Beat: Miscellaneous

Coalition forces accidentally kill 2 young boys in southern Afghanistan

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USPA News - Two young boys tending donkeys in southern Afghanistan were killed this week when coalition forces, believed to be Australian service members, mistook them for insurgents, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) acknowledged on Saturday. The incident happened on Thursday morning when coalition forces were conducting a routine liaison patrol in the Shahid-e Hasas district of Uruzgan province, located in the country`s volatile south. Two young brothers, aged 11 and 12, were killed when the foreign troops fired at what they thought were insurgents.

"I offer my personal apology and condolences to the family of the boys who were killed," said Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, the commander of U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan. "I am committed to ensuring we do the right thing for the families of those we harmed, as well as for the community in which they lived." Dunford said the alliance would take full responsibility for the tragedy, adding that a joint Afghan-ISAF investigation team visited the scene on Saturday and met with local leaders. The alliance said it remains committed to taking appropriate actions to minimize the likelihood of similar occurrences in the future. Provincial officials claimed Australian service members were responsible for killing the boys and their two donkeys. And although ISAF did not say which nationalities were involved in the operation, Australia`s Defense Department confirmed its soldiers were taking part in the operation. Australia`s Chief of the Defense Force, General David Hurley, said Australian soldiers from the Special Operations Task Group were on the ground when the incident occurred. "Australian personnel immediately reported the incident to Afghan Government officials and military leaders in Uruzgan," he said. "It is premature to make any determination about how the incident occurred or who was responsible." Civilian casualties, in particular those caused by coalition airstrikes, are regularly a major source of tension between the Afghan government and ISAF. According to an annual report released by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in February, civilian casualties from the nearly 12-year-old war decreased by 12 percent in 2012 when compared to the same period a year earlier. The UN said it recorded 2,754 civilian deaths in 2012 or 14,728 civilian deaths over the past six years. And while the overall incidence of civilian casualties decreased in 2012, the report found insurgents are increasingly targeting civilians throughout the country and continue to attack without regard for human life. The UN attributed 81 percent of the civilian casualties in 2012 to anti-government elements and 8 percent to pro-government forces. Eleven percent of the casualties could not be attributed to any party.

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