

Midnight's Victims

Derek Gregory



Samia Ahmadi, right, whose father and fiancé were both killed in the strike, grieves over the deaths, 30 August 2021

I: Introduction

‘The last drone strike in Afghanistan’ Kabul, 29 August 2021



The Ahmadi family pray at the cemetery next to family graves of family members killed by a US drone strike in Kabul, 29 August 2021 (AP)

Drones and the global borderlands

Large armed military drones like the MQ-9 Reaper require vast infrastructure and are restricted to uncontested airspace



*They are typically operated by advanced militaries in CT and COIN missions **in and over** the global borderlands*

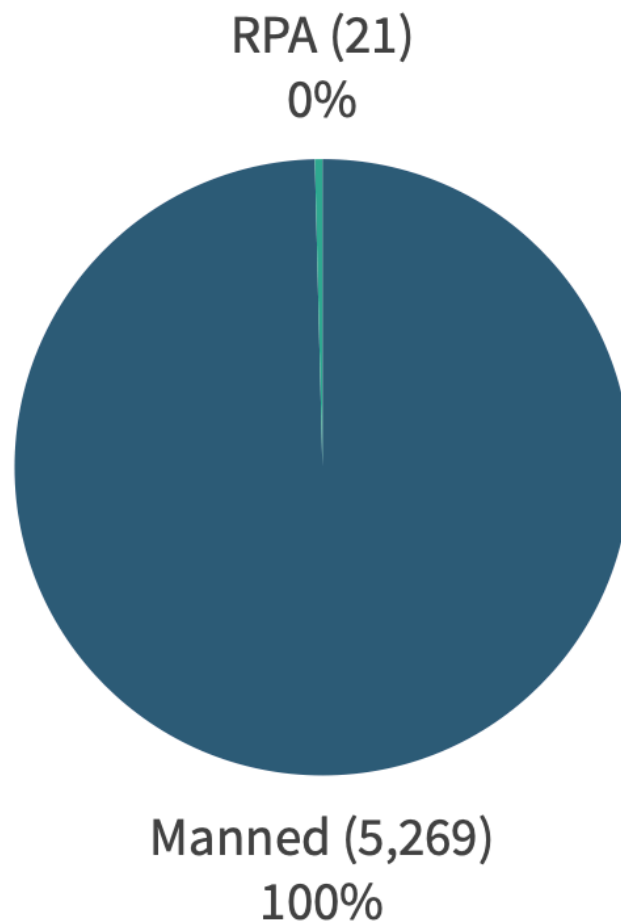
Smaller armed drones and modified COT-drones require a modest to minimal infrastructure and are of limited range and lethality



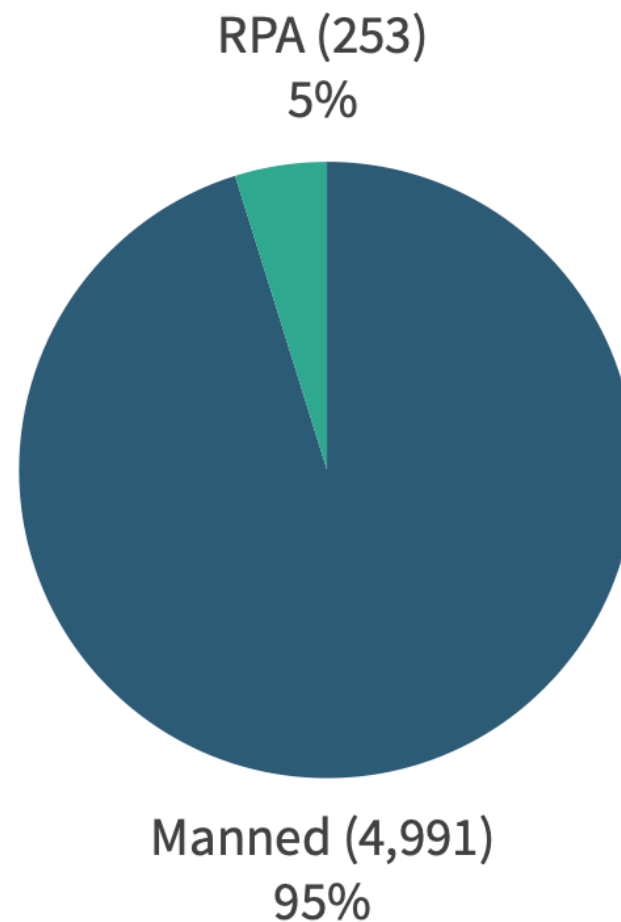
*But they are much cheaper and can also be operated by smaller militaries and non-state actors including terrorist groups in offensive missions **in and from** the global borderlands*

USAF: UAVs and Total Aircraft Inventory (TAI)

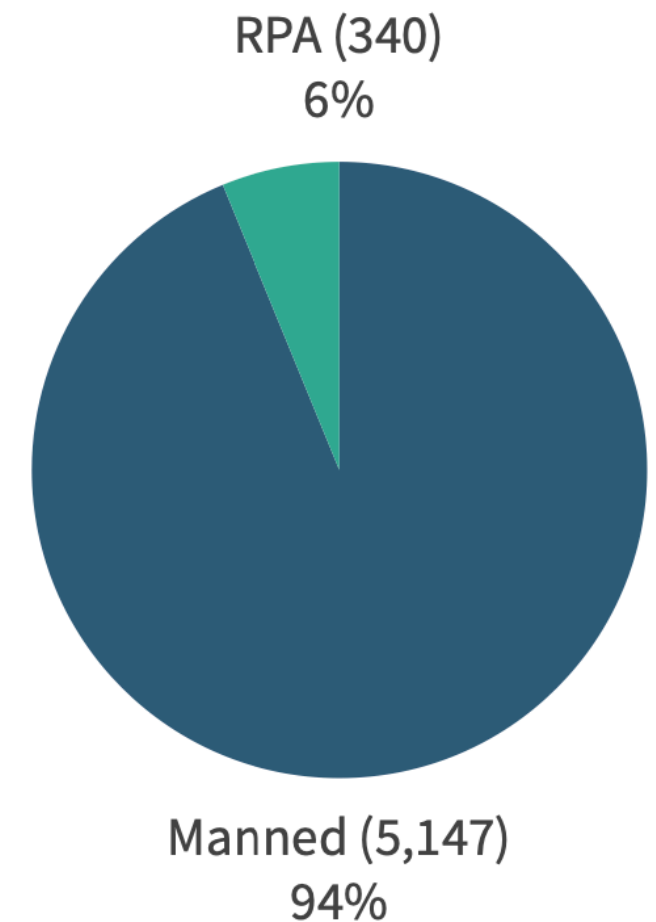
2005 Aircraft TAI



2010 Aircraft TAI

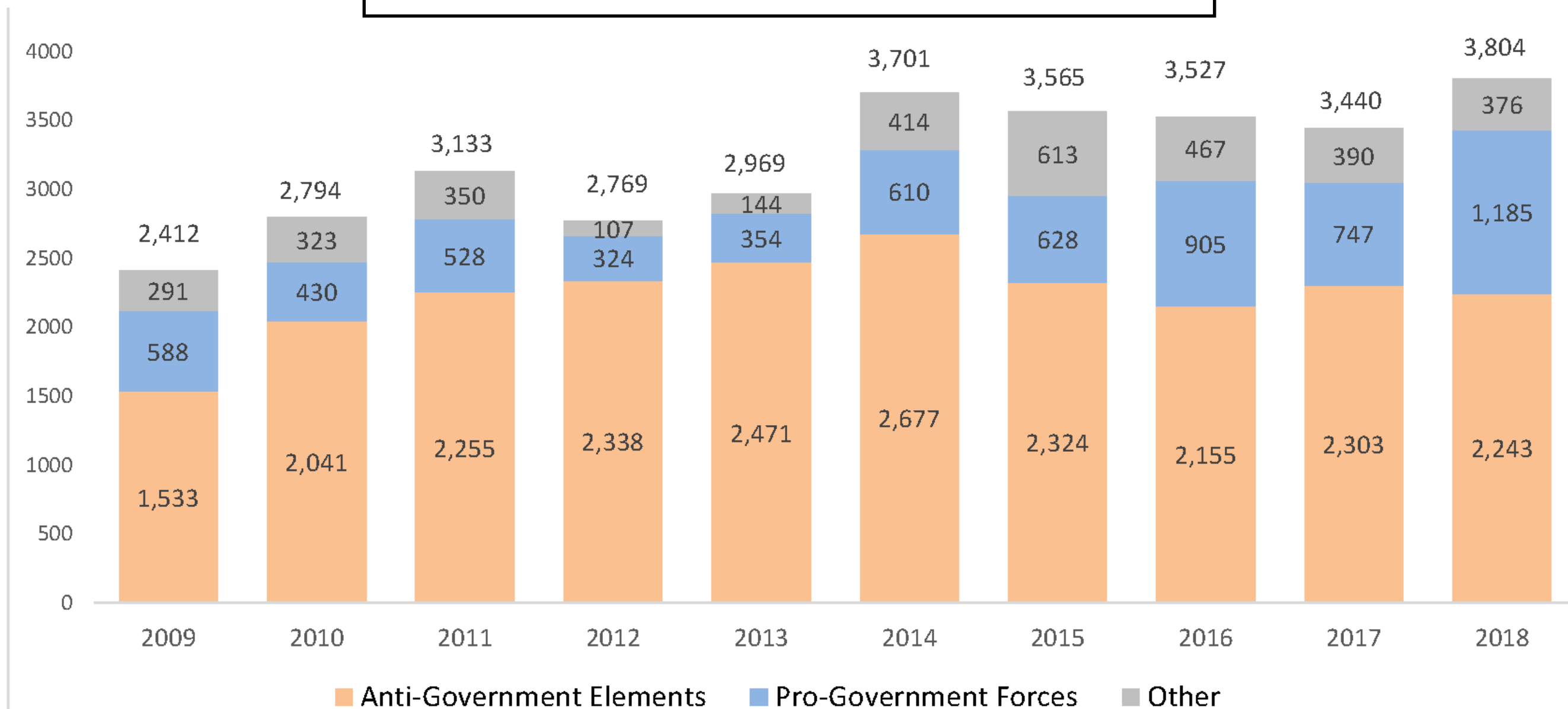
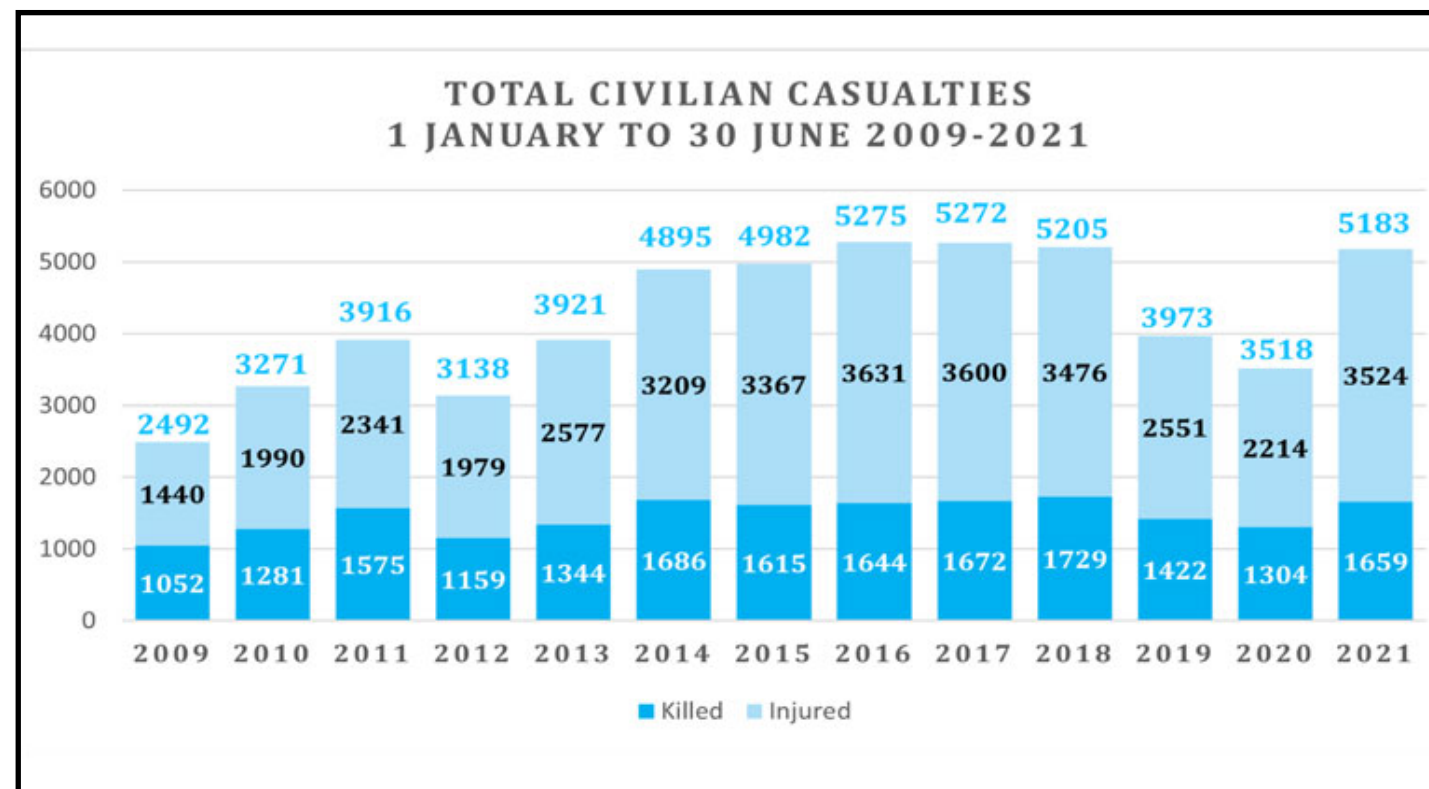


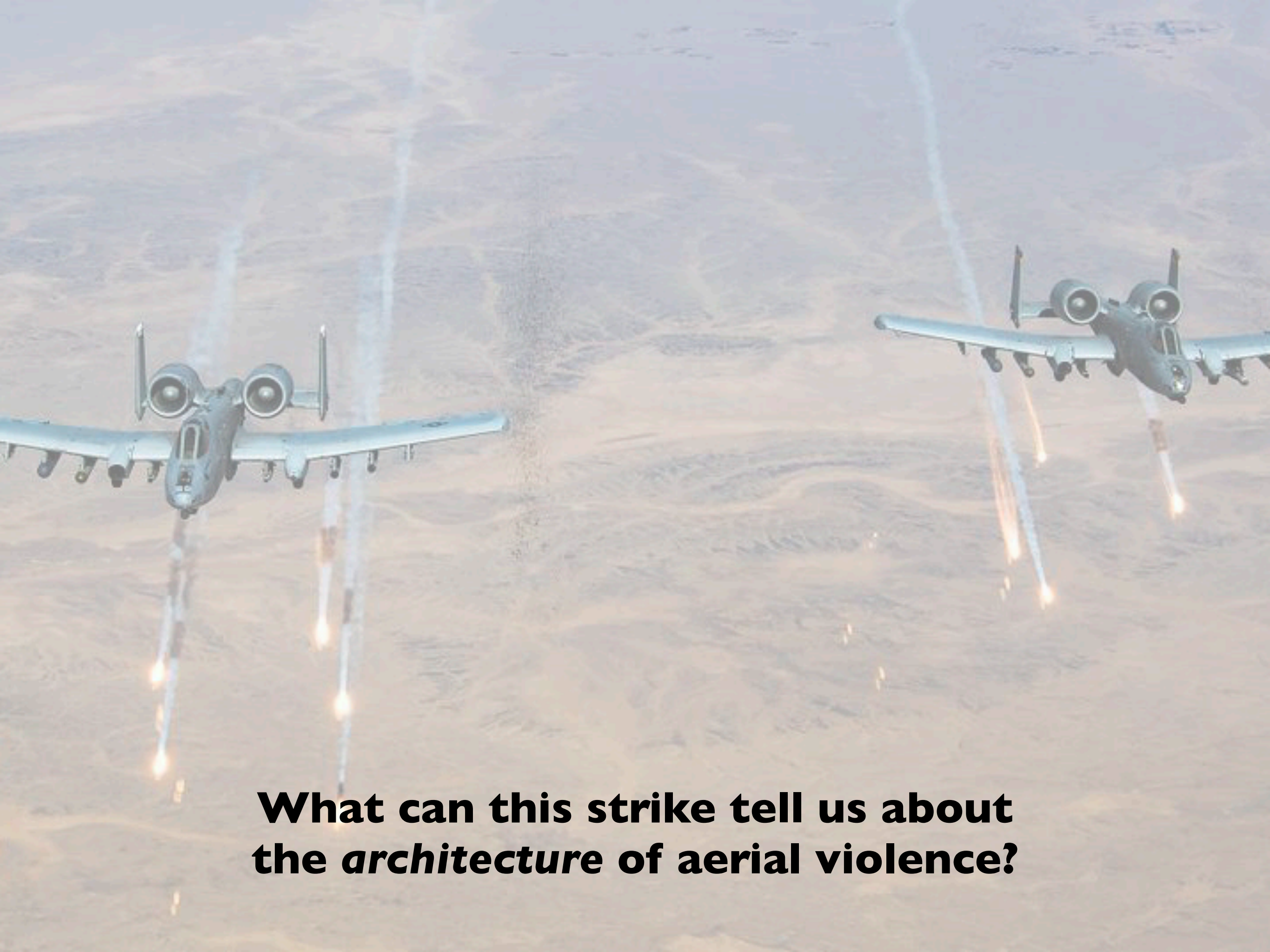
2021 Aircraft TAI



‘For the Air Force ... [the UAV] revolution is over. ... The Air Force’s incorporation of unmanned aircraft into its force structure – after strong resistance during the 1990s and early-2000s – has become routine.

