

AIR FORCE MAGAZINE



Air Force Inspector General Lt. Gen. Sami D. Said briefs reporters at the Pentagon on the independent investigation into the death of 10 Afghan civilians, Nov. 3, 2021. Screenshot photo.

'Confirmation Bias' Cited in Erroneous Strike That Killed 10 Civilians in Afghanistan

This website uses cookies to improve your browsing experience. By using this site, you agree to our use of cookies. [View our Privacy Policy](#)

ACCEPT

SHARE ARTICLE

Three days after 13 Americans were killed at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, a U.S. Central Command strike cell in Qatar made a series of assumptions over the course of eight hours based on the intelligence available at the time, leading to the death of 10 innocent civilians, including seven children, according to the final report by the Air Force inspector general.

Air Force Inspector General Lt. Gen. Sami D. Said interviewed 29 individuals, including 22 directly involved in the operation, as part of a 45-day investigation directed by Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III and ordered by Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall before briefing senior defense officials.

“Individuals involved in this strike that were interviewed during this investigation, truly believed at the time that they were targeting an imminent threat to U.S. forces on HKIA,” Said said.

He told defense reporters Nov. 3 the strike cell made a “reasonable” conclusion that the white Toyota Corolla driven by aid worker Zemari Ahmadi was a vehicle of interest, based on “intelligence available that correlated the Corolla to particular locations.”

Said attempted to paint a picture of a self-defense strike made during a vulnerable time when 13 service members had just been killed. Ground intelligence was not available and there were [many known terrorist threats](#) as the Aug. 31 evacuation deadline neared.

“You have to realize that strike cell was dealing with multiple threat streams tracking multiple vehicles at any given time,” he said.

The inspector general said confirmation bias then crept in, making analysts believe Ahmadi was acting suspiciously. A stop at a suspected ISIS location and handover of a computer bag was one example, since a computer bag was used in the Aug. 26 HKIA attack.

“So, the fact that on that day, on the 29th we’re watching this white Corolla, we saw an exchange of a computer bag. It wasn’t lost on people,” he said.

Despite the execution errors combined with confirmation bias that led to the “regrettable strike” and civilian casualties, Said said the investigation “found no violation of law.”

“What likely broke down was not the intelligence, but the correlation of that intelligence to a specific house, the inference that what the intelligence is talking about is that house and that car,” he added. “There’s an art to that, and that’s where the disconnect and correlation broke down.”

Communication breakdowns also took place between the support team operating the platforms and the strike cell. The support teams could only provide additional context to the strike cell through a secure chat function.

In all, Said described three recommendations listed in the classified report:

Removed from the pressure of the moment, Said also said a careful study of video footage two minutes before the strike was launched reveals physical evidence that a child was at the compound. Ultimately, seven children were killed in the strike, along with three Afghan men.

The Inspector General noted that the recommendations would only apply to time-limited, defensive strikes in urban settings, like the erroneous Aug. 29 strike, rather than a "typical" over-the-horizon, counterterrorism strike, which gathers information over days.

Assignment of accountability may still come through the chain of command, which has had the report for two days. Possible repercussions may include de-credentialing, firing, or re-training individuals involved.

Afghanistan

Air

National Security

Expand Comments



ALSO ON AIR FORCE MAGAZINE

A Dozen Senators Introduce ...

11 days ago • 2 comments

A bipartisan group of Senators introduced a bill to

Leaked Air Force Memo: Bigger ...

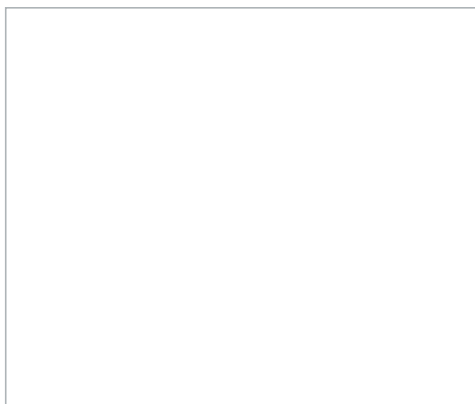
3 days ago • 2 comments

An Air Force memo posted to social media isn't

Air Force MILCOM

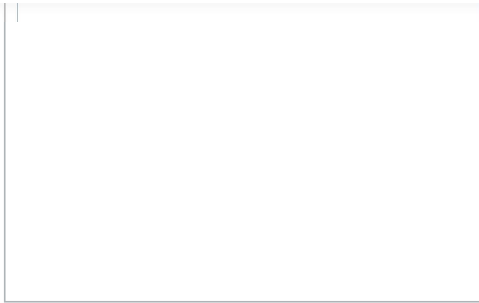
7 days ago •

The Army's Engineers



This website uses cookies to improve your browsing experience. By using this site, you agree to our use of cookies. [View our Privacy Policy](#)

