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Biden orders drone assassination of al-Zawahiri in Afghanistan

On Monday evening, President Biden announced that, under his direction, a US drone strike was launched on Saturday that killed “the emir of al Qaeda,” Ayman al-Zawahiri, in Kabul, Afghanistan.



President Joe Biden being briefed on July 1 about the plan to assassinate Ayman al-Zawahiri

Biden said that al-Zawahiri was the “number-two man” and Osama bin Laden’s deputy at the time of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. He also said the assassination of the 71-year-old Egyptian-born physician was necessary because he was “deeply involved

in the planning of 9/11” and was a “mastermind” behind the bombings of the USS Cole in 2000 and the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.

As has been the case in every CIA targeted drone strike, no details or proof of the allegations made by the president were presented. According to news reports, US intelligence tracked al-Zawahiri down and found him living in a safe house in a densely populated section of Kabul.

The reports said that Biden approved the attack a week ago and that the CIA fired two Hellfire missiles and killed al-Zawahiri on a balcony of the house. The press cited intelligence officials as saying no one else was killed, including members of al-Zawahiri’s family or any nearby civilians.

Speaking from the White House Blue Room balcony, the President justified the act of US imperialist military violence, saying, “Now justice has been delivered, and this terrorist leader is no more.” He added, “People around the world no longer need to fear the vicious and determined killer.”

Biden also made it clear the assassination of al-Zawahiri was a warning to anyone deemed an enemy by the US government. He said: “You know, we—we make it clear again tonight that no matter how long it takes, no matter where you hide, if you are a threat to our people, the United States will find you and take you out.”

Coming in the midst of the escalating US-led war against Russia in Ukraine, and on the eve of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s provocative visit to Taiwan, Biden’s thuggish words could only be taken as an implicit threat against Russian President Putin and Chinese leader Xi.

A statement from the Taliban, the Islamist political organization that took control of Afghanistan after the US withdrawal last summer, condemned the drone attack in somewhat muted language, declaring: “It is an act against the interests of Afghanistan and the region. Repeating such actions will damage the available opportunities.”

The *New York Times* reported, “The CIA missiles hit a house in Kabul’s Sherpur area, a wealthy downtown enclave within what is considered the city’s diplomatic quarters, which once housed dozens of Western embassies and now is home to some high-ranking Taliban

officials. The strike took place at 9:48 p.m. on Saturday East Coast time, or 6:18 a.m. on Sunday in Kabul time, officials said.”

Yahoo News reported, “A senior administration official said that the president was first briefed on intelligence relating to al-Zawahiri’s whereabouts on July 1. The official described Biden as ‘immersed in intelligence,’ wanting to know about the layout of the safe house, the impact of a strike on other residents and on civilians living nearby.”

The *Times* also reported, “Two top aides to Mr. Biden—Jonathan Finer, his deputy national security adviser, and Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, his homeland security adviser—were first briefed on the intelligence in April. Later other officials were brought in, including Jake Sullivan, the national security adviser, who briefed the president.”

The weapon used to kill al-Zawahiri, the AGM-114R9X (air to ground missile), is a modified Hellfire missile. It does not employ explosives, and instead uses kinetic energy and six blades to eviscerate the target.

It is a highly secretive weapon that has been employed by the US Air Force and the CIA against “high value targets,” not all of whom have been identified. It has been used in at least five countries, including Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan, to supposedly combat terrorism by dicing up enemies of US imperialism.

The *Times* called the grisly strike a “major victory” for Biden “at a time of domestic political trouble.”

Among the concerns of the Democratic administration is the likelihood that the party will lose its majority in one or both houses of Congress in the November midterm elections. It is significant that the strike took place on the eve of significant primary elections in Arizona, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri and Washington.

Biden said that the action was proof that the administration would “continue to conduct effective counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan” after the US military withdrawal from the country one year ago.

However, while the Republicans did not challenge the decision to assassinate al-Zawahiri, Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma said the strike on al-Zawahiri “reflects the total failure

of the Biden administration's policy towards that country." Republican Representative Michael McCaul of Texas said the strike "serves as a reminder the American people were lied to by President Biden. Al Qaeda is not 'gone' from Afghanistan as Biden falsely claimed a year ago."

Drone assassinations became standard military practice during the first term of the Obama administration and were continued by the Trump White House. As with his predecessors, Biden's targeted assassination was carried out in violation of international law.

Assurances from the CIA that no one else was killed cannot be uncritically accepted. According to research by Airwars, over the last 20 years and after more the 91,000 strikes in seven war zones, "at least 22,679, and potentially as many as 48,308 civilians, have been likely killed by US strikes."

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