*However, the Air Force has stalled in its effort to bring more remotely piloted aircraft (RPAs) into the force. The RPA proportion of the force has leveled off at 5 to 7 percent for 10 years, and **current procurement plans show no change in the future. The FY 2020 budget procures no RPAs, and there are none in the five-year plan.***





**What can this strike tell us about
the *architecture* of aerial violence?**



2: The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the fall of Kabul

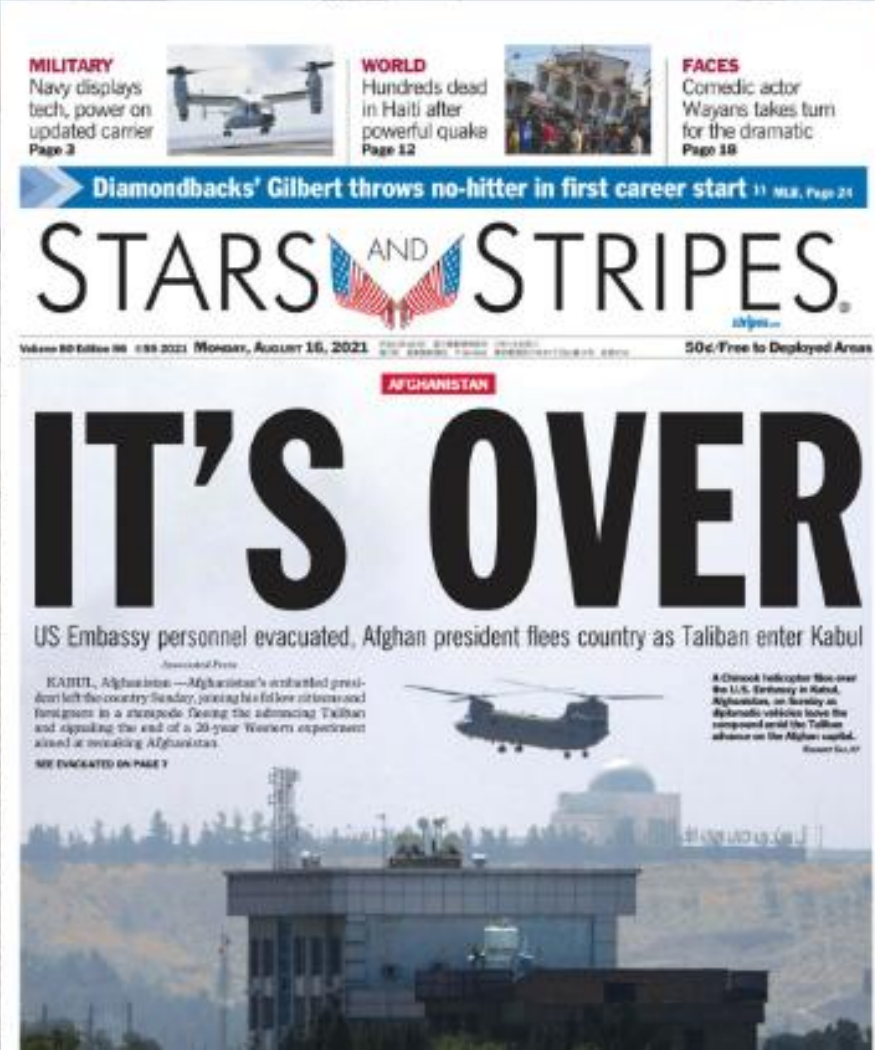
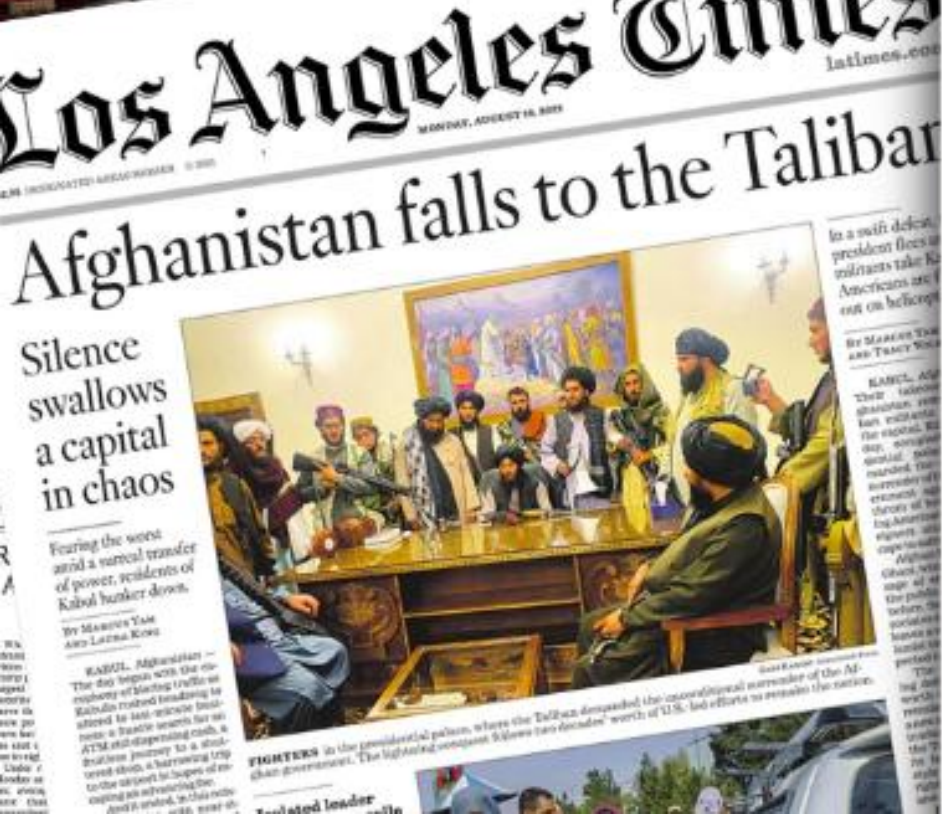
Peace to Afghanistan
اتفاق إحلال السلام
افغانستان ته د
موافقتنامه آوردن
الدوحة قطر ٢٩ فبراير ٢٠٢٠

Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan
اتفاق إحلال السلام في أفغانستان
افغانستان ته د سولې راوستلو تړون
موافقتنامه آوردن به افغانستان
Doha Qatar 29 February 2020 ٢٠٢٠ فبراير ٢٩ الدوحة قطر

Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan
اتفاق إحلال السلام في أفغانستان
افغانستان ته د سولې راوستلو تړون
موافقتنامه آوردن به افغانستان
Doha Qatar 29 February 2020 ٢٠٢٠ فبراير ٢٩ الدوحة قطر



Doha Agreement, 20 February 2020



15 August 2021: The fall of Kabul

15 August 2021

Ritz-Carlton Hotel, Doha

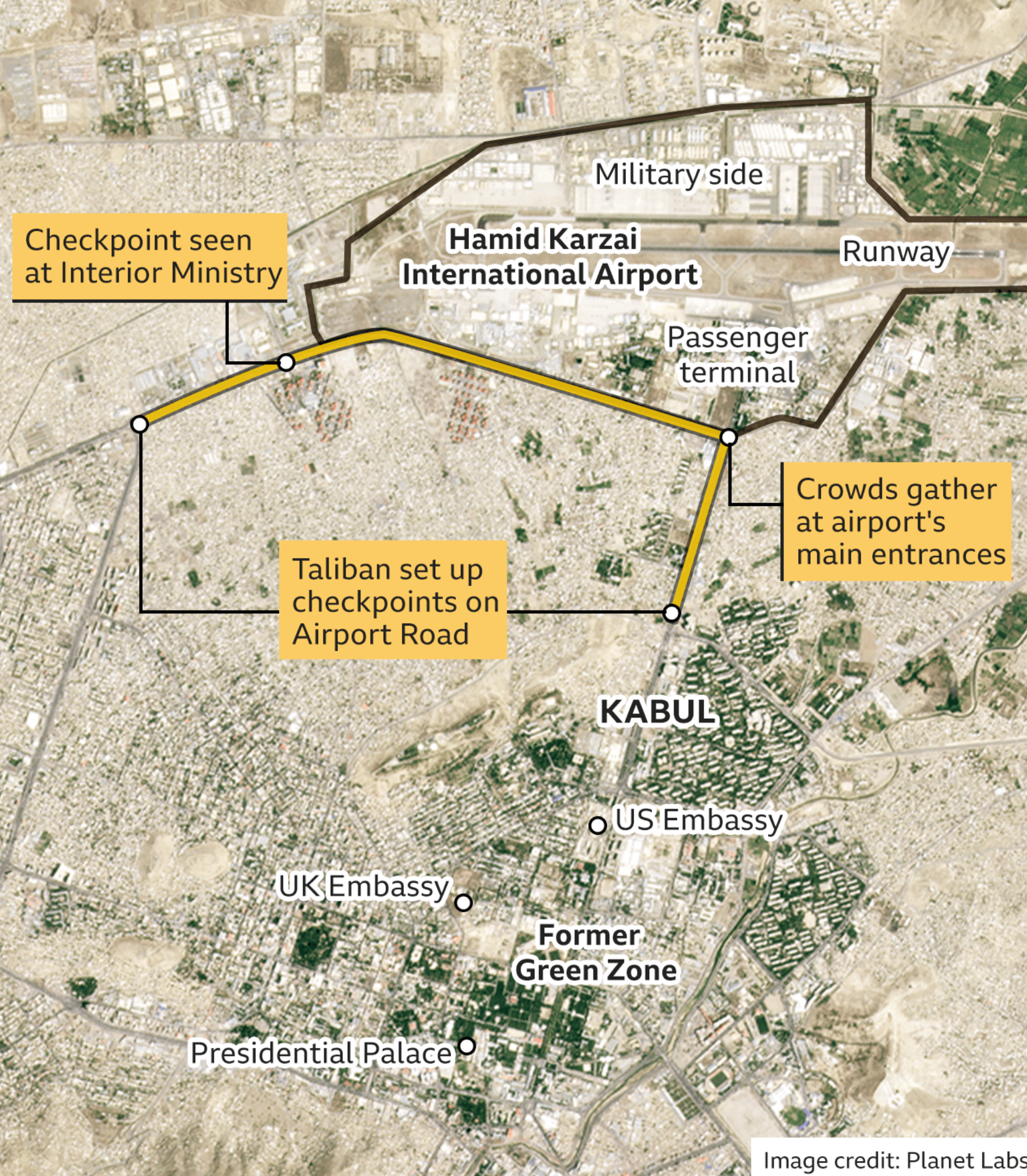
Meeting between Gen. Frank McKenzie, CENTCOM commander, and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, deputy leader and the head of the Taliban's political wing

‘McKenzie gave a presentation [to Baradar] about his mission to evacuate U.S. citizens and their allies. He spread two maps out on the table. One showed a **narrow corridor between the U.S. Embassy and the airport, where his forces would be active**. The second had a **30-kilometer radius drawn around the center of Kabul**; any move by the Taliban into that zone, McKenzie warned them, would be interpreted as a hostile act...

‘We already have some people inside there, Baradar answered.

‘Who is going to take responsibility for Kabul — are you? Baradar asked.

‘Khalilzad and McKenzie looked at each other. My mission is what I described, the general said.’



‘In that case, Baradar asked, **what if the Taliban went in and took over security?**

There was a pause as the two sides conferred among themselves. Finally, McKenzie indicated the **second map, with its narrow corridor. As long as there was no interference with his mission, the general said, he had “no opinion” on that.... ‘**

Mathieu Aikins, New York Times Magazine



U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Frank McKenzie, the commander of U.S. Central Command, directs operations with U.S. Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Farrell J. Sullivan, at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Afghanistan, 17 August 2021.





Military side

Runway

KABUL INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Civilian side

Passenger terminal

Abbey Gate

Entrance

Taliban fired shots from guard tower

Entrance

Military entrance guarded by Afghan forces

Main entrance

Most violence here, Taliban fired shots

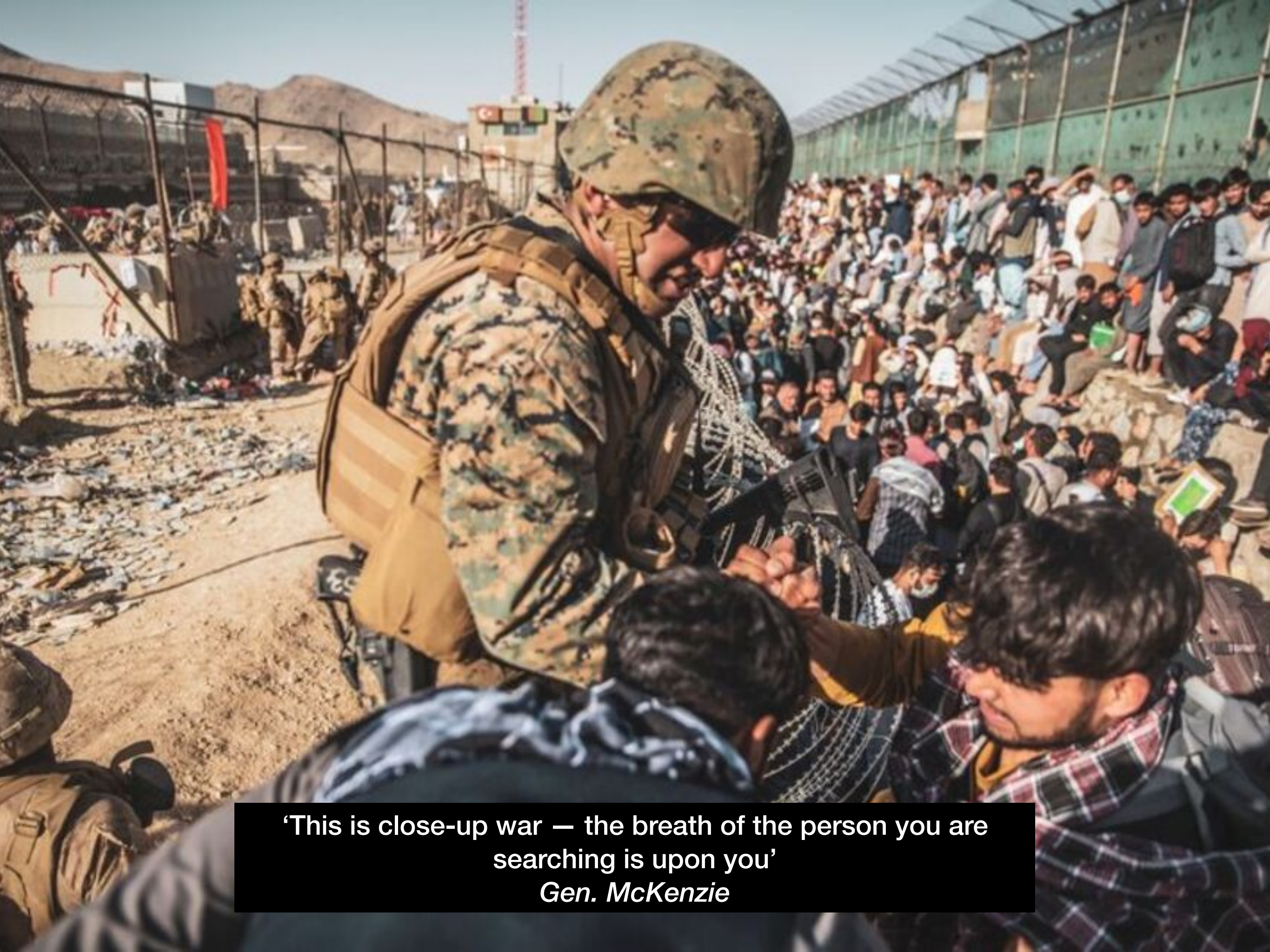
Crowds gathered trying to escape city

Many Taliban patrols along Airport Road

Airport Road

Crowds of people wait outside the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, 25 August 2021



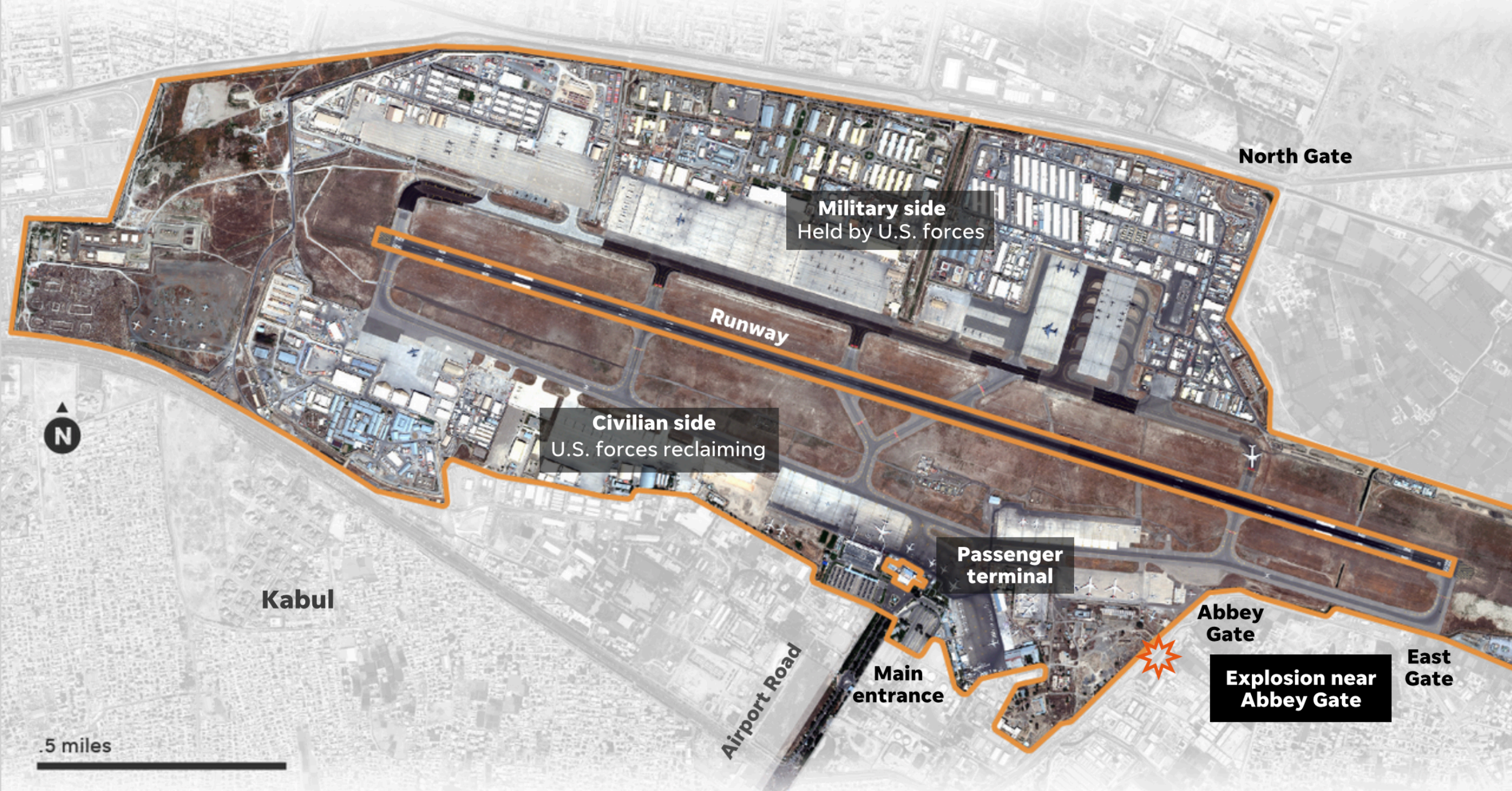


**‘This is close-up war — the breath of the person you are
searching is upon you’
*Gen. McKenzie***

The Taliban released thousands of inmates from two high-security prisons, Pul-e-Charkhi in Kabul and the Parwan Detention Facility at nearby Bagram. They included Taliban and members of IS-K. (though its senior leaders were all executed)

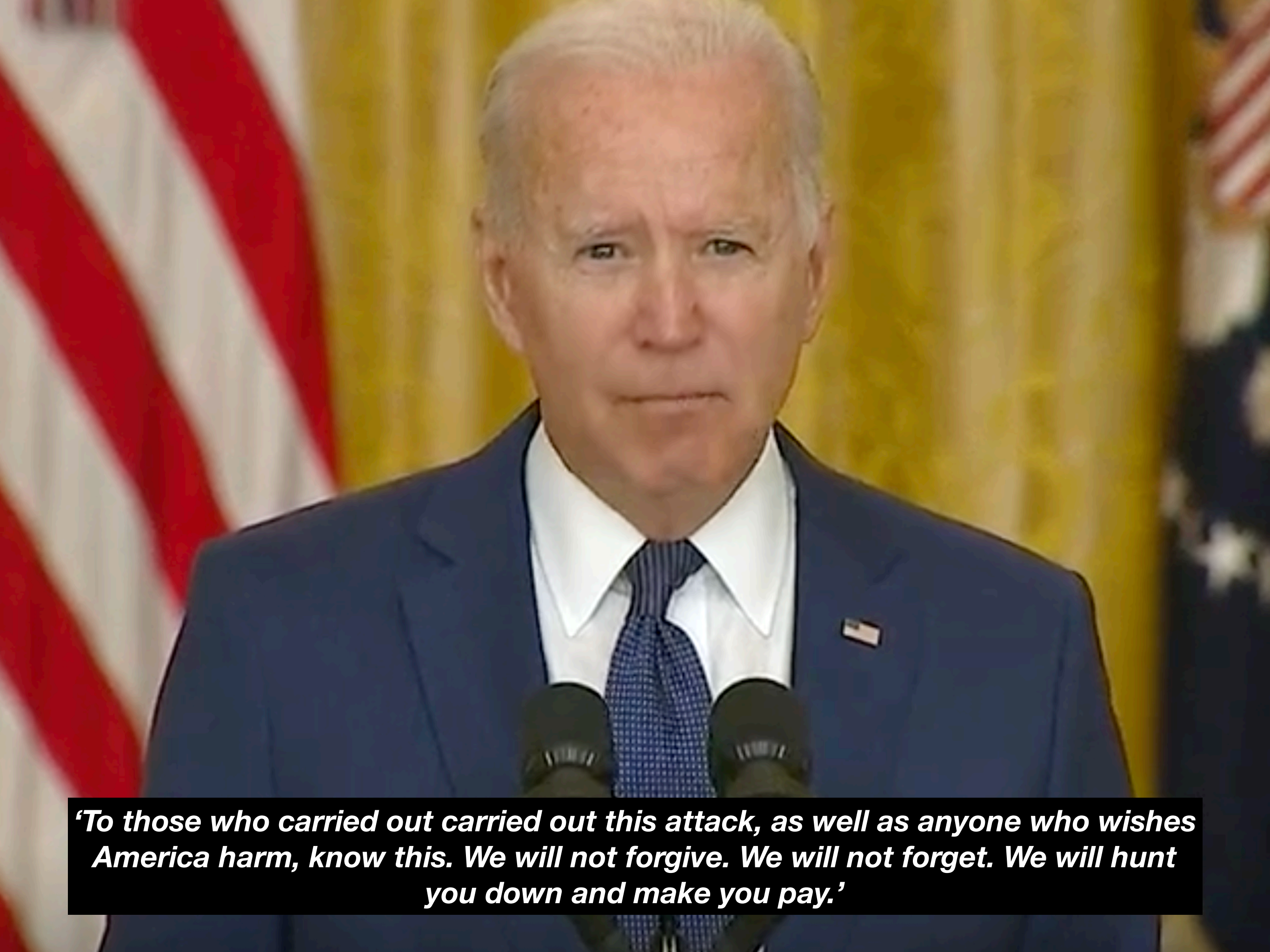
*Among those released was **Abdul Rahman Al-Logari**, a former engineering student*





26 August 2021: Suicide bombing at Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA) claimed by ISIS-K and attributed to al-Logari

13 American troops and over 170 Afghans were killed, and many left with serious wounds; 14 injured US troops evacuated to Landstuhl, and Afghans treated by local hospitals and NGOs.



'To those who carried out carried out this attack, as well as anyone who wishes America harm, know this. We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay.'

28 August 2021: Drone strike in Jalalabad

'The strike, carried out by a single MQ-9 Reaper drone flying out of a base in the United Arab Emirates, struck in Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar Province, and killed an ISIS-K planner known to U.S. intelligence analysts for developing a specific type of attack in the Kabul area, a senior U.S. military official said later....

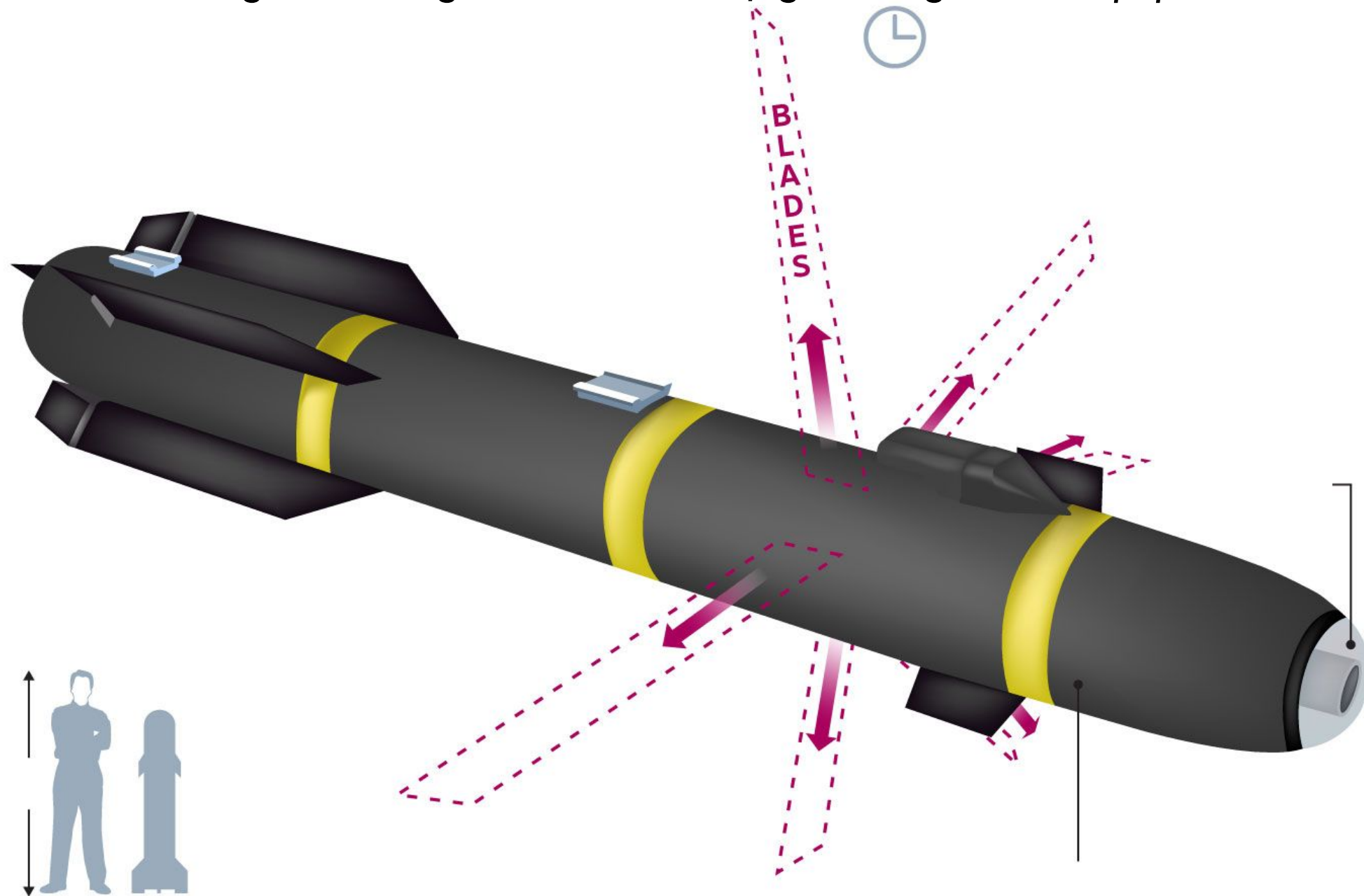
'The planner was believed to be involved in future plots against targets in Kabul, including the airport, but there was no immediate evidence that he had plotted Thursday's attack outside the airport.'

Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, 'A reprisal strike killed two ISIS militants and wounded another'

New York Times, 28 August 2021

US Central Command described this as an 'over-the-horizon counterterrorism operation'

Scott Ritter: 'US defense sources said the men were killed by a special variant of the Hellfire missile, known as the R9X, or 'flying Ginsu', a reference to the six blade-like devices which emerge from the missile, killing its target by cutting it to shreds in lieu of the normal high explosive payload carried by the Hellfire. The R9X was developed specifically to handle situations ... where legitimate targets have taken refuge among a civilian population.'



Reportedly, US personnel monitoring the live video images coming from the MQ-9 drone waited until the planner's wife and children left the compound before launching the 'flying Ginsu'

29 August 2021: Drone strike in Kabul

U.S. airstrike takes out ISIS-K vehicle packed with explosives in Kabul

BY DAVID MARTIN, ELEANOR WATSON

UPDATED ON: AUGUST 29, 2021 / 8:03 PM / CBS NEWS



As many as **six MQ-9 Reaper drones** had tracked the suspect vehicle, a white Toyota Carolla, for **eight hours** throughout the day.

Authority for airstrikes had been delegated to the commander of the **Over-the-Horizon Strike Cell at Al Udeid Airbase in Qatar**, but in this case final authorisation was given by the **Ground Force Commander** at HKIA, **Major General Christopher Donahue** (right): 'the last US soldier to leave Afghanistan'

The target vehicle had just arrived at **a compound in a residential neighbourhood 3 km from HKIA**.

The strike was carried out by an **MQ-9 Reaper** that fired a **single Hellfire missile with a 20-lb warhead**.



‘We will maintain the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and other countries. We just don’t need to fight a ground war to do it. We have what’s called Over The Horizon capabilities, which means we can strike terrorists and targets without American boots on the ground...’

Remarks by President Biden on the End of the War in Afghanistan, 31 August 2021



3: US military narratives





Secretary of Defense Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Milley Press Briefing on the End of the U.S. War in Afghanistan

SEPT. 1, 2021

'We had very good intelligence that ISIS-K was preparing a specific type vehicle at a specific type location. We monitored that through various means and all of the engagement criteria were being met. **We went through the same level of rigor that we've done for years** and we took a strike. So that we did.

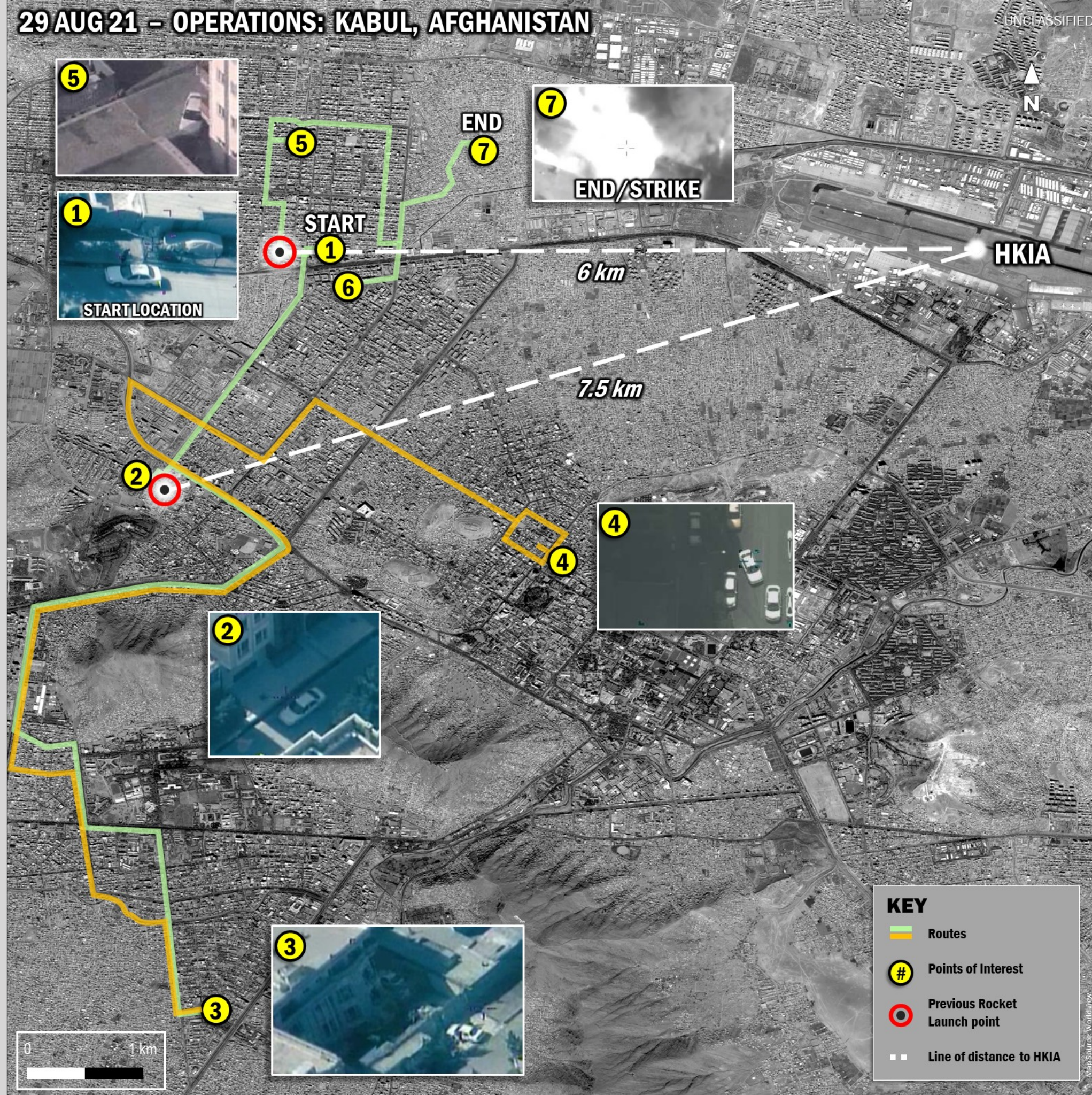
'Secondly is we know that there was secondary explosions. Because **there was secondary explosions, there's a reasonable conclusion to be made that there was explosives in that vehicle.**

'The third thing, as **we know from a variety of other means, that at least one of those people that were killed was an ISIS facilitator.**

'So were there others killed? Yes, **there are others killed. Who they are, we don't know.** We'll try to sort through all of that. But we believe that the procedures at this point – I don't want to influence the outcome of an investigation – but at this point, we think that the procedures were correctly followed and **it was a [righteous strike].'**

29 AUG 21 - OPERATIONS: KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

UNCLASSIFIED



General McKenzie, commander US Central Command, 20 September 2021:

*‘In the 48-hours prior to the strike, **sensitive intelligence indicated that the compound at point number one on the map was being used by ISIS-K planners,** used to facilitate future attacks. We were also receiving a significant number of reports indicating multiple avenues of [attacks?] which were being planned simultaneously through which ISIS-K would attempt to harm our forces including with rockets, suicide explosive vests and vehicle born improvised explosive devices.*

In fact, in the 36-hours preceding the strike our leaders on the ground at the airport and in the strike cell received more than 60 different pieces of intelligence related to imminent threats with some intelligence corroborating and some conflicting with events observed from our UAVs, which were flying above Kabul throughout the day.

*‘One of the most recurring aspects of the intelligence was that **ISIS-K would utilize a white Toyota Corolla as a key element in the next attack.** Because the compound at point number one was our strongest lead for this series of imminent attacks we initiated an intense surveillance of the compound with **as many as six MQ-9 Reapers** on the morning of 29 August.’*

The suspect compound was placed under intensive aerial surveillance



All stills from video released to the New York Times following a FOIA request





'At 8:52 A.M. local time on 29 August a white Toyota Corolla arrived at point number one, the compound we believed to be a key area of interest associated with imminent threats to the airport.'



The focus of the UAVs shifted from the compound to the vehicle and it rapidly moved from being a 'vehicle of interest' to a 'suspect vehicle' to a target.

'Two adult males exited the vehicle, met with an adult male in the compound and received a bag from him. The Corolla then departed the compound heading south and we followed the vehicle. At 9:05 A.M. the Toyota Corolla picked up a third adult male carrying a bag at point number two and then continued south.'



'At 9:35 the Corolla arrived at the compound at point number 3... And all three adult males, in the vehicle, entered the building on the compound....'

*‘At 11:19 A.M. **three adult males unloaded bags and jugs from the trunk** of the vehicle before departing the compound at 11:22 A.M. heading south. At approximately this time **U.S. forces were notified of a sensitive intelligence collection indicating that an ISIS-K cell leader, in Kabul, was dropping off supplies.***

‘At 12:11 P.M. the Corolla arrived at point number four and at least two adult male occupants exited the vehicle in front of an office building before returning to their vehicle and departing at 1:27 P.M. heading west and then south.

*‘At 2:00 P.M. the Corolla returned to the compound at point number three. Subsequently **multiple adult males were observed loading the truck of the vehicle – the trunk of the vehicle with items assessed at the time to be explosives before departing at 3:47 P.M. with four adult males heading north.***

‘At 4:11 P.M. the Corolla returned to point number two and dropped off one adult male carrying a bag then continued north. After driving near point number one, the Corolla dropped off one adult male on the road at point number five, which is roughly several hundred meters north of point number one.

‘At 4:39 P.M. the Corolla dropped off its last passenger on the road at point number six.

'At 4:51 P.M. the Corolla arrived at point number seven and back into a compound that was approximately three kilometers from the airport which was the closest it came to the airport all day.'







We were very concerned that **the vehicle could move quickly and be at the airport boundary in a matter of moments.** By this time we had observed the vehicle for about eight hours. While in the compound, the vehicle was observed being approached by **a single adult male assessed at the time to be a co-conspirator.** The strike was executed at this time because the vehicle was stationary and to reduce the potential for civilian casualties. A single Hellfire missile was fused to detonate inside the vehicle to further minimize the chance for civilian casualties.



‘It struck the vehicle of vehicle at 4:53 PM, which produced an explosive event and follow-on flames significantly larger than a Hellfire missile would have been expected to produce.’







*‘It is my assessment that leaders on the ground and the strike cell had achieved a **reasonable certainty** at the time of the strike to designate the vehicle as an **imminent threat to U.S. forces at the airport**, and that they made **a self-defense strike** in accordance with established rules of engagement.*

*the strike team were **convinced at the time of the strike that the area was clear of civilians** and that they had taken prudent steps in regards to weaponeering the strike to minimize the potential for civilian casualties...*

*....**This was not a rushed strike. The strike cell deliberately followed and observed this vehicle and its occupants for eight hours while crosschecking what they were seeing with all available intelligence** to develop a reasonable certainty of the imminent threat that this vehicle posed to our forces.’*



The voice of the CENTCOM briefing was studiously objectifying:

‘Point 1’, ‘point 2...’, ‘a compound’, ‘a white Toyota Corolla’, ‘adult males’ who variously ‘arrive’, ‘exit’, ‘carry’, ‘receive’, ‘depart’, ‘enter’ and ‘load’

*Calibrated minute by minute for eight hours, this is the voice of time-geography, a skeletal danse macabre observed, mapped – **conducted** – in an abstract space of objects and bodies*

4: A counter-narrative





The target was neither simply a car nor a compound but a man: **Zamarai Ahmadi.**

He was 43. He had grown up in a poor neighbourhood of Kabul, unable to read or write; since 2006 he had worked for an NGO based in California and worked his way up from handyman to engineer. With the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Ahmadi had applied for a US visa for him and his family.



‘Nutrition & Education International’s mission is to provide practical solutions to malnutrition by establishing an in-country, self-sustainable soy value chain, composed of seed multiplication, soybean cultivation, soybean processing, and soy market development.’

‘When NEI downsized a few years ago and let one of its drivers go, Zamarai stepped in and started driving a kind of office carpool. On workdays, he left his house in the morning in the Corolla to pick up colleagues on the way to the office, and at the end of the day, he dropped them off before returning home. “It was not his job, but he was a very humble person,” says one co-worker...’

Krista Mahr, ‘The man the US didn’t intend to kill in Afghanistan’, Time, 28 September 2022



‘The head of Kabul traffic police, General Asadullah Khan, says Corollas account for 80 percent of the 700,000 vehicles driving through the congested streets of Kabul...’

Joris Fioriti, ‘The trusty Japanese car of the Afghan people’, AFP 23 June 2013

How Zamarai Ahmadi spent his final hours

A US official said the military tracked its target for eight hours on August 29 before firing a deadly Hellfire missile. CNN reconstructed Ahmadi's movements that day based on interviews with colleagues and family.



8.30 a.m.

Ahmadi leaves his house

8.45 a.m.

Picks up a former colleague

9 a.m.

Collects a laptop from a colleague's house, then picks up another colleague

• Buys takeaway breakfast in Pul Sorkh area

9.30 a.m.

Arrives at the NEI office in Kart-e-Seh area

After 10 a.m.

Goes to a Taliban security station and a bank in the Share-Naw area with colleagues

• Visits a second Taliban security station in Saray-Shamali area

2 p.m.

Returns to office, shortly afterward pulling out a hose to fill containers

4 p.m.

Leaves the office, drops off colleague and former colleague on the way

5 p.m.

Back at home, a US drone strikes Ahmadi's car in the courtyard of his house

His boss, who was already at work, phoned Ahmadi and asked him to **pick up his laptop** which he had left at home on his way into the office.

The UAVs were already circling over his boss's house, which they had **identified as the suspected ISIS-K compound**.

Ahmadi's boss 'said his house – where he lives with his parents, three sisters, wife and three children – has never been an ISIS safehouse. His family has lived at the residential address for more than 40 years': Sandi Sidhu and others, CNN, 14 September 2021

'When asked whether there could have been an ISIS safe house nearby, the director said that he had known most of his neighbors for years, but that **there had been a new tenant in the house next door, which shares a wall. He said he found that person's behavior suspicious and had reported him to the Afghan intelligence service**': Mathieu Aikins and Melissa Rubin, New York Times, 18 September 2021

The next morning a rocket attack against the airport was launched from a nearby compound using an improvised launcher concealed inside the trunk of a Toyota Corolla (right).

'Analysts are now exploring the possibility that the ISIS safe house was actually a neighboring house.'



After breakfast and checking in at the office of NEI, Ahmadi and a colleague drove to a **Taliban-controlled police station and a bank.**

They 'sat in a white Toyota Corolla, watching a long line of people waiting to get money from a bank ... They were parked in Shahr-e Naw, a neighborhood that was, until recently, a trendy place where young urbanites liked to hang out. Two weeks after the Taliban had taken over, the friends talked about how different things looked. People weren't wearing the same clothes. Everything had changed so fast....'

They were also there to get **permission from the Taliban to continue to provide food aid** (rice and soyabeans) to displaced people sheltering in a nearby park.



Internally displaced families who fled from their homes due the fighting between Taliban and Afghan security forces take shelter in a public park in Kabul,,August 2021





There was a **water shortage** in Ahmadi's neighbourhood, so that afternoon he used a hose at the NEI office to **fill containers with water** from a standpipe

(Were these the same 'jugs' – then empty – that the strike cell observed being unloaded from the car earlier that morning?)



The *New York Times* and CNN recovered film from a security camera at the NEI office showing Ahmadi and a security guard filling the containers with water and stowing them in the trunk of the Corolla

At the end of the day, Ahmadi **drove home**, dropping off his colleagues en route. Home was a family compound in **Khwaja Burgha**, a densely packed working-class neighbourhood, west of HKIA

KHAJE BUGHRA
خواجہ بگرا

'Years ago, his family asked him to step in after his uncle died and marry his widow. He did, becoming a stepfather and later having four children of his own. On his modest engineer's salary, he helped support his younger brothers and their families, with whom he shared a home. Money was tight, but things were good, those who knew him said.'

**Hamid Karzai
International
Airport**

فرودگاه

بین المللی



ZEMARI AHMADI'S CAR

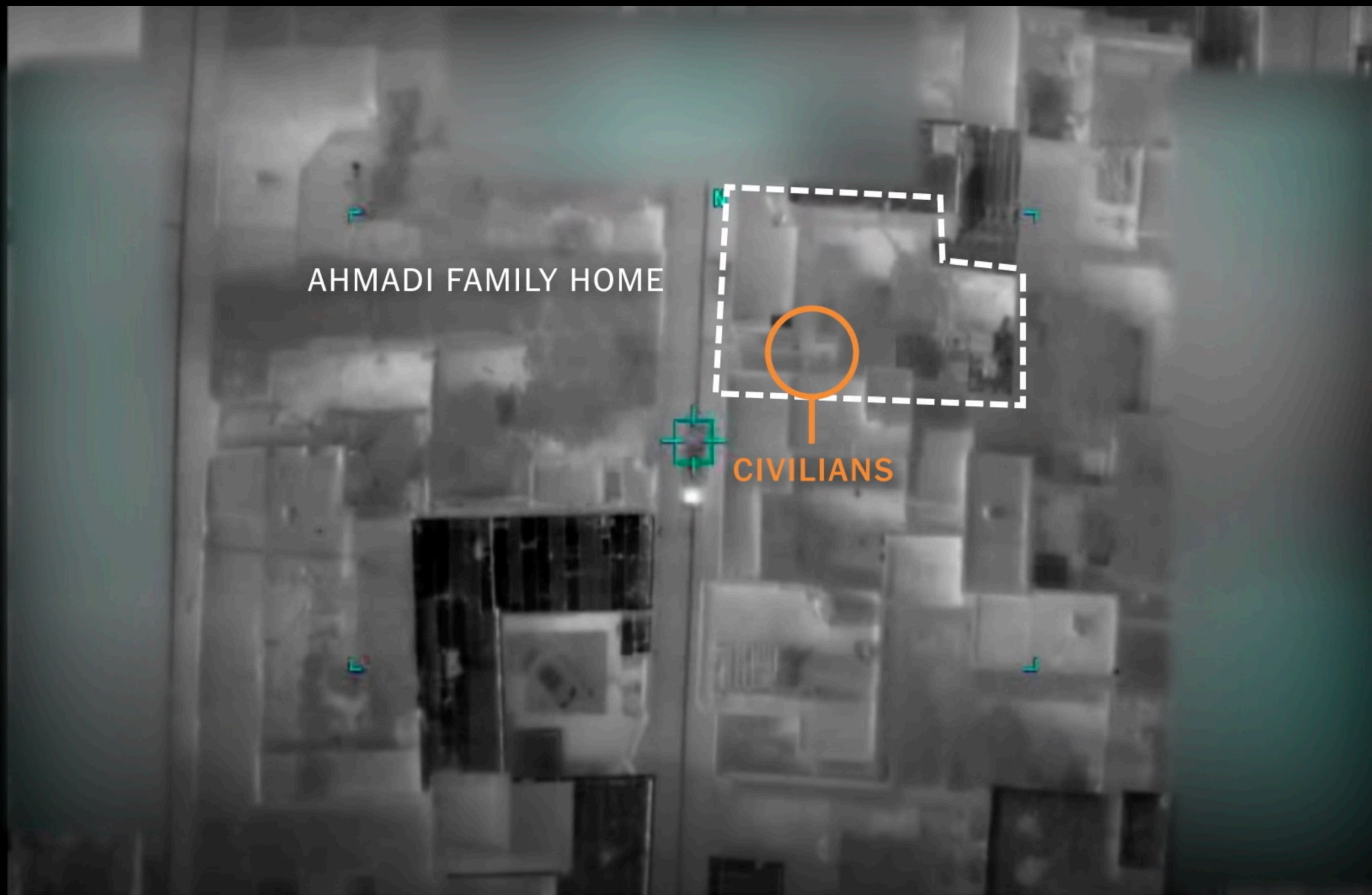


When Ahmadi arrived home, he honked his horn – as he always did – and his son Farzad (11 years old) ran out to greet him; he climbed on his father’s lap and, as he backed the car into the courtyard of the family compound, the other children came out to watch.



they'd jump in the car while it was
still in the alley.









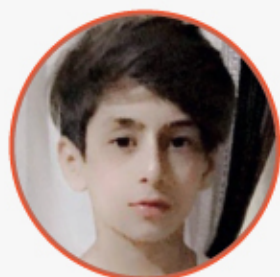


*Family and
neighbours tried
in vain to douse
the flames
(CNN)*

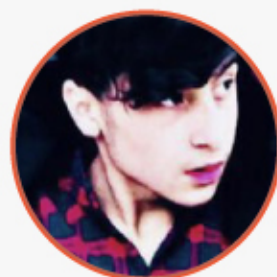
*"There was blood
everywhere... We run
to everyone, seeing if
we could save them. I
saw the bodies, they
were all burned,...
The car had been
entirely destroyed.
Pieces of flesh had
flown everywhere.'*



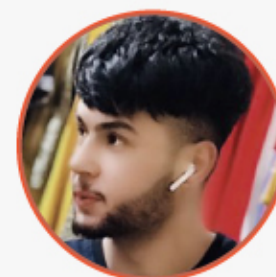
AHMADI'S 3 CHILDREN



Farzad (9)



Faysal (15)

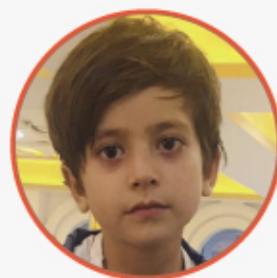


Zamir (19)

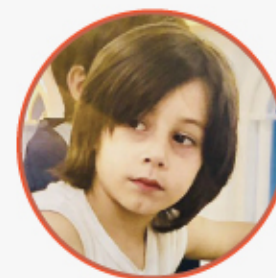
CHILDREN OF ROMAL AHMADI, BROTHER OF ZAMARI AHMADI



Ayet (2)



Bunyamin (6)



Armin (7)

ZAMARI AHMADI'S OTHER NIECES AND NEPHEWS



Malika (2)



Sumayya (2)

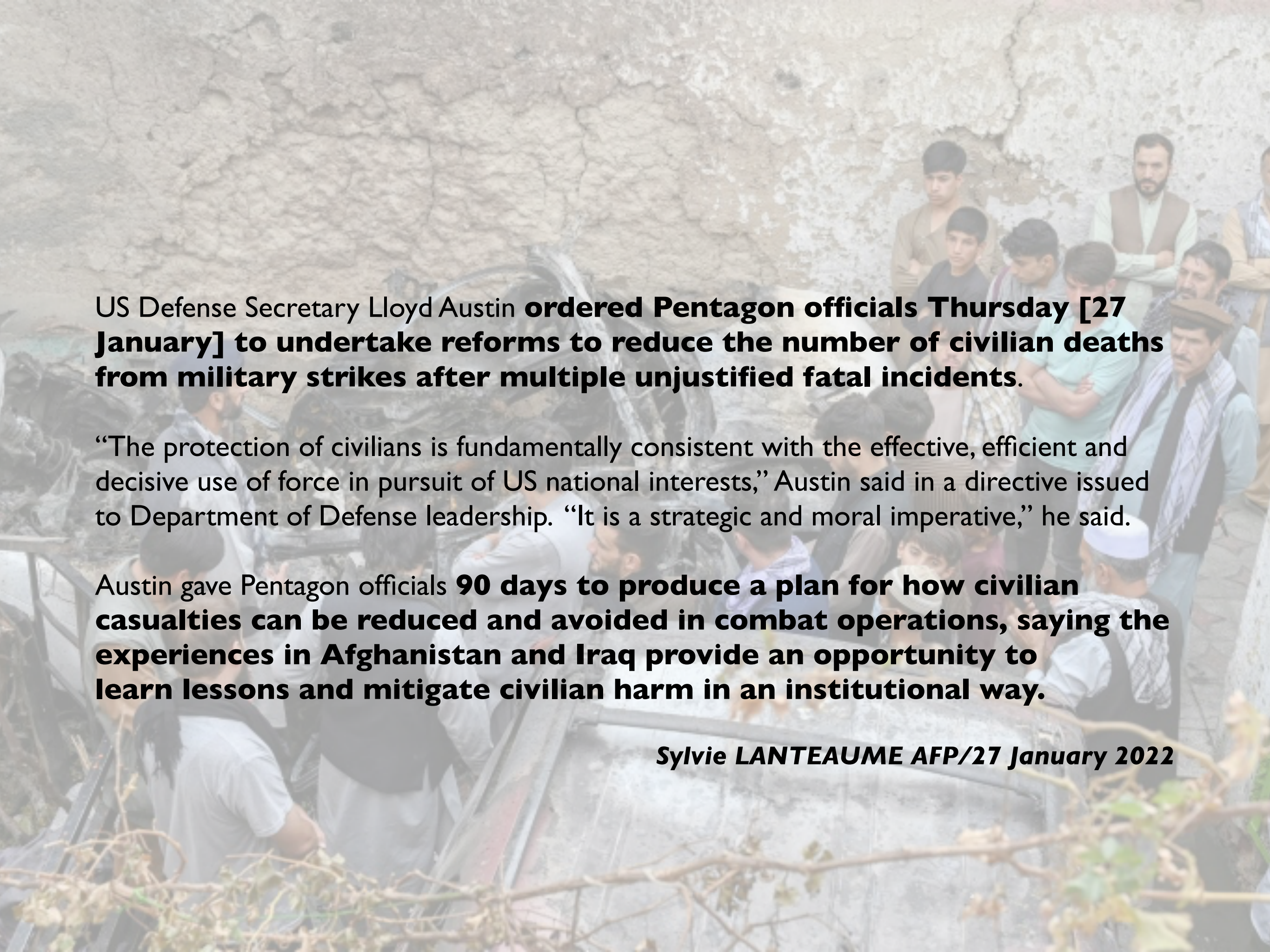


**Ahmad
Nasir (30)**



‘We apologize, and we will endeavor to learn from this horrible mistake.’

Gen McKenzie, US Central Command



US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin **ordered Pentagon officials Thursday [27 January] to undertake reforms to reduce the number of civilian deaths from military strikes after multiple unjustified fatal incidents.**

“The protection of civilians is fundamentally consistent with the effective, efficient and decisive use of force in pursuit of US national interests,” Austin said in a directive issued to Department of Defense leadership. “It is a strategic and moral imperative,” he said.

Austin gave Pentagon officials **90 days to produce a plan for how civilian casualties can be reduced and avoided in combat operations, saying the experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq provide an opportunity to learn lessons and mitigate civilian harm in an institutional way.**

Sylvie LANTEAUME AFP/27 January 2022



MICHAEL J. MCNERNEY, GABRIELLE TARINI, KAREN M. SUDKAMP,
LARRY LEWIS, MICHELLE GRISÉ, PAULINE MOORE

U.S. Department of Defense Civilian Casualty Policies and Procedures

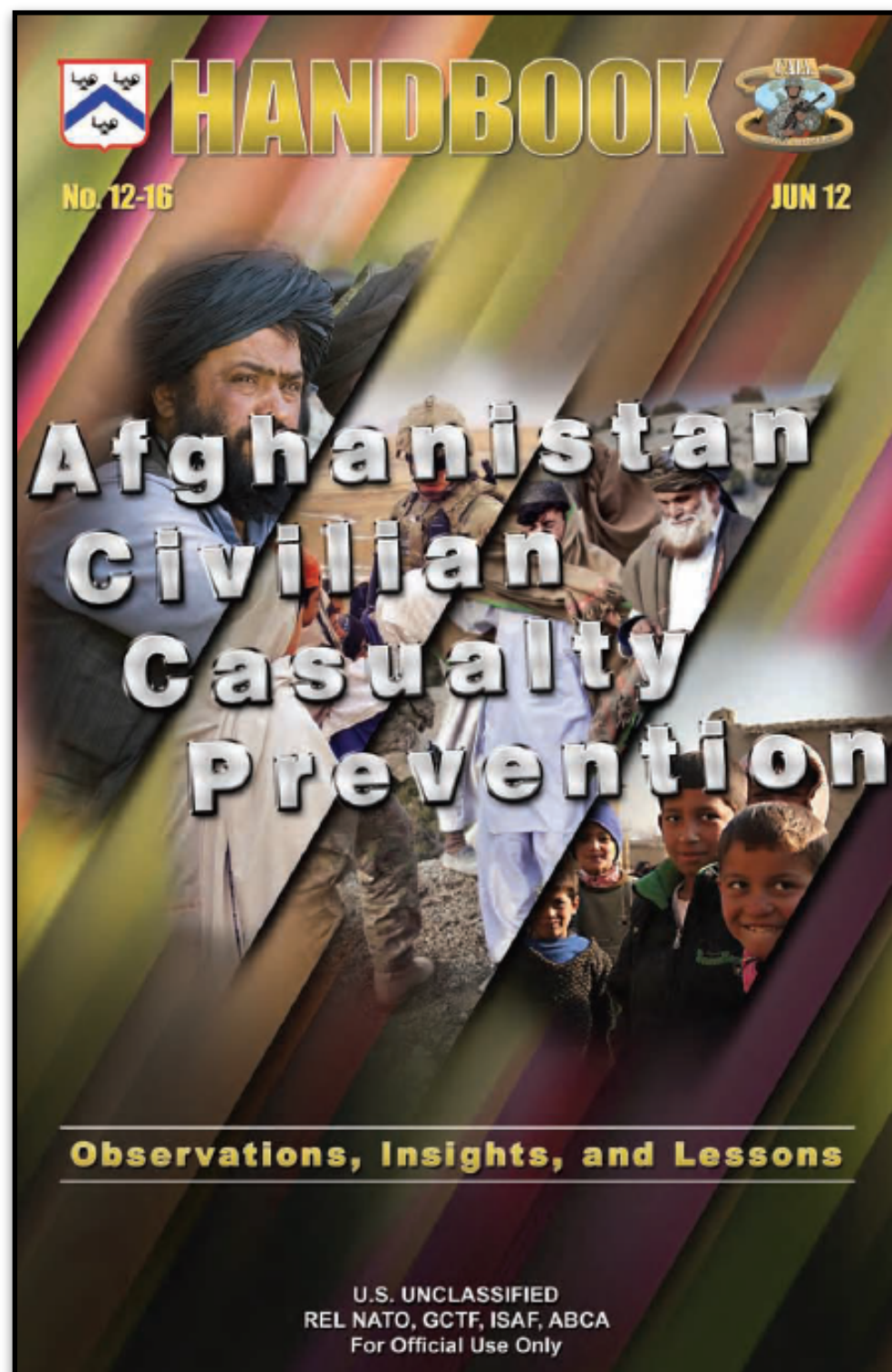
An Independent Assessment



‘The research reported here was completed in February 2021 and underwent security review with the sponsor and the Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review before public release.

*‘This research was **sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense** and conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Security Research Division (NSRD), which operates the National Defense Research Institute (NDRI), a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense intelligence enterprise.’*

27 January 2022



UNCLASSIFIED



Reducing and Mitigating Civilian Casualties: Enduring Lessons

12 April 2013

Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis (JCOA)
A division of the Joint Staff J7

UNCLASSIFIED

‘Not an OTH strike’



Lt Gen Sami Said, USAF Inspector General

‘If you try to equate it or correlate it to strikes you’re familiar with – classic, over the horizon CT strikes – you would be comparing apples to oranges. So please don’t do that. It was unique in the sense that it was a self defense strike, executed in self defense, unlike what you’re accustomed to, which is by far the norm, where you have a long time to do things like pattern of life. You have days to assess the intelligence and determine how you’re going to execute the strike. It’s a very different construct and very different execution. So I wouldn’t conclude anything from this particular strike, which was very unique, to the norm that is exercised with over the horizon CT strikes.’

5: Uruzgan, 21 February 2010

Still from reconstruction of strike in National Bird

5: Uruzgan, 21 February 2010

1440 WHIT1 ONCEA 2VTT7 100 250

HOTV H 01914 30 0200

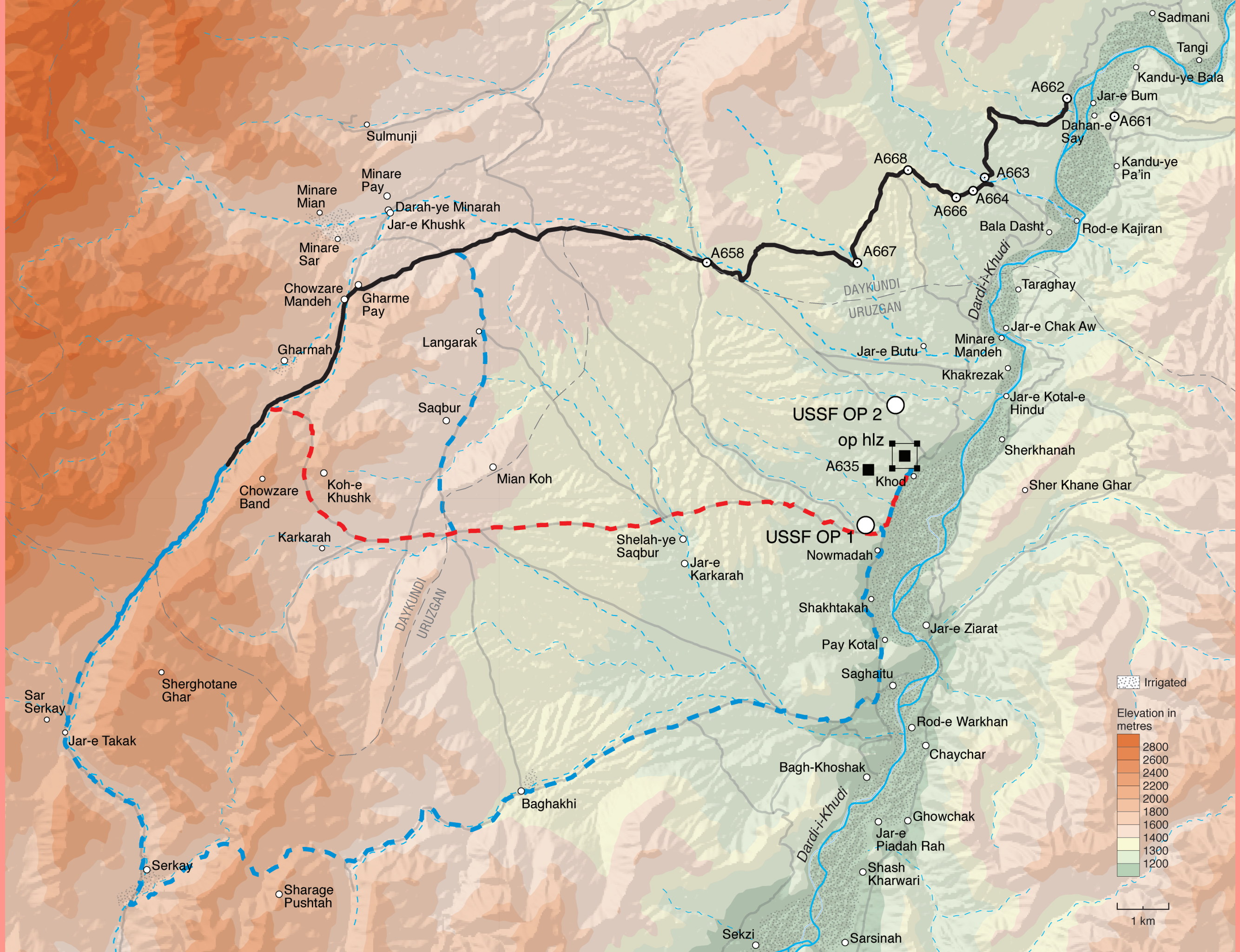
0 <-0

120

APM LTHC

H 36 782181
W 69 225001
BKG 8
DRG 3.4394
DRG 1.8594
TWO 384
ELV 1786 F

Still from reconstruction of strike in National Bird



FMV and ICOM correlations and geo-locations

0445 SALT report:

‘AAF elements [Anti-Afghan Forces, i.e. the Taliban] are moving in two groups, one to the north and one to the south, in an attempt to surround CF [coalition forces]. Stating that this is “our” area and we cannot afford to allow CF to operate in this area or we will lose local support.’

NSA ‘Real-Time Regional Gateway’ Data Center, Bagram Air Field

The Predator crew debated the make of the vehicles at length **not only because they could see them more clearly than the occupants...**

... but also because they could recognise them more readily: these were familiar objects to American eyes in a way that Afghan people were not.



ICOM was used to add some subtitles

Subtitled and ventriloquized

‘The concealment of weapons’

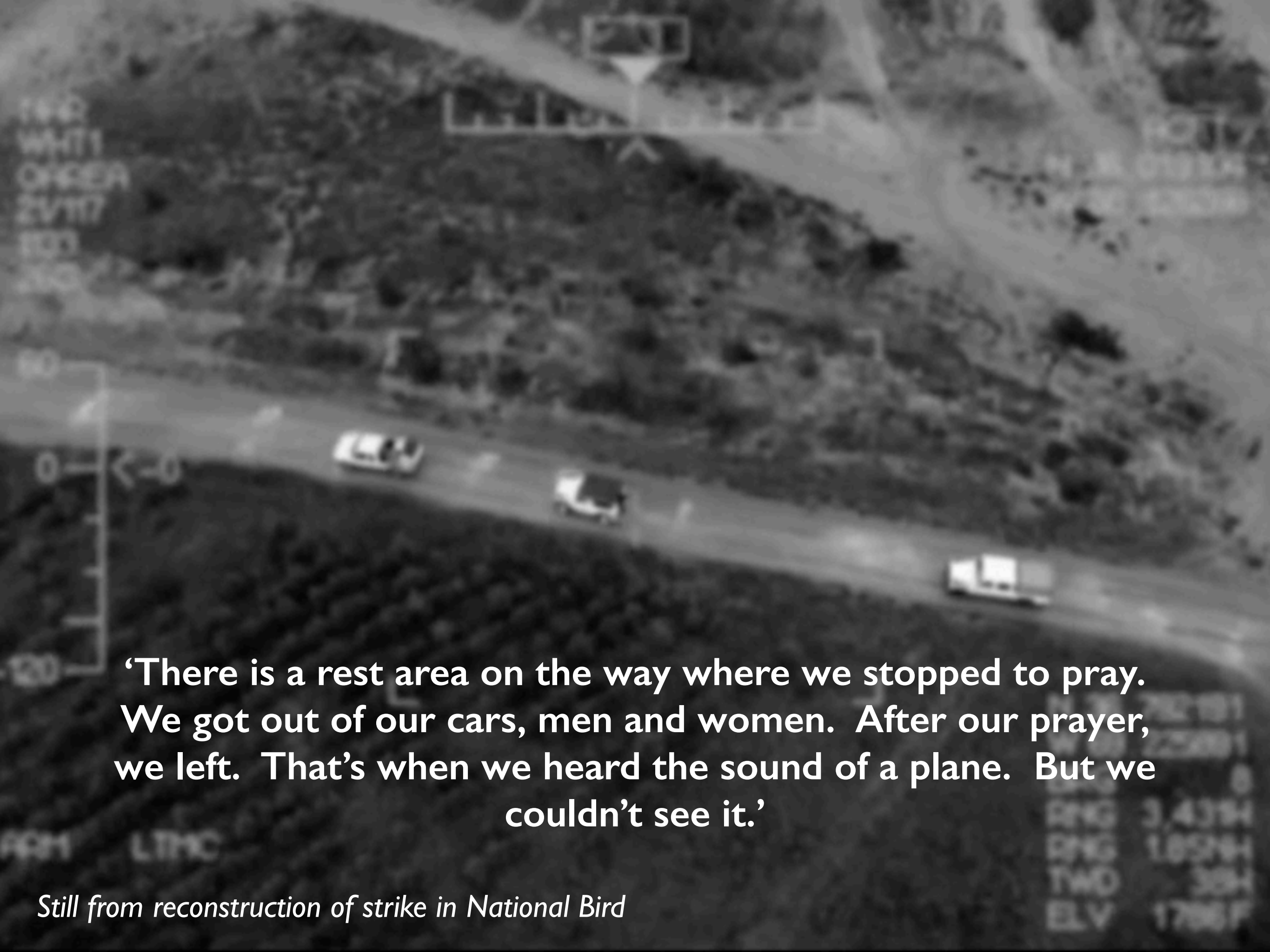
Predator pilot:

‘They wrap their [shit] up in their man dresses so you can’t PID it.’

‘They probably mostly left their weapons in the vehicles’

When the JTAC told the Predator pilot he was looking for more than AK-47s, ‘something like a mortar, or something large and fairly obvious’, the pilot promised ‘we’ll keep our eyes open but we haven’t seen it yet.’

The Predator crew speculated that there could be a dismantled mortar in the back of one of the SUVs and that *the passengers might be sitting on the mortar tubes or they could be concealed ‘anywhere in [the] base plate.’*

An aerial night-vision reconstruction of a military strike. The image shows a road with three cars. A large, bright, rectangular object, likely a missile or bomb, is in the process of striking the road between the second and third cars. The scene is surrounded by dense vegetation. Various technical overlays are visible, including a scale on the left, a heading indicator at the top, and data readouts on the right and bottom left.

**‘There is a rest area on the way where we stopped to pray.
We got out of our cars, men and women. After our prayer,
we left. That’s when we heard the sound of a plane. But we
couldn’t see it.’**

Still from reconstruction of strike in National Bird

Secure

2 - MISSION

DATE

▶284▶

▶APR4▶

▶28894▶

LOCAL TIME

▶174▶

▶384▶

▶554▶

UTC OFFSET

▶0.84▶

06:17 (Sensor): **They're praying, they are praying.**

06:17 (Jag25): KIRK97 JAG25

06:18 (Pilot): JAG25 just want to confirm that you copied we have about 20 pax dismounted, they are outside the trucks praying at this time and we're 3 1/2 miles from the friendly location.

06:18 (Jag25): Roger good copy, from SOTF, we should have A-10's and OH-58's that are on standby...*garbled*

06:18 (Sensor): A-10's as well, that's consistent with the vehicle capacity, 24-25 people. This is definitely it, this is their force. **Praying? I mean seriously, that's what they do.**

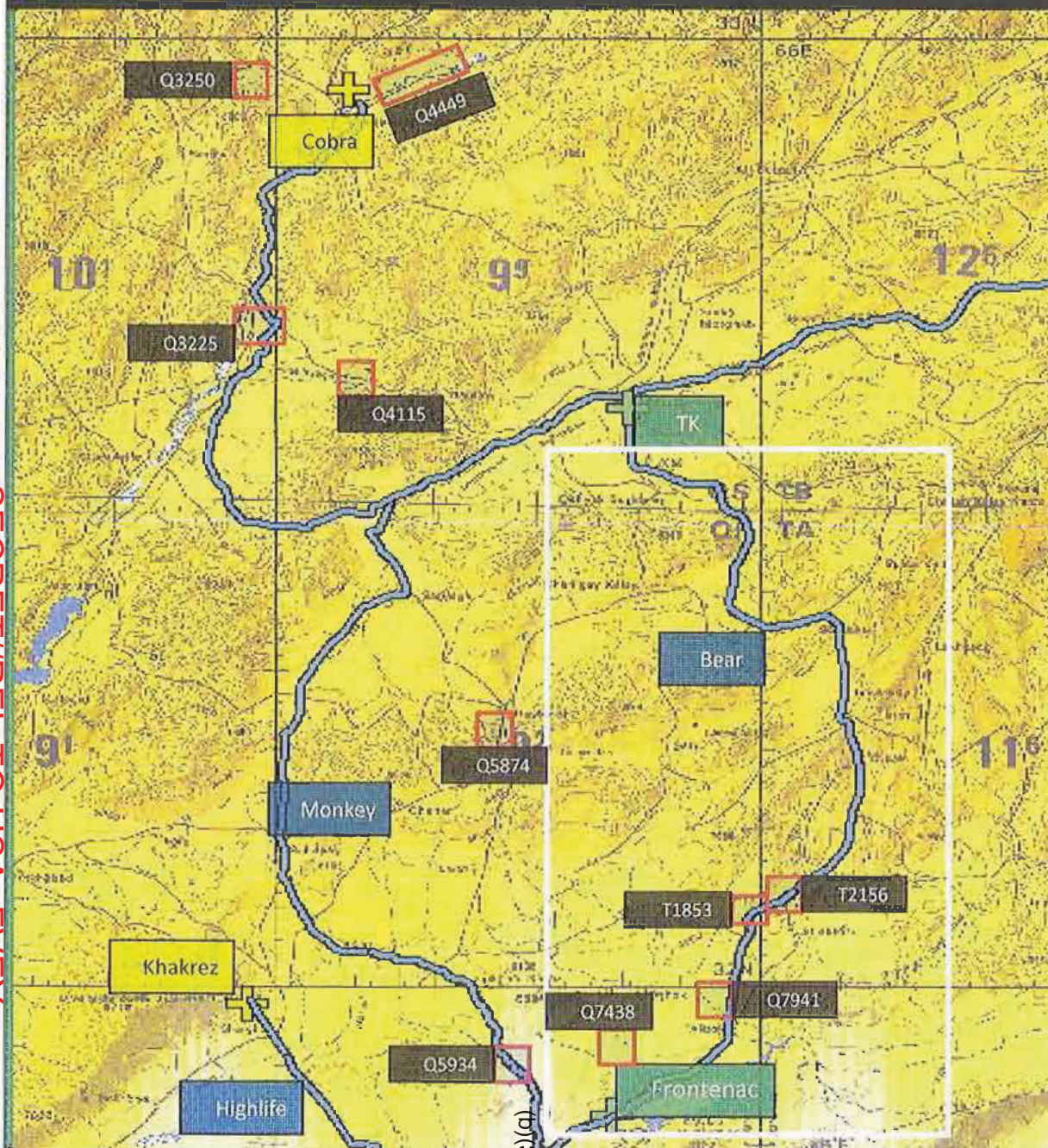
06:18 (MC): **They're gonna do something nefarious.**

***‘A convoy’ of ‘military-aged males’
executing a ‘flanking manoeuvre’***



Didn't you see that there were women and children?

SWT 1 WESTERN URUZGAN / RTE BEAR ARMED RECON / PRIMITIVE ESCORT



NAI	LOCATION	TYPE
Q3225	41S QS 3210 2509	IED HOT SPOT
Q3250	41S QS 3271 5011	INS ACTIVITY
Q5308	41S QS 5352 0831	INS SPOTTER LOCATION
Q4449	41S QS 4430 4970	INS SAFEHAVEN
T2156	42S TA 2124 5645	HIGH ACTIVITY ALONG RTE BEAR (AMBUSH LOC)
T1853	42STA 1808 5312	INS FIGHTING POSITIONS
Q7438	41R QR 7423 3808	INS SPOTTER OVERWATCHING FOB FRONTENAC
Q5874	41S QR 5820 7437	INS SPOTTER NETWORK
Q7941	41R QR 7993 4190	HIGH DF ACTIVITY ATTACKS USING RPG, SAF, AND MORTARS.
Q5934	41R QR 5972 3408	INS IED CELL OPERATING AREA
T2583	42S TA 2551 8308	IED ACTIVITY

INTEL SUMMARY: THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE OF INS ACTIVITY IN W. URUZGAN. OVER THE PAST MONTH THERE HAS BEEN 2X SIEDS TARGETING ANP AND GIROA. ATTACKS IN W. URUZGAN INDICATE THAT INS ARE ATTEMPTING TO UNDERMINE CFS AND DISPLAY ANPS ABILITY TO PROTECT THE LOCAL POPULACE. W. URUZGAN IS ALSO KEY FOR INS SUPPLY ROUTES THROUGH HELMAND. INS HAVE MULTIPLE CACHE SITES THROUGHOUT W. URUZGAN LOCATED VIC DEH RAWOOD AND IN THE VALLEYS IN NW SHAHEED-E HASSAS.

