

New evidence that US Army deliberately targeted hospital in Kunduz

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It is now more than three weeks since the October 3 massacre by US military forces of medical personnel and patients at the Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) medical center in Kunduz, Afghanistan. Aided by the media, the US military and the Obama administration are continuing their efforts to cover up and whitewash a war crime.

On Monday, the Associated Press published a report providing further confirmation that the facility was targeted and bombed by US military personnel with full knowledge that it was a functioning hospital. The attack lasted for an hour, destroying the building and killing 30 people, including at least 13 MSF staff members and 10 patients.

According to the AP, “A day before an American AC-130 gunship attacked the hospital, a senior officer in the Green Beret [Army] unit wrote in a report that US forces had discussed the hospital with the country director of the medical charity group, presumably in Kabul, according to two people who have seen the document.”

A report from “a senior Green Beret officer from 3rd Special Forces Group” on October 2 stated, “MSF report that they have personnel in the trauma center,” according to the AP, citing two sources who have seen the report.

The AP states that it was the Green Berets, the Special Forces division of the US Army, that called in the attack.

According to the AP, the Army believed that the hospital was being used by the Taliban, which had recently taken control of the city. This has been repeatedly denied by MSF, both before and after the attack.

The report also cites MSF spokesman Tim Shenk, who notes that in the days before the attack, “an official

in Washington” asked the group “whether our hospital had a large group of Taliban fighters in it.” Shenk continues: “We replied that this was not the case. We also stated that we were very clear with both sides to the conflict about the need to respect medical centers.”

The involvement of “an official in Washington” raises questions as to whether personnel in the Obama administration played a direct role in selecting and targeting the hospital.

The report follows a previous article citing a former intelligence official who said special operations analysts had mapped the entire area and drawn a circle around the hospital.

The new report adds to the growing body of evidence demonstrating that US forces knowingly and deliberately destroyed a hospital that was performing civilian functions, a grave violation of the Geneva Conventions and a violation of the US War Crimes Act. According to the latter, those found guilty of committing such a crime can be subject to life imprisonment or death.

Among the possible motivations for the attack is the fact that the hospital was the only major medical center in northeastern Afghanistan, and it provided aid to all those injured in the escalating conflict between US forces and the Taliban-led insurgency. Beyond those immediately killed, hundreds or even thousands will die as a result of their loss of access to medical care.

In a statement released on October 23, which reported an increase in the death toll from 22 to 30, MSF noted that the destruction of the hospital “will have a huge impact on access to surgical care for hundreds of thousands of people in the region... Last year, more than 22,000 patients received care at the hospital and more than 5,900 surgeries were performed.”

It added, “All that now remains of the three operating theaters, the ER and outpatient departments, and the intensive care unit are collapsed roofs, blackened walls, floors thick with dust, and twisted pieces of metal that were once beds and trolleys.”

The attack may also have been intended to send a message to Pakistan. According to the earlier AP report, the US Army forces suspected that the hospital was being used by a Pakistani operative to coordinate Taliban activity. MSF, however, has stated that it had no Pakistanis on its staff and that none of those killed who have been identified were Pakistani.

In either case, the US military was making clear that it was prepared to take any action and commit any crime to maintain its position in Afghanistan. Only days after the attack, the Obama administration announced that it would maintain up to 10,000 troops in the country at least through the end of 2016.

The White House and the military continue their efforts to whitewash the war crime. Since the massacre, military officials have issued a series of self-contradictory statements about what happened, including claims that the attack was a “mistake.”

On October 15, a US military patrol entered the bombed out hospital facility without informing MSF, a violation of previous agreements. An MSF official said that the entry “damaged property” and “destroyed potential evidence.”

Over the weekend, the military announced that General John F. Campbell, the overall commander of operations in Afghanistan, has appointed Major General William B. Hickman to lead a supposedly “independent” investigation into the incident. The character of this investigation was indicated by Campbell, who said in a statement, “We will be forthright and transparent and we will hold ourselves accountable for any mistakes made.”

The attack on MSF was not a “mistake.” It was a crime. The purpose of Hickman’s inquiry will be to cover up for those responsible.



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