

[Al-Qaeda Leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is Killed in a U.S. Drone Strike in Afghanistan](#)

A recent American drone strike in Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul killed Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. The targeted attack was the culmination of a months-long intelligence gathering operation that had tracked down al-Zawahiri to a safe house in the Sherpur neighborhood of Kabul. He had assumed control as head of the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda over the past decade following the 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden, and al-Zawahiri was regarded as one of the key plotters behind the 9/11 attacks against the United States. Al-Zawahiri's whereabouts were long unknown until U.S. intelligence pinpointed his location earlier this year, according to Biden administration officials. Some security experts have argued that the drone attack provides a glimpse into expected U.S. counterterrorism strategy in the aftermath of last year's American troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, and also highlights that the United States can still conduct successful operations of this kind in the absence of a direct military presence in the country.

As a part of the intelligence gathering mission leading up to the killing of al-Zawahiri, U.S. operatives determined that the Al-Qaeda leader had moved from neighboring Pakistan to a safe house in the Sherpur area of Kabul. They were also able to observe that once al-Zawahiri arrived at the hideout, he never left it. U.S. officials then spent a period of several months tracking his daily habits and created a model of the safe house to brief U.S. President Biden on the operation. Particular attention was placed on trying to minimize any potential risk to civilians, with reported focus on dynamics such as not threatening the integrity of the infrastructure during the planned drone strike. Additionally, there were inquiries into the type of construction materials that the home was made of, as well as potential weather conditions that could have an effect on the impact of the strike. President Biden ultimately provided his authorization, something that was recommended by his entire national security team. The move gave intelligence operatives the ability to conduct the airstrike at a time deemed most optimal, and al-Zawahiri was killed at 6:18 a.m. local time in Kabul this past Saturday morning.

Analysts have speculated that this strike may provide hints about the United States' future grand strategy. After the withdrawal from Afghanistan in August of last year, some around the world assumed that the United States would begin to gradually shift its attention away from regional issues in the Middle East and place more focus on other matters such as Russia and China-related concerns. This attack indicates that the United States still has both the ability and will to continue to conduct counterterrorism operations, even if their physical presence in the region has decreased dramatically. It is still evident however, that the United States' priorities have shifted to Russia as the immediate threat, while classifying China as a long-term challenge. It could also be argued that the United States staying active in the Middle East addresses these threats, as it is almost certain that any vacuum left by the United States would quickly be filled by China or Russia. Remaining a key figure allows the United States to prevent, or at the very least mitigate, any large-scale upticks in Chinese or Russian influence.