

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 29, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Austin,

We write to express our deep concern with the Department of Defense's policies and procedures around the August 29, 2021 drone strike in Kabul that resulted in the wrongful deaths of at least ten innocent Afghan civilians, including seven children. While we appreciate that wartime decisions are made in accordance with the best intelligence available in order to protect the lives of American servicemembers and others from imminent threats, the shocking disconnect between what this drone strike was purported to accomplish and the impact it actually had raises important questions about safeguards in the Department of Defense to prevent civilian casualties.

Originally, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark A. Milley claimed the strike in Kabul was a "righteous" strike. And in other statements, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) asserted that "we know" the strike "disrupted an imminent ISIS-K threat." It took a follow-up statement from CENTCOM to even confirm that civilians had died in the strike. And only weeks later, after public outcry and investigations by the both the New York Times and Washington Post, did CENTCOM Commander General Kenneth McKenzie confirm that the strike was a "tragic mistake."

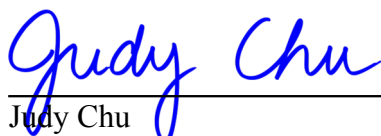
Acknowledging our error is vital and I applaud the Pentagon for its timely and efficient review of the drone strike and for sharing those findings with the public quickly. However, the acknowledgment of responsibility does not explain how such a decision was made, what precautions were taken to protect civilians, and what is being done to prevent similar deadly mistakes in the future.


Specifically, we would like to know:


1. Whether the Secretary of Defense is involved in the decision-making process when civilian lives are at risk?
2. What precautions are taken to avoid civilian casualties and were those considerations made during this strike? If so, what went wrong?
3. What disconnect occurred to result in repeated statements from CENTCOM that they were assured the strike was correct and successful before acknowledging the civilian deaths?
4. What precautions are being taken to prevent against future civilian deaths?


We appreciate your consideration and I look forward to your response.

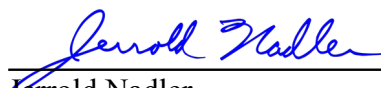
Sincerely,



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress


Mark Pocan
Member of Congress


Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress


Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress


Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress


Karen Bass
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress