

Afghanistan, Biden and the Taliban &gt;

# A reprisal strike killed two ISIS militants and wounded another.

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The Pentagon said that two Islamic State militants were killed and one was wounded in Friday night's drone strike in Nangarhar Province as part of the American retaliation for the suicide bombing at the Kabul airport that killed scores of people, including 13 American service members.

Defense Department officials said one of the Islamic State drone targets was a "planner," and one was a "facilitator." Both, they said, were involved in planning attacks against Americans, although officials at a news conference on Saturday declined to say whether they were involved specifically in the Kabul airport attack.

There remains a threat to American troops and civilians at the Kabul airport, officials said, making the ongoing evacuation effort perilous.

For the first time, Pentagon officials publicly acknowledged the possibility that some of the people killed in the aftermath of the suicide bombing at Kabul airport may have died in gunfire coming from American service members after the suicide bomber detonated himself.

Pentagon officials have previously said there was gunfire after the bombing, but were unsure where it emanated. Investigators are looking into whether the shots came from Americans at the gate, or from the Islamic State, which claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing.

"We can't confirm that," Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby said during a news conference on Saturday. But, he added that the Defense Department was "not in position to deny it either."

Defense Department officials declined to name the Islamic State planner and facilitator killed in the drone strike in Nangarhar, near the border with Pakistan.

“They were ISIS-K planners and facilitators and that’s enough reason there alone,” Mr. Kirby said, referring to the Islamic State Khorasan.

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.

The planner and an associate were driving in a car in Jalalabad when the drone’s Hellfire missile killed them, the official said. A third person in a building nearby was injured in the drone blast. No civilian casualties reported.

With three days to go before President Biden’s Aug. 31 deadline for withdrawal, the American troops at the Kabul airport have begun what the military is calling their “retrograde, ” meaning service members are getting on planes and leaving too.

A military official said there are now around 4,000 American troops on the ground in Kabul, down from a peak of 5,800. Mr. Kirby said American citizens and Afghan allies continue to be allowed into the airport and onto departing planes.

Maria Cramer contributed reporting.