CONCEPT OF THE OPERATION: NLT 210700FEB10 SWT 1 WILL DEPART TK AND CONDUCTS ARMED RECONNAISSANCE IN AOI IVO W. URUZGAN AS WELL AS RTE BEAR. SWT REFUELS AS NECESSARY. EOM IVO CHARLIE RAMP AT TK.

SWT 1 TIMELINE:

0600: O&I
0645: COMMO
0700: DEP TK
1200: EOM



DTG: 210700FEB10

AMC: 1LT

TIME BLOCK: 0700-1200

MSN#: WP-A-02-21-03

AMR#:

TASK ORG: 1 X SWT

MISSION: NLT 210700FEB10 A TRP TF CONDUCTS ARMED RECONNAISSANCE IVO WESTERN URUZGAN IOT DESTROY ENEMY IED EMPLACEMENT TEAMS AND INTERDICT INSURGENT FREEDOM TO MANEUVER.

TASK ORG: 1 X SWT

T1: CONDUCT ARMED RECON OPERATIONS IVO WESTERN URUZGAN
P1: DESTROY ENEMY IED TEAMS AND ALLOW FREEDOM OF MANEUVER
T2: CONDUCT R&S OF NAI'S
P2: CONFIRM OR DENY COMMANDER'S PIR

SECRET//REL TO USA, FVEY

SECRET//REL TO USA, FVEY

00037259



Redacted video feed of strike

‘Performing civilian-ness’

0848

Relief Sensor Operator: ‘That guy’s laid down? They’re not running.’

Safety Observer: ‘Dude, this is weird.’

Relief Sensor Operator: ‘They’re just walking away....’

0849

Relief Sensor Operator: ‘I don’t know about this. This is weird.’

Pilot: ‘Got nowhere to go. Probably confused as [expletive deleted].’

0857

Relief Sensor Operator: ‘The thing is, nobody ran.’

Safety Observer: ‘Yeah, that was weird...’

Mission Commander at Hurlburt Field:

The reaction of the survivors ‘was different than is normal’ during an engagement with the Taliban....

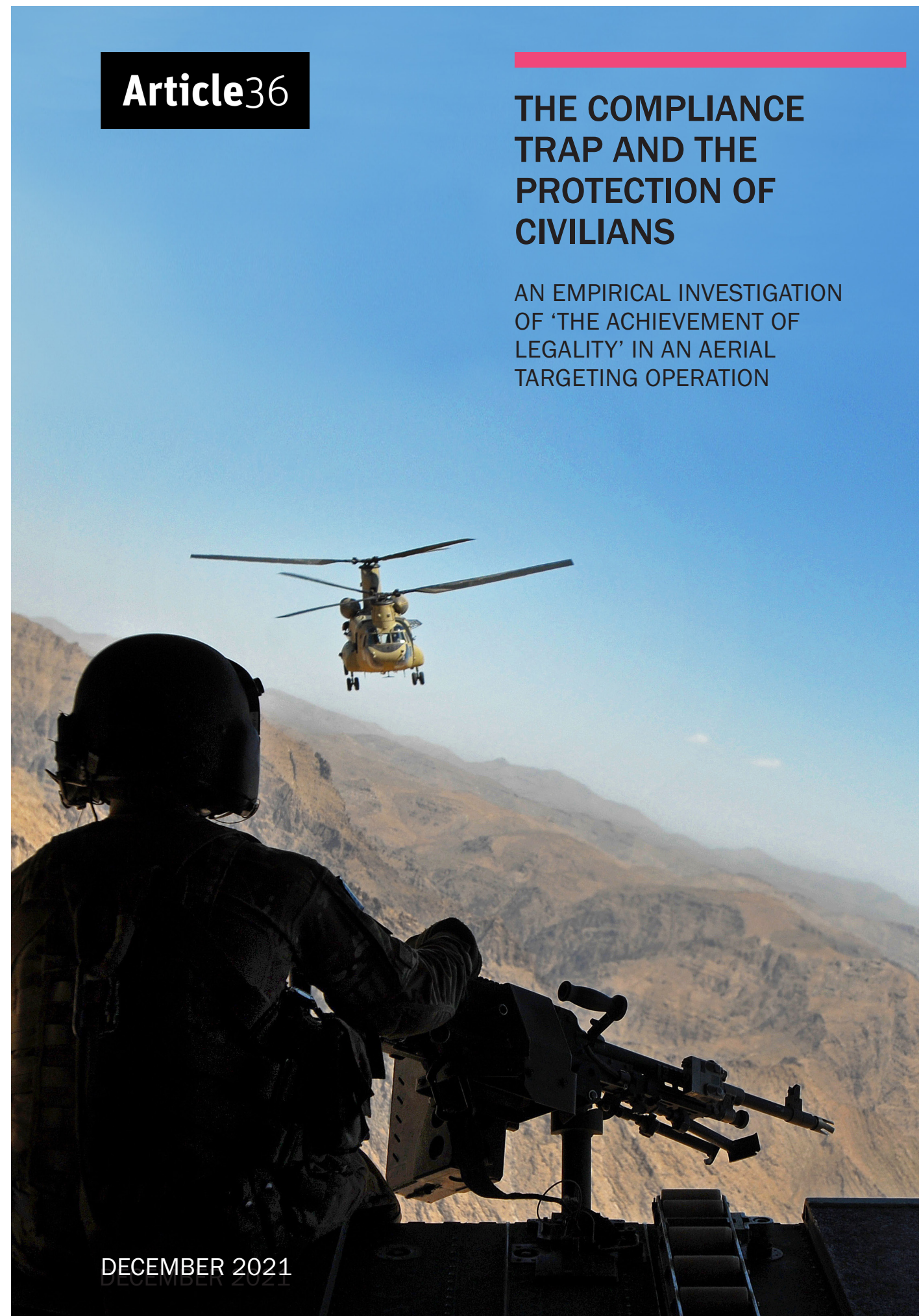
*‘... the strong capacity of military personnel to produce and maintain the legality of the targets during the operation led to **a failure to scrutinise the scene on the ground in any context other than one of achieving IHL compliance...***

*‘The argument is not that the personnel knew the vehicle occupants to be civilians and deliberately mischaracterised this in order to be authorised to strike. Rather, **in their focus on achieving compliance, they were incentivised to assess available information in such a way that the legitimacy of the strike they had already determined to carry out would not be threatened.** The fact that the occupants might not be insurgents, for example, was never entertained: the focus was purely on seeking to meet the administrative criteria ... that allowed the use of force, rather than making an external evaluation of the situation.’*

Article36

THE COMPLIANCE TRAP AND THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF ‘THE ACHIEVEMENT OF LEGALITY’ IN AN AERIAL TARGETING OPERATION



DECEMBER 2021

6: The architecture of aerial violence

‘Lessons Unlearned’ (I)

- **‘Correlation’ of UAV imagery with ICOM that could not be geo-located with any precision**

*‘U.S. officials **claimed they intercepted communications between the sedan and the alleged ISIS safe house**, instructing it to make several stops. ... (NYT)*

*‘**Intercepted communications among suspected militants** said the car would meet a motorcyclist shortly before the driver of the white sedan had such an interaction, the official said.... (Washington Post)*

*‘As US drone operators monitored the car from above, the US military was **picking up chatter from suspected ISIS militants plotting more suicide attacks**, the US official told CNN. Intelligence indicated the cell would pick up materials and meet up with someone on a motorcycle, the US official said, **without specifying the time and locations for those events.***

*Over the next eight hours, the US observed the vehicle stop and unload objects, and appear to meet up with someone on a motorcycle. **"So it seems to correlate or did correlate with what the intelligence was suggesting was going to happen,"** the official said....’ (NYT)*

‘Lessons Unlearned’ (2)

Areal essentialism

The withdrawal of US forces to HKIA and its immediate vicinity ensured that they knew next to nothing of what was happening elsewhere in Kabul, apart from remote imagery and ICOM.

*That withdrawal reinforced a collective sense of Kabul as a **threat landscape** and hence impelled those watching from afar to reduce the people within the city to that landscape and to construe their actions as threats.*

‘Lessons Unlearned’ (3)

‘Confirmation bias’

McHale’s investigation into the Uruzgan attack: the Predator crew displayed a clear and chronic disinclination to believe the vehicles ‘could be anything other than a threat formation’ – 19 passages in the transcript where there appeared to be ‘a predisposition or proclivity to make sure this was confirmed as a good target’ and 13 where the Predator crew modified the assessments from the screeners accordingly. ‘Every time there is a representation of something other than a target, until after the strike there is pushback’.

In Kabul too, those constructions were cumulative:

*In the morning adult males were observed as they ‘**unloaded bags and jugs from the trunk of the vehicle**’ and yet, later that afternoon, they were observed loading ‘the trunk of the vehicle with **items assessed at the time to be explosives**’: how was it possible to identify ‘bags’ and ‘jugs’ in the morning but not identify much larger water containers later in the day?*

‘Lessons Unlearned’ (I)

General McKenzie: *‘This was **not a rushed strike**... The strike cell deliberately followed and observed this vehicle and its occupants for **eight hours** while crosschecking what they were seeing with all available intelligence **to develop a reasonable certainty of the imminent threat** that this vehicle posed to our forces.’*

Lt General Said: *‘I had the luxury of time to review that data over weeks. They didn't, right? They had the same data, but they had to assimilate it, digest it and make a decision in a matter of hours.’*

*Investigation summary: **‘While this investigation had the benefit of considerable time to assess information available during the strike, those executing it didn't.’***

‘Confirmation bias’ extended after the strike

Gen Mark Milley: ‘We know that there was secondary explosions. Because there was secondary explosions, there’s a reasonable conclusion to be made that there was explosives in that vehicle.’

But visual forensics carried out by experts for both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* concluded that any secondary explosion was minor and caused by either the propane tank behind the car or fumes from the car’s gas tank

‘A single Hellfire missile was fused to detonate inside the vehicle to further minimize the chance for civilian casualties. It struck the vehicle at 4:53 PM, which produced an explosive event and follow-on flames significantly larger than a Hellfire missile would have been expected to produce.’

‘Lessons Unlearned’ (4)

The performance of ‘civilian-ness’

‘The presumption of civilian status is part of the binding laws of war’: Just Security

What could Ahmadi have done differently – how could he have satisfied his unseen, unknown watchers that he was an innocent civilian? **how else could he have performed his ‘civilian-ness’ in a way that would have satisfied them** – that could conceivably have resulted in a different outcome?

‘Lessons Unlearned’ (4)

Erasure of civilians in the target zone

*‘Surveillance videos showed the presence of at least one child in the area some two minutes before the military launched [the] drone strike... [But Gen Said] said the footage showing the presence of a child would have been easy to miss in real time.’ He was **‘unsure whether anyone who was not specifically looking for evidence of a child would have picked up on it.** “Two independent reviews that I conducted, the physical evidence of a child was apparent at the 2-minute point,” he said. “But it is **100 percent not obvious; you have to be looking for it.**”*

***But that is precisely the point:
screeners are supposed to be ‘looking for it’.***



Said even turned confirmation bias around to *defend the strike cell* by suggesting that the screeners who reviewed the post-strike footage were also prey to it:

*‘Just to be fair here in context they knew they were looking for kids. That's very different when you're sitting down to review something you know what you're looking for. You're being very attentive to that but I couldn't find anybody that didn't know, so **they're predisposed to looking for kids.** We have to understand that context.’*

**To repeat: screeners are not supposed to be predisposed
‘to looking for kids’ only *after* a report of civilian casualties**

‘Lessons Unlearned’ (5)

Threat to US ground forces both imminent and paramount

*‘The drone operators had the vehicle in their sights. They knew it was parked in the [courtyard], away from any American troops. **All they had to do was be patient a little longer, and they would have realized that the car never moved against anyone in a threatening manner, and they wouldn’t have had to pull the trigger...** But instead, they decided to be careless and pull the trigger ‘just in case.’*

Lt Col Daniel Davis (ret), Defense Priorities

‘We were very concerned that the vehicle could move quickly and be at the airport boundary in a matter of moments’ – despite the distance and the crowded streets.

Q: ‘...My understanding is sometimes it took you like an hour to just to drive short distances because of the chaos in the city and I was in the airport.’

GEN. SAID: ‘Sure, but it's so here's the critical issue, though. What the folks thought that were targeting at the time were a vehicle that contained somebody associated with ISIS-K but more importantly, they believed the vehicle contained explosives. And here's the risk... **the folks conducting the strike have to balance the risk to force.**’

‘Lessons Unlearned’ (6)

Initial denial of CIVCAS

*“It should be noted that **the US military was only forced to admit to its failure in this strike because of the current global scrutiny** on Afghanistan. Many similar strikes in Syria, Iraq, and Somalia have happened out of the spotlight, and the US continues to deny responsibility while devastated families suffer in silence.”*

Brian Castner

But the suppression of civilian casualties extends far wider in time and in space and across all forms of aerial violence: there is not only a reluctance but also a systematic refusal to accept transparency or accountability for civilian casualties

THE UNCOUNTED

By AZMAT KHAN and ANAND GOPAL NOV. 16, 2017

New York Times Magazine

AN ON-THE-GROUND INVESTIGATION REVEALS THAT THE U.S.-LED BATTLE AGAINST ISIS — HAILED AS THE MOST PRECISE AIR CAMPAIGN IN HISTORY — IS KILLING FAR MORE IRAQI CIVILIANS THAN THE COALITION HAS ACKNOWLEDGED.

By Azmat Khan and Anand Gopal
Photograph by Giles Price



LOST IN THE WRECKAGE

We visited the locations of nearly 150 airstrikes across northern Iraq, seeking to determine which air force launched them and whom they killed. The American-led coalition now acknowledges that it was the “probable” source of many more of those strikes than previously disclosed. Below are the stories of some of the victims.

A. K. and A. G.



THE UNCOUNTED

‘Our own reporting, conducted over 18 months, shows that the air war has been significantly less precise than the coalition claims. **Between April 2016 and June 2017, we visited the sites of nearly 150 airstrikes across northern Iraq, not long after ISIS was evicted from them.** We toured the wreckage; we interviewed hundreds of witnesses, survivors, family members, intelligence informants and local officials; we photographed bomb fragments, scoured local news sources, identified ISIS targets in the vicinity and mapped the destruction through satellite imagery. We also visited the American air base in Qatar where the coalition directs the air campaign. There, we were given access to the main operations floor and interviewed senior commanders, intelligence officials, legal advisers and civilian-casualty assessment experts. We provided their analysts with the coordinates and date ranges of every airstrike — 103 in all — in three ISIS-controlled areas and examined their responses. The result is the first systematic, ground-based sample of airstrikes in Iraq since this latest military action began in 2014.

We found that one in five of the coalition strikes we identified resulted in civilian death, a rate more than 31 times that acknowledged by the coalition. It is at such a distance from official claims that, in terms of civilian deaths, this may be the least transparent war in recent American history. Our reporting, moreover, revealed **a consistent failure by the coalition to investigate claims properly or to keep records that make it possible to investigate the claims at all.** While some of the civilian deaths we documented were a result of proximity to a legitimate ISIS target, many others appear to be the result simply of flawed or outdated intelligence that conflated civilians with combatants. **In this system, Iraqis are considered guilty until proved innocent.’**

we are certainly capable
of performing better.

