**Case Study -** Military Dispute Over Casualties in Afghanistan

In mid-June 2006, images captured by an Australian unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) led to a clash between a senior Australian officer and U.S. defence force officials over the issue of civilian casualties. The UAV was apparently engaged in an unrelated mission but was in a position where it was able to record the results of a U.S. missile strike on a compound that was allegedly a Taliban stronghold. The attack was part of the U.S.-led Operation Mountain Thrust, which was being conducted in Southern Afghanistan at the time. In public comments after the operation, the U.S. military said its missile strikes had been successful and had killed scores of Taliban fighters.

What was apparently of concern to the senior Australian officer in this case was the fact that the images captured by the UAV appeared to show a number of civilians, including children, being blown up during the strike. Australian Defence sources suggested that this officer, stationed at the military headquarters in Bagram, had confronted a senior U.S. officer over the operation and the level of collateral damage that it had caused. He also threatened to relay his concerns back to the Australian Department of Defence, an action that may well have caused the Australian government to re-evaluate its cooperation with the U.S. in Afghanistan. The Australian officer was particularly concerned that the U.S. had decided to attack the Afghan compound with missiles from a ground-based rocket system without asking for more information about the target from the Australian forces. These forces were in a much better position than U.S. troops to carry out more detailed reconnaissance on the compound, which was located near the Australian area-of-operations.

However, this dispute between allies over the issue of civilian casualties did not become public until 2009, at a time when the Afghan government and international observers expressed major concerns about the level of collateral damage caused by U.S. air and missile strikes against apparent Taliban and Al-Qaeda targets.

Reflect on the case study. **Which perspective, either the Australian or the US, do you most align with ethically?**

You are required to provide clear and accurate reasons to justify your position, with reference to the Triangular Balance and **at least three** ethical theories.

* **Triangular Balance**

Commanders must balance three responsibilities when engaged in any form of operations, in war or in peacetime. These are

1. the responsibility to achieve the mission;
2. the responsibility to protect their own forces; and
3. the responsibility to protect other persons, which in peacetime operations will mean any bystanders or other innocent parties and in wartime operations will include all non-combatants and their property.

This triangular balance can be difficult to maintain, especially in combat operations, since it will often be the case that two of the considerations will come into conflict with the third one.

* Some **ethical theories** that you could reference are:

1. Consequentialism (classic Utilitarianism);
2. Virtue ethics (Universalist and Contextualist);
3. Contract theory;
4. Deontology (Kantianism);
5. Objectivist ethical egoism (Objectivismor individual rights).

Your written response should be **500 words**.