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By Leonard C. Goodman / Independent Media Institute  
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## ***The U.S. Killer Drone Program Stays Afloat on the Back of Lies and Pentagon Propaganda***

***A wrongly targeted Afghan aid worker and his family are among the latest casualties.***

On August 29, in the final days of our 20-year occupation of Afghanistan, the United States launched a drone strike, firing a 20-pound Hellfire missile at an aid worker named Zemari Ahmadi as he parked his car outside his home in a residential neighborhood of Kabul. The lethal strike killed Ahmadi and nine members of his family, including seven children, five of whom were younger than 10. The children had come outside to meet Ahmadi as he returned home from his job at an American NGO where he distributed food to Afghans displaced by the war. He and his family had applied for refugee resettlement in the United States.

When a surviving member of Ahmadi's family complained publicly about the errant strike that slaughtered so many members of his family, the Pentagon did what it has been doing for 20 years in Afghanistan. It lied.

According to the [New York Times](#), the Pentagon claimed that Ahmadi was a facilitator for the Islamic State, and that his car was packed with explosives, posing an imminent threat to U.S. troops guarding the evacuation at the Kabul airport. General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., commander of the U.S. Central Command, said the drone strike dealt ISIS Khorasan a crushing blow. General Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called it [a "righteous strike."](#)

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When it was confirmed that children as young as two had died in the strike, the Pentagon suggested that any civilian deaths resulted from the detonation of explosives inside the vehicle that was targeted. The military produced an assessment that the occupants of the vehicle were wearing suicide vests and that the car itself was packed with explosives.

Most of our drone strikes take place in remote areas and no follow-up investigation is ever conducted. However, the slaughter of Ahmadi's family took place 2 miles from the Kabul airport, at which American reporters were stationed covering the chaotic evacuation of U.S. troops and allies. In the days following the deadly drone strike, reporters from the New York Times conducted a thorough investigation, visiting Ahmadi's home and place of work, viewing video footage from security cameras, and consulting with weapons experts.

This investigation quickly confirmed that every official statement of the Pentagon was false. Ahmadi did not visit an Islamic State safe house on the day of his death; he visited his office. His car was not loaded with explosives; it was loaded with water canisters he was bringing home to his family because there was a water shortage in his neighborhood.

After the publication of the New York Times investigation, the Pentagon conceded that it had made a tragic, but "honest" mistake when it assassinated Ahmadi and his family by drone. No one has been held accountable for the deadly mistake.

Targeted drone killing is an innovation of the war on terror. It facilitates continuous war by making it appear less costly and more humane. Indeed, President Biden has already announced that the U.S. will continue launching drone strikes from afar after its withdrawal from Afghanistan. Similar language was used when Biden announced an end to American support "for offensive operations in the war in Yemen," while reserving the right to continue killing Yemenis if it believes they are linked to ISIS or Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

And of course don't expect any peace dividend from the end of the Afghan war. In September, the House approved, in bipartisan fashion, \$778 billion in military spending for 2022, a \$37 billion *increase* over our 2021 military budget. More than half the funds

we've sent to the Pentagon since 9/11—or about \$8 trillion—has ended up in [the pockets of private corporations](#) such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman. These companies then use some of those taxpayer dollars to lobby Congress and the president to keep the wars going and the money flowing into their pockets.

President Eisenhower warned of the danger that a profit-seeking “military-industrial complex” will produce a state where wars are not fought with an intention of winning them but to ensure that they never end. The author George Orwell articulated these dangers in his classic novel *1984* (published in 1949) wherein he described continuous war as an opaque, low-intensity conflict whose primary purpose was to siphon off resources and perpetuate itself.

Begun under President George W. Bush, the drone program was fully embraced and escalated under the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. President Obama assured Americans that our drones are so “exceptionally surgical and precise,” “narrowly target[ed]... against those who want to kill us” while not putting “innocent men, women and children in danger.”

The claim that drones are humane and effective has always been a lie. But by classifying the program as top secret and by aggressively prosecuting whistleblowers, the U.S. has been able to hide the truth about drones from most Americans. Ironically, of course, the people targeted by our drones know the truth about who is being killed. Thus the classification of all information about drones does nothing to protect national security; rather it protects government officials from any accountability.

I have asked several members of the U.S. Senate about the drone program and have never received a straight answer. In the fall of 2009, I attended a fundraiser for Senator Chuck Schumer at a Chicago law firm. The United States had just suffered one of its deadliest months in Afghanistan in which more than 50 Americans were killed. Schumer assured the group that Obama was turning things around with his unmanned killer drone program. I asked Schumer about civilian deaths and whether the CIA (which then ran the drone program) had ever studied whether drones killed more terrorists than they created. The senator said he was pretty sure the CIA did reach such a conclusion.

In fact, as WikiLeaks later revealed, the CIA had conducted such a study in July 2009. But that study, called “CIA Best Practices in Counterinsurgency,” reached the opposite conclusion: that the clandestine drone and assassination program was likely to produce counterproductive outcomes, including strengthening the very “extremist groups” it was allegedly designed to destroy, particularly if “non-combatants are killed in the attacks.” This report was classified as “secret,” meaning it could be read by Senator Schumer, but not by you or me, until 2014, when WikiLeaks released it to the public.

Others have come forward to expose the official lies told about our drone program. In 2014, a former signals intelligence analyst in the U.S. Air Force named Daniel Hale leaked internal documents exposing how, in one five-month period in Afghanistan, 90 percent of the people killed by our drones were not the intended target. Hale also disclosed how children in areas targeted by our drones cannot go out and play on clear days because that is when the drones fly. Hale said that drone operators reported having to kill a part of their conscience to keep doing their job. Hale was prosecuted under the Espionage Act for leaking these documents and has been sentenced to 45 months in prison.

The investigation by the New York Times into the drone assassination of Mr. Ahmadi and his family is an important step in bringing some sunlight into the clandestine world of drone warfare. Sadly, most victims of our drones still remain anonymous as the strikes take place in remote areas of faraway countries such as Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. Much of the work to reveal the truth about drones still falls on independent investigative journalists and whistleblowers like Mr. Hale. They are our best hope to begin holding those responsible accountable and bringing an end to this dangerous lie.

*This article was produced by [Economy for All](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute.*

**Leonard C. Goodman** is a Chicago criminal defense attorney and co-owner of the newly independent [Reader](#).