

# MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES IN KUNDUZ TREATED 2 HIGHER RANKING TALIBAN BEFORE ATTACK

On Tuesday, the Daily Beast noted that DOD had not fulfilled its promise to release the preliminary results of its investigation into the October 3 bombing of the Médecins Sans Frontières trauma center in Kunduz a month earlier.

When the U.S. military fired on a hospital in Afghanistan last month, the Pentagon promised to reveal details about the disastrous airstrike within 30 days.

That promise has not been kept. And according to Doctors Without Borders, the U.S. military has stonewalled attempts for an independent investigation of the incident.

The intransigence is particularly baffling because, in the days after the attack, which left at least 23 people dead, senior military and White House officials had enough information to say publicly the U.S. had made a “mistake” by firing on the hospital.

One possible explanation may be that on October 24, ISAF Commander John Campbell ordered another inquiry, this one carried out by a higher ranking general from another command.

With an initial military assessment confirming civilian casualties in the bombing of a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz by an American warplane, Gen. John F. Campbell, the

American commander in Afghanistan, has appointed a two-star general from another command to conduct an independent investigation, his office said in a statement on Saturday.

[snip]

A spokesman for General Campbell, Brig. Gen. Wilson Shoffner, said an assessment team had “determined that the reports of civilian casualties were credible.” The investigation, which will be conducted by three senior officers outside General Campbell’s command, will be led by Maj. Gen. William B. Hickman and supported by two brigadier generals.

General Campbell, also the commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, said: “My intent is to disclose the findings of the investigation once it is complete. We will be forthright and transparent and we will hold ourselves accountable for any mistakes made.”

That might suggest the problems go well beyond the ones that keep getting leaked to the DailyBeast about an intelligence system Duncan Hunter wants to replace failing.

Another official privately told The Daily Beast that failures with the Army’s Distributed Common Ground System-Army, a multibillion-dollar intelligence computer system that is supposed to locate civilian targets, contributed to confusion about the true nature of the target.

Today, MSF released its own report of the bombing.

The report is interesting because, from the start, it has been clear MSF had a pretty good inkling of why they had been targeted. It lays out how, on September 28, the patient base in

the hospital shifted from being primarily government forces to Taliban forces (though there were also 26 children treated that day) – though all were subject to MSF’s requirement that no weapons be brought into the compound. About half the 130 patients in the hospital during the attack were Taliban.

Perhaps most interesting is this paragraph, indicating that by Wednesday September 30, MSF had concluded two of those Taliban patients were more senior Taliban.

By Wednesday, MSF was aware of two wounded Taliban patients that appeared to have had higher rank. This was assumed for multiple reasons: being brought in to the hospital by several combatants, and regular inquiries about their medical condition in order to accelerate treatment for rapid discharge.

I’m going to guess that one or both of these men were used to claim the hospital was operating as a command post, if not to claim it could legitimately be targeted.

Much later in the report, it describes Afghan forces searching the hospital as the evacuation started.

Some Afghan Special Forces started to search for Taliban patients in the MoPH and MSF ambulance on leaving the hospital.

And while the night before the attack had been remarkably calm, fighting resumed right outside the hospital shortly after the attack.

At approximately 8.30am, MSF staff remaining in the Trauma Centre report that fighting broke out again in front of the KTC main gate. The fighting forced those remaining in the hospital to hide in the basement for an

additional one hour.

Two patients' and one MSF staffer's bodies have yet to be found in the rubble, though there are 7 thus far unidentified bodies. The report does not note whether those senior Taliban figures survived or not, which I find to be a really important point.

All of which is to say that, whatever the fuck up that didn't prevent the hospital from being bombed within DOD, those Taliban may well have been the reason the Afghans pushed for the attack. If MSF's descriptions of conditions in the hospital are correct – and there's no reason to doubt it – that in no way excuses the attack. But it may explain it.

The report also includes this striking summary of MSF's attempts to communicate to DOD they had been targeted (according to the report the strike started some time between 2:00 and 2:08 AM).

MSF made multiple calls and SMS contacts in an attempt to stop the airstrikes:

At 2.19am, a call was made from MSF representative in Kabul to Resolute Support in Afghanistan informing them that the hospital had been hit in an airstrike

At 2.20am, a call was made from MSF representative in Kabul to ICRC informing them that the hospital had been hit in an airstrike

At 2.32am a call was made from MSF Kabul to OCHA Civil Military (CivMil) liaison in Afghanistan to inform of the ongoing strikes

At 2.32am a call was made by MSF in New York to US Department of Defense contact in Washington informing of the airstrikes

At 2.45am an SMS was received from OCHA

CivMil in Afghanistan to MSF in Kabul confirming that the information had been passed through "several channels"

At 2.47am, an SMS was sent from MSF in Kabul to Resolute Support in Afghanistan informing that one staff was confirmed dead and many were unaccounted for

At 2.50am MSF in Kabul informed Afghan Ministry of Interior at Kabul level of the airstrikes. Afghan Ministry of Interior replied that he would contact ground forces

At 2.52am a reply was received by MSF in Kabul from Resolute Support stating "I'm sorry to hear that, I still do not know what happened"

At 2.56am an SMS was sent from MSF in Kabul to Resolute Support insisting that the airstrikes stop and informing that we suspected heavy casualties

At 2.59am an SMS reply was received by MSF in Kabul from Resolute Support saying "I'll do my best, praying for you all"

At 3.04am an SMS was sent to Resolute Support from MSF in Kabul that the hospital was on fire

At 3.07am an SMS was sent from MSF in Kabul to OCHA CivMil that the hospital was on fire

At 3.09am an SMS was received by MSF in Kabul from OCHA CivMil asking if the incoming had stopped

At 3.10am and again at 3.14am, follow up calls were made from MSF New York to the US Department of Defense contact in Washington regarding the ongoing airstrikes

At 3.13am an SMS was sent from MSF in Kabul to OCHA CivMil saying that

incoming had stopped

At 3.15am an SMS was received from CivMil OCHA stating that information had been passed to Resolute Support in the North and CJOC in Kabul as well as ANA in Kabul and the North

At 3.18am an SMS was sent from MSF in New York to US Department of Defence contact in Washington that one staff was confirmed dead and many were unaccounted for

Presumably, MSF released their report to get their side of the story out and add to pressure for an independent investigation. We'll see whether it works.