



UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND  
7115 SOUTH BOUNDARY BOULEVARD  
MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FL 33621-5101

April 14, 2017

Office of the Staff Judge Advocate

Human Rights Watch  
Ms. Sarah Margon, Washington Director  
c/o Ms. Alexandra Schmitt  
1930 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 500  
Washington DC 20009

Dear Ms. Margon:

Thank you for your letter dated April 11, 2017 and the opportunity to review the draft report entitled *Attack on the Omar Ibn al-Khatab Mosque*. I am the U.S. Central Command Staff Judge Advocate and I am responding on behalf of General Votel.

Our command shares your views about the need to take precautions necessary to minimize civilian casualties during our operations in Syria. We remain absolutely committed to complying with our obligations under the laws of armed conflict, and greatly appreciate input from organizations like Human Rights Watch.

We carefully review every allegation of civilian casualties that may have been caused by a Coalition airstrike. In this particular case, we also conducted a thorough examination of the classified intelligence used to inform the targeting decision, and the classified intelligence that emerged following the airstrike. This comprehensive investigation reached the preliminary conclusion that the strike was lawful.

I acknowledge that the draft Human Rights Watch report could not have taken into account the classified information available to U.S. authorities. This may help explain why the U.S. investigation reached a different conclusion. Nevertheless, we always welcome additional information to assist our investigations, and we will continue to carefully review this incident in light of your report. We respectfully request that you provide us, by April 28, 2017, any relevant information you have not already provided. You may e-mail additional information to Major Cleo Smith at:

[REDACTED]

On behalf of U.S. Central Command, thank you for your dedication to protecting civilians affected by conflict.

Sincerely,  
[Signed]

R. Patrick Huston  
Colonel, U.S. Army  
Staff Judge Advocate