THE CIVILIAN CASUALTY FILES

HIDDEN PENTAGON RECORDS REVEAL PATTERNS OF FAILURE IN DEADLY AIRSTRIKES

BY AZMAT KHAN



SPLASH (b)(1)1.4a

GOOD HIT



3. "The devastation caused by the bombing of Flight International Coalition on the city Harem 11/06/2014"

Potential similarities to building, treeline and apartments in Harim Compound 001 slide



SECRET//REL-TO-USA, FVEY

REQUEST #136

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
COMBINED JOINT TASK FORCE - OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE
CAMP ARIFJAN, KUWAIT
APO AE 09306

IRCS

31 AUG 2017

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: CIVCAS Allegation Closure Report, Allegation No. 1224

1. (U) **BLUF.** Based on the below findings, this allegation is **CREDIBLE**. A thorough review of all available strike records indicates that it is more likely than not that ten civilians were killed as a result of a Coalition strike. CJTF-OIR CIVCAS Cell shall close this allegation and make available for immediate public release.

2. (U) **Background.** I considered the following information in making my findings:

a. (S//REL) On 15 July 2017, CJTF-OIR CIVCAS Cell received a First Impression Report indicating potential CIVCAS during a target engagement. On 14 July 2017, (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(6) conducted a strike against an assessed tunnel system in Old Mosul, pursuant to Rule of Engagement (ROE) (b)(1)1.4a. The initial strike request included (b)(1)1.4a aimpoints; the TEA approved strikes (b)(1)1.4a aimpoints due to (b)(1)1.4a concerns see by (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(6) expended (b)(1)1.4a (b)(1)1.4a on the (b)(1)1.4a aimpoints. After (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(6) executed weapons employment, the aircraft self-reported having inadvertently stuck aimpoint (b)(1)1.4a one of the aborted aimpoints.

b. (S//REL) On 15 July 2017, CJTF-OIR CIVCAS Cell received a First Impression Report (FIR) indicating CJFLCC would begin a CIVCAS Credibility Assessment Report (CCAR) based upon a self-report.

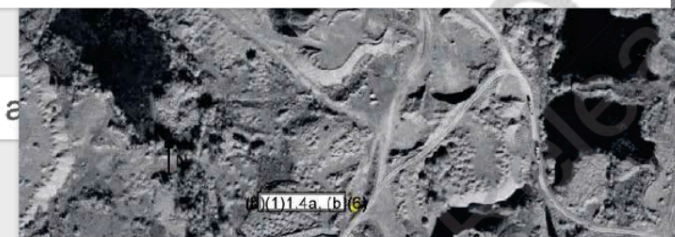
c. (S//REL) On 20 July 2017, MG White approved the assessment, finding the allegation to be **CREDIBLE**. CJFLCC recommends no further action be taken.

3. (U) **CIVCAS Credibility Assessment**

a. (S//REL) Ten unarmed adult males were seen at aimpoint (b)(1)1.4a prior to weapons impact. The unarmed males were not deemed ISIS fighters by the TEA, and therefore were considered civilians.

b. (S//REL) FMV from (b)(1)1.4a, (b)(6) does not show any civilian casualties as a result of the strike on aimpoint (b)(1)1.4a; however, it is reasonable to assume that any civilians at that aimpoint at the time of weapons release.

f. (U) No further investigation is warranted.



SECRET//REL-TO-USA, FVEY

1539 - 11/14/2018

that at least five civilians were killed as

enough to conclude that any person in the blast radius was seriously injured or killed in the strike.



Hidden Files Reveal Military's Failures in Deadly Airstrikes

From Preceding Page

aware of both a weapons cache and a civilian presence. That was the case in the largest civilian casualty incident the military has admitted in the war, the March 17, 2017, airstrike on two ISIS snipers in the Mosul al Jadida neighborhood that killed at least 103 civilians.

Failures of Accountability

On Jan. 6, 2017, Rafi Al Iraqi woke to the sound of a bomb close by. Another hit next door. Moments later, his own house was struck. He could hear his oldest son, Hamoody, screaming in the wreckage. "I just gave him to some people to take him to the hospital," Mr. Al Iraqi recalled. "Then I went back in to find my other children."

What happened next was captured on video taken by ISIS' media agency, which often visited blast sites for propaganda.

Rescuers emerged holding limp bodies. Mr. Al Iraqi's daughter, Nour, was alive. "I took her with my own hands to the hospital," he recalled this past June, in his most recent interview with The Times. "But by then, she had died." A nearby house for ISIS fighters was untouched.

Soon, via the ISIS video and news reports, word spread online that three families had been targeted in the Zerai neighborhood near Mosul's Grand Mosque. In all, 16 civilians were killed, including three of Mr. Al Iraqi's children and his mother-in-law. Hamoody's leg was lacerated.

The military began a civilian-casualty assessment, which found that there had been a single strike in Zerai that day — on a house assessed to be used exclusively as an ISIS "foreign fighter headquarters" and "artillery staging location." The strike had been preplanned, with no expected civilian casualties.



JIM HUYLEBROEK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

U.S. officials said an Aug. 29 drone strike in Kabul destroyed a vehicle carrying bombs, but a Times investigation found it had killed 10 members of one family.

*‘The trove of documents — the military’s own confidential assessments of more than 1,300 reports of civilian casualties, obtained by The New York Times — lays bare how **the air war has been marked by deeply flawed intelligence, rushed and often imprecise targeting, and the deaths of thousands of civilians, many of them children, a sharp contrast to the American government’s image of war waged by all- seeing drones and precision bombs.***

The documents show, too, that despite the Pentagon’s highly codified system for examining civilian casualties, pledges of transparency and accountability have given way to opacity and impunity. In only a handful of cases were the assessments made public. Not a single record provided includes a finding of wrongdoing or disciplinary action. Fewer than a dozen condolence payments were made, even though many survivors were left with disabilities requiring expensive medical care. Documented efforts to identify root causes or lessons learned are rare. ...

*... what the hidden documents show is that **civilians have become the regular collateral casualties of a way of war gone badly wrong.***

,

Monitoring and assessing civilian harm from airpower-dominated international military actions. Seeking transparency and accountability from belligerents, and advocating on behalf of affected non-combatants. Archiving open-source casualty reports, and military claims by nations.

An Iraqi man rushes his son for medical treatment during the Battle of Mosul. (Maranie R. Staab)

*Airwars selected a sample of 91 incidents [from the NYT files] between December 2016 and October 2017. **In each case, the US-led Coalition had specifically reached out to Airwars requesting further details on alleged civilian harm.** In 70 of these cases, we were able to match our response directly to declassified assessments in the Times database.*

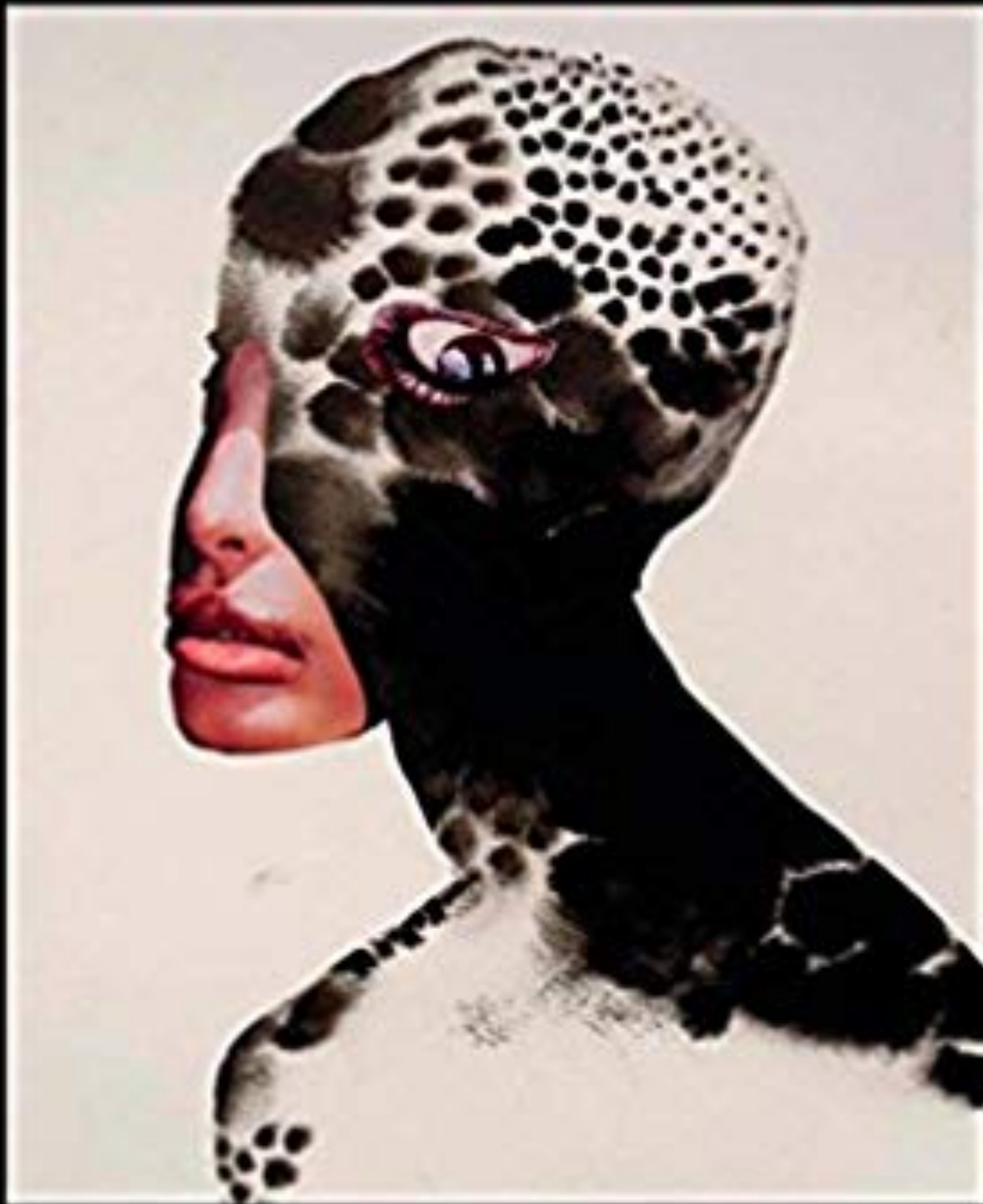
The results are concerning.

In total, in only three of the 70 cases where the Coalition asked Airwars for more information did it eventually go on to accept causing civilian harm. The other 67 incidents were deemed ‘non-credible.’

**AFGHANS
LIVES
MATTER**



HABEAS VISCUS



RACIALIZING ASSEMBLAGES, BIOPOLITICS,
AND BLACK FEMINIST THEORIES OF THE HUMAN

ALEXANDER G. WEHELIYE

The space of exception is not confined to the enclosed space of a camp or system of camps (a 'gulag archipelago').

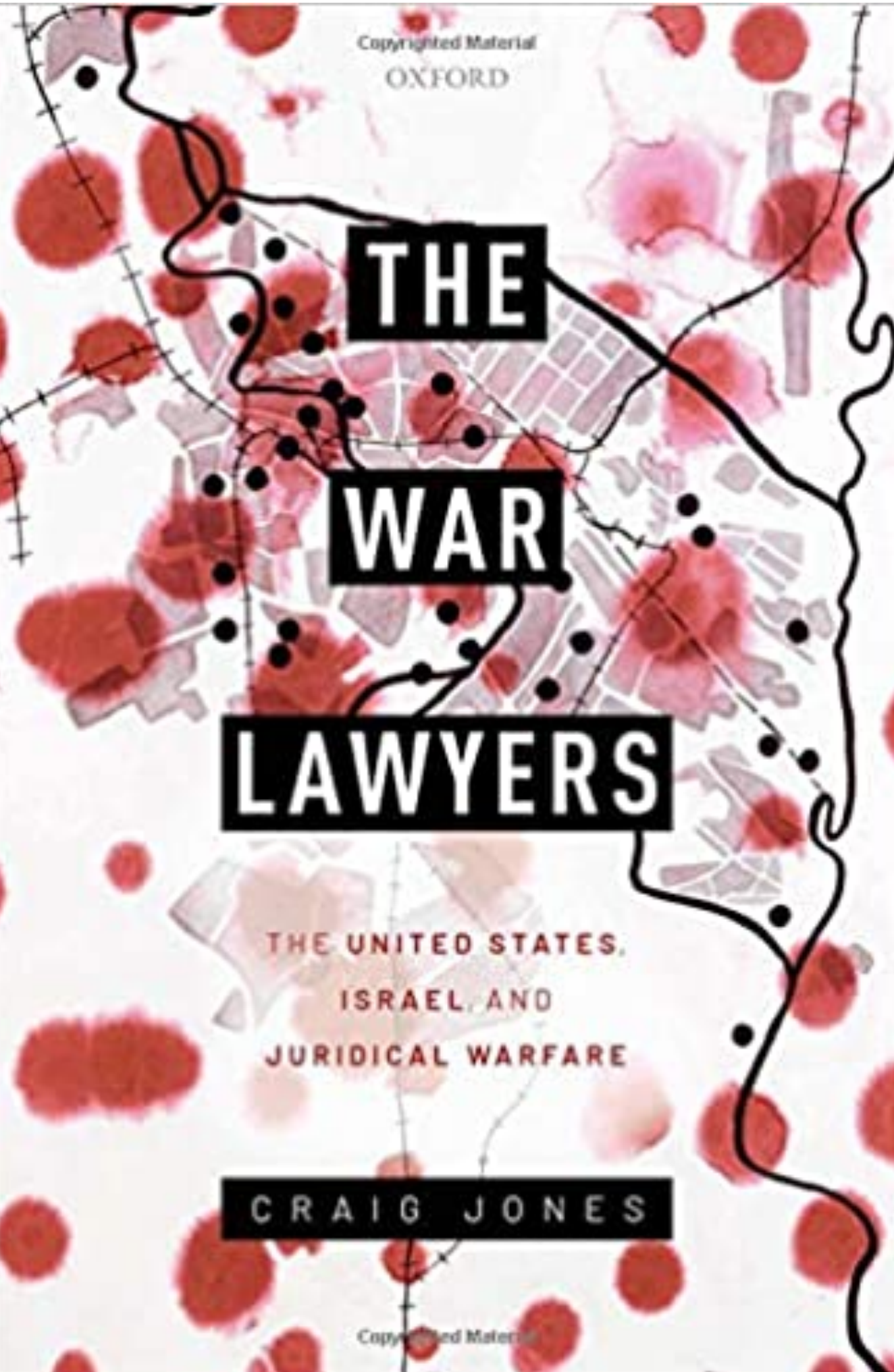
Even camps are embedded in dispersed and compound geographies of exception.

The constitution and extension of spaces of exception typically involve a complex and uneven constellation of national and international law.

War zones are also prototypical spaces of exception wherein 'exceptions to the exception' are also precarious and volatile spaces.

Spaces of exception are typically mediatized and racialised.

The 'exceptional' are not devoid of all agency (reduced to 'bare life') and do not always stand alone.



*Violence does not only lie beyond the law, 'outside' the law – but is also **sanctioned by** and **inscribed within** the law*



Edited by Irit Katz, Diana Martin and Claudio Minca

CAMPS REVISITED

Multifaceted Spatialities
of a Modern Political Technology

**‘The camp is the space that is
opened when the state of
exception begins to become the
rule.’**

Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer pp 164-5