security forces. ISAF will still be responsible for military air support as well as support in combat operations until the end of 2014.

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