Indirect Killing of Civilians

Conflict dynamics in a number of contexts ACLED codes have required the establishment of a clear decision on how to code civilian deaths when the deaths are not due to direct targeting. This has been particularly relevant in Iraq. ACLED has established the following practices.

In "**Battles**", deaths of civilians through indirect fire are included in the fatality total, but they will not appear in the actor categories as they cannot participate in battle.

In "**Remote violence**", civilians can be coded as an Associated Actor when an armed group is targeted by another armed group. Like with Battles, any civilians killed/injured are mentioned in the 'Notes' column, and fatalities among civilians are reflected in the 'Fatalities' column. The difference is because there are many situations where large numbers of civilians (10+) may be killed in airstrikes, shelling, IED blasts, etc. which involve interactions between two armed groups, and it is useful to identify (within the Actor columns) that the Actor who engaged in the Remote violence interacted with both an armed group AND civilians when they engaged in the attack.

Particular issues with indirect attacks from Iraq coding:
Often in Iraq, Iraqi/Coalition airstrikes lead to both IS and civilian casualties, or more problematically, an airstrike would hit an IS target (mortar team, sniper, garrisoned building, vehicles driven by IS militants) but only civilians are reported as casualties. The key context is that the Islamic State routinely engages in the use of civilians as humans shields in Iraq (particularly in Mosul) to insulate themselves against Coalition bombing (video by BBC showing this practice in a specific incident). In its broadest form, this involves forcing civilians to stay in cities under attack by Coalition forces to either deter airstrikes and/or to ensure higher civilian death tolls from Coalition attacks (forcing them to incur higher moral/political costs for each strike).

More specifically, there were reports of IS garrisoning buildings and forcing civilians in the building to stay or actually pushing them into the building while the militants use it as cover during fighting with Iraqi/Coalition forces, knowing that it will force their opponents to either not carry out airstrikes on the building, or to accept the moral/political costs of bombing the building and knowingly causing civilian casualties.

IS militants were also reported to have put civilians into buildings rigged with explosives to ensure that any airstrike that hit the building would cause additional civilian deaths; the most infamous instance of a Coalition airstrike causing significant civilian casualties has been attributed to this practice (i.e. the deaths were due to a "secondary explosion" triggered by IS after the airstrike).