

Pentagon report whitewashes bombing of Doctors Without Borders hospital

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On Wednesday, spokesmen for the US-led occupation of Afghanistan outlined findings from an internal military investigation into the destruction of a large medical center in Kunduz, Afghanistan, carried out by US forces in October.

In contradiction to the claims of Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières, MSF) and of numerous victims and eyewitnesses to the attack, the US military is claiming that the hospital was targeted out of “human error.” US forces were actually attempting to attack a supposed Taliban position, located several hundred meters distance from the MSF center, the US military is asserting.

At the press conference Wednesday, US-NATO Afghanistan commander General Steve Campbell read a selection of talking points from the DOD’s internal report. The actual report was not publicly available as of Wednesday evening, despite rumors that it would be released Wednesday.

In the two months since the October 3 attack, the US military has already assembled an impressive record of lies and prevarications on the issue. During the days immediately following the attack, the DOD repeatedly altered its explanation for the incident, offering a series of narratives to the effect that the Afghan forces were partly responsible, the US troops were exhausted from combat, Taliban were thought to have occupied the compound, etc.

On Wednesday, General Campbell set forth a version of events that rehashes these various excuses into a convoluted narrative clearly tailored to shield the US government and high command from criminal prosecution.

The US AC-130 gunship that launched the strikes was rerouted from a planned mission in midflight and experienced a technical malfunction just prior to strikes on the MSF center, Campbell said.

The malfunction, it is claimed, “degraded” the gunship’s targeting ability and somehow caused it to lock onto the hospital, which was located hundreds of meters away from the Taliban position supposedly being targeted.

“The aircrew visually located the closest, largest building, which we now know was the [Doctors Without Borders]

trauma center,” Campbell said.

“Tragically, this misidentification continued throughout the rest of the operation,” he said.

To the extent that he assigned any blame, Campbell placed responsibility on the soldiers directly carrying out the strikes, and especially on the local Afghan forces. The US Special Forces officer “relied primarily upon information provided by Afghan partners,” he said.

It comes as no surprise that the storyline advanced by the US-NATO occupation authorities is riddled with contradictions and inconsistencies. Even without viewing the actual report, one can state confidently that it amounts to a whitewash and cover-up for yet another in a long list of war crimes committed by US occupation forces in Afghanistan.

General Campbell claimed that the US Special Forces HQ in Bagram had received a call from MSF at 2:20, 12 minutes after the attack began at 2:08. According to his timeline, the attack lasted almost 30 minutes. MSF staff who were inside at the time place the total bombardment at closer to 90 minutes.

Moreover, US forces did, in fact, launch simultaneous strikes against the alleged Taliban fighting position which they supposedly mistook the MSF hospital for.

Perhaps most damningly, the US gunship continued firing upon the MSF hospital for nearly an hour and a half, according to all evidence released prior to the US attack. Firing continued even though the US-led force never received any return fire from the supposed Taliban fighting position.

The US military’s attempted whitewash cannot cover up the fact that all evidence points to a deliberate, calculated attack on a civilian hospital, which is a war crime under international law. The highest levels of the military establishment are responsible, along with the Obama administration that oversaw the attacks.

“The most plausible explanation is that the US military and its Afghan forces decided to attack the hospital because of its well-known practice of treating all in need of care, including wounded Taliban fighters,” the WWSWS wrote on

October 6, three days after the attack.

This analysis was subsequently vindicated in mid-October, when the Associated Press published evidence proving that US operatives had scouted out the MSF site immediately before the October 3 strikes.

MSF responded to Wednesday's announcement with further denunciations of the US cover-up.

"The US version of events presented today leaves MSF with more questions than answers," the organization wrote in an "Initial reaction to US military investigation into Kunduz attack" posted on its web page.

Even taking the US military's account at face value, MSF notes, this would still mean that "30 people were killed and hundreds of thousands of people are denied life-saving care in Kunduz simply because the MSF hospital was the closest large building to an open field, and 'roughly matched' a description of an intended target," MSF wrote.

There is absolutely no reason, however, to accept as good coin the US government's assertions that the attack was unintentional. The historical record is filled with instances of willful atrocities by US imperialism, ordered from the highest levels. Especially since 9/11 and the declaration of the "Global War on Terror," the US military has increasingly utilized collective punishment, intentional targeting of civilians areas and infrastructure, targeting of journalists and numerous other tactics that violate international law.

In 2004, the Bush administration ordered a general siege and assault on the Iraqi city of Fallujah. Consciously intended as an act of collective punishment in retaliation for the killing of a handful of US Blackwater mercenaries, the siege of Fallujah saw US forces pummel the densely packed city with heavy weapons, white phosphorus and depleted uranium for days on end. The US military blocked all male residents between the ages of 15 and 60 from fleeing the city during the days prior to the assault.

The MSF attack in Kunduz was only the most publicized among the many atrocities against Afghanistan committed by US forces since the 2001 invasion.

In Afghanistan, US forces have carried out small-scale Fallujahs on a near daily basis, in a continuous campaign of terror against the Afghan masses aimed at propping up the US puppet regime in Kabul. Since 2013, dozens of Afghan witnesses have come forward to testify that US commandos and Afghan proxy militias under their command committed rampant murder and torture against villagers in Nerkh district.

Since the mid-2000s, "elite" US units serving in Afghanistan, including Delta Force and Army Rangers, have effectively operated in rural Afghanistan for years without any meaningful restrictions on the use of lethal weapons,

testimony from US commandos published this year by *Army Times* journalist Sean Naylor has shown.

In 2010, US commandos raided an "insurgent compound" that turned out to be a birthday party for the son of an Afghan police officer, killing several female civilians in the process. The US occupation authority sought to cover up the incident by publishing claims that the women were killed by "insurgents" in "honor killings," according to research published in Naylor's *Relentless Strike: The Secret History of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)*.

This year, the publication of the DOD's 2015 *Law of War Manual* has effectively "legalized" such practices, granting US commanders broad scope to target any objects they consider necessary.

Empowered by the more "liberal" rules of engagement set forth in the *Manual*, US commanders would feel perfectly at ease targeting a known medical center. Under the DOD *Manual*, the mere possible presence of enemy forces or intelligence agents in the area is sufficient under the expanded guidelines to authorize strikes.

In Kunduz, US imperialism has placed the entire globe on notice that US forces, empowered by expansive new rules of engagement, are now being formally authorized and encouraged to employ mass terror as a psychological weapon. The military's whitewash has driven home this message, making clear that US forces can commit war crimes with virtual impunity, even in the highest-profile cases.

In keeping with the traditions of the US military, initial announcements Wednesday have made clear that if any US military personnel do face punishment, they will be the lower ranking soldiers involved.



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