ACCEPT



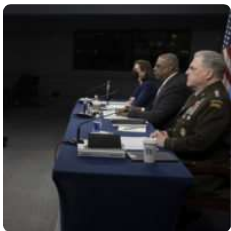
Latest News



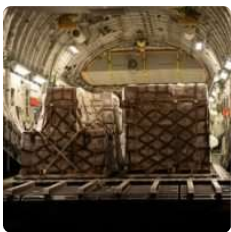
Key Air Force, Space Force Leaders Set to Retire



Biden Signals U.S. Defense of Taiwan—Pentagon Stays Mum

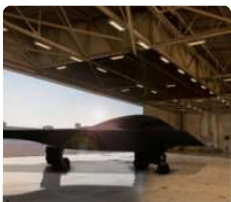


Second Meeting of Ukraine Defense Contact Group Adds Nations, Yields...



Air Force C-17 Delivers 78,000 Pounds of Infant Formula

Loads Data for New B-21 Stealth Bomber Confirms Digital Models;...



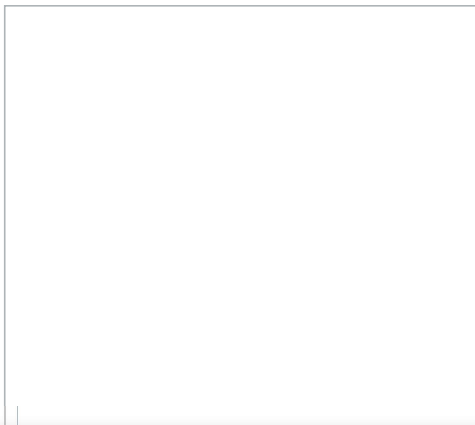
This website uses cookies to improve your browsing experience. By using this site, you agree to our use of cookies. [View our Privacy Policy](#)

ACCEPT

Subscribe to the Daily Report

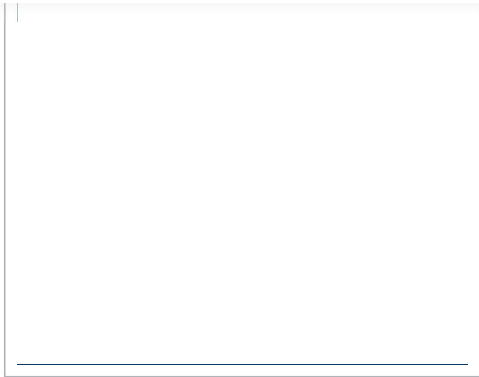
Get your daily fix of Air Force news delivered right to your inbox every day. There's no more reliable source for news about your Air Force.

Subscribe Today



This website uses cookies to improve your browsing experience. By using this site, you agree to our use of cookies. [View our Privacy Policy](#)

ACCEPT



Related Content

Biden Signals U.S. Defense of Taiwan—Pentagon Stays Mum
 May 23, 2022

President Joe Biden again drew into question America’s “strategic ambiguity” regarding the defense of Taiwan by saying the United States would become involved militarily if China invaded the island. However, Pentagon leaders declined to discuss military plans or strategy when asked to elaborate. At a joint press conference with Japanese...

Second Meeting of Ukraine Defense Contact Group Adds Nations, Yields ‘Sharper’ Focus
 May 23, 2022

Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III hosted his second Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting in a virtual format May 23, drawing 47 nations that back Ukraine’s fight against Russia but leaving questions about when the war might end. New coastal defense systems and more artillery, armor, and tanks were highlighted...

Air I
Pou
 May 2:

An Air Base, (deliver formu curren told, tl Harbo pound



This website uses cookies to improve your browsing experience. By using this site, you agree to our use of cookies. [View our Privacy Policy](#)

ACCEPT

Daily Report

Contact Us

Advertise

Subscribe!

Air & Space Forces Association

Reuse and Reprint Permission

Privacy Policy

Air Force Magazine is the official publication of the Air & Space Forces Association, 1501 Langston Boulevard, Arlington, Va., 22209-1198. Copyright 2022.

This website uses cookies to improve your browsing experience. By using this site, you agree to our use of cookies. **View our Privacy Policy**

ACCEPT