

The Afghan hospital bombing: An imperialist war crime

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17 October 2015

The massacre of at least 22 medical personnel and patients, including three children, at the Doctors Without Borders medical center in Kunduz, Afghanistan is a war crime for which the US government and military, including top officials in the Obama administration, are responsible.

In the nearly two weeks following the October 3 massacre, details have begun to emerge exploding the campaign of misinformation put out by US military officials.

On Thursday, the AP cited a former intelligence official who said that US special operations analysts had been gathering information on the hospital in the days before the attack, supposedly because they suspected a Pakistani intelligence agent of using the facility to coordinate Taliban activity. The analysts had mapped the entire area and drawn a circle around the hospital.

According to a separate report, cockpit recordings—which have not been publicly released—reveal that the crew of the AC-130 flying gunship sent to bombard the facility questioned the legality of the attack.

The Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) facility was a well-known landmark, and the claim by military officials that they did not know precisely what was being done is a transparent lie. Throughout the course of the hour-long assault, personnel frantically called Afghan and US military officials pleading with them to stop, but to no avail.

Meinie Nicolai, president of the operational directorate of MSF, said that the new details are evidence of a “premeditated massacre” carried out with deliberate intent. This would constitute a “grave breach” of the Geneva Conventions, which according to the US War Crimes Act of 1996 is punishable by life

imprisonment or death.

This week, photographic evidence of the scale of the atrocity has also come out. Freelance journalist Andrew Quilty published a series of images showing the burnt-out remains of the hospital. “Throughout the building,” Quilty reported, “on all visible surfaces, there were wild and sporadic arcs of bullet holes. In other places, larger rounds had penetrated straight through the walls, leaving gaps some 2 feet wide in the solid brick.” The photographs show hospital beds that have been incinerated, walls crumbling from the impact of the assault, corpses charred beyond recognition.

“Walking through the roughly 40 rooms, bodies and remains lay scattered and, in most cases, alone,” Quilty writes. “All but one of these bodies—or what was left of them—still in the facility were on the ground. Beneath one victim’s remains—otherwise indistinguishable but for a severed foot—were the white and pale blue squares of a hospital gown, almost completely intact.”

As evidence of a blatant and calculated war crime begins to mount, the US media is playing its traditional role as a propaganda arm for the state. The *New York Times* has not reported on the revelations of the AP, and it has buried coverage of the aftermath of the bombing on its inside pages.

At a press conference on Friday, President Barack Obama was not asked a single question on the bombing.

The most likely explanation of the attack is that it was a deliberate action ordered by the US military to send a message to the population of Afghanistan that continued resistance to the occupation and the puppet regime in Kabul will be met with bloody violence and terror.

Whatever the specific chain of command that produced the October 3 massacre, ultimate

responsibility lies with those who have launched and continue to prosecute the war in Afghanistan. Even as evidence of the US war crime mounts, President Barack Obama announced on Thursday that 10,000 troops will remain in the country through the end of 2016. The United States is involved in an endless war, and the response of American imperialism to the crisis of the occupation and the Afghan puppet regime is mass killing.

While the attack on the MSF facility is particularly brutal, the entire history of the war and occupation of Afghanistan is written in blood and terror. In November 2001, one month after the Bush administration launched the war, US and Afghan forces massacred hundreds of Taliban prisoners at Mazar-i-Sharif, using the same AC-130 gunships used against the MSF hospital. That same month, hundreds of Taliban prisoners were suffocated to death inside metal cargo containers after surrendering to Northern Alliance and US forces in Kunduz.

Over the past 14 years, one atrocity has followed the next. An untold number of men, women and children have been killed in drone strikes, bombings, attacks on wedding parties and civilian buildings. Most of the time, these crimes go unreported, with the dead labeled “enemy combatants” or “insurgents.” When they are acknowledged by the media, they are quickly swept under the rug or whitewashed by official “investigations.”

American imperialism is a criminal enterprise. For the past quarter century, the ruling class has been engaged in an expanding war of conquest and domination. The catalogue of atrocities to be recorded in future tribunals would include the killing of more than 400 civilians in the attack on the Amiriyah shelter in Iraq during the Persian Gulf War in February 1991; the bombing of the Chinese embassy during the NATO war against Yugoslavia in May 1999; the destruction of Fallujah following the invasion of Iraq in 2003; and many more. To these must be added the policy of drone assassination, vastly expanded under Obama, and the regime of torture and rendition at military facilities and CIA black sites all over the world.

Responsibility for these crimes rests with the Democratic and Republican politicians who authorized these wars; the military brass which has carried them out; the mass media, which has churned out the lies

justifying one invasion after the next; the pseudo-left and academic propagandists who have joined in the campaign for “human rights” intervention. Significantly, in the Democratic Party debate earlier this week, the self-proclaimed “democratic socialist” Bernie Sanders reiterated his support for American militarism and explicitly defended the war in Afghanistan, while saying nothing about the massacre at the MSF hospital.

There is, however, a powerful social force that is capable of putting an end to imperialism. The corporate and financial elite that threatens to plunge the planet into a Third World War confronts no more powerful adversary than the working class at home. This colossal revolutionary factor in world politics is beginning to emerge into open struggle against the corporations and their political representatives.

It is the American working class, united with its class brothers and sisters all over the planet and armed with a revolutionary socialist program, that will bring an end to war and hold the war criminals that run the country to account.



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