

Biden Claims CIA and Pentagon Determined Gaza Hospital Strike Originated in Gaza—But Where’s the Proof?

By [John Kiriakou](#)

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On October 17, an explosion took place immediately adjacent to the al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza, the result of what appears to have been a rocket attack. Between 200 and 500 people were killed, all of them Palestinians. Gazans and many in the international community immediately blamed the Israeli military for the attack. Israel, however, blamed an errant rocket from the Islamic Jihad terrorist group, an organization allied with Hamas. A day after the explosion, President Biden said that the Pentagon and the CIA had determined that the rocket had indeed [originated in Gaza](#) and was likely from Islamic Jihad. But where’s the proof?

A few days after the explosion, Senators Mark Warner (D-VA) and Marco Rubio, the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said that they [had been briefed](#) on the matter and were confident that the rocket had come from Islamic Jihad. We’re all just supposed to take their word for it.

There’s an easy way to inform the public as to what the intelligence on this bombing concludes. It’s called a “tearline.” In the Intelligence Community, a report will come in that will lay out an event something like this:

“Source ABCDE, whose previous reporting has been deemed to be accurate, says that Islamic Jihad launched the rocket that hit the al-Ahli Hospital on October 17. As proof, Source ABCDE offered information indicating that the launch originated at coordinates XX’XX” by ZZ’ZZ”.”

That information is then followed by a line of asterisks across the paper, where it is literally

torn off. And underneath that tearline, the issuing agency would write something unclassified and ready for release to the public akin to “The rocket associated with the explosion at al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza originated from coordinates XX’XX” by ZZ’ZZ,” indicating that it was launched from territory controlled by Hamas.”

See? It’s as easy as that. So why haven’t the Israelis or the United States issued something for public consumption? Why are we just supposed to take their word for it? And to make this even more of an open-and-shut case of keeping the intelligence away from the American people, consider this:

Classified cables produced by the U.S. government always have something called a [precedence designator](#). That designator tells the recipient how important the cable is and whether it needs immediate action. For example, most diplomatic cable traffic is given a “Routine” designation. Some if it is designated “Priority,” meaning that the recipient should act on it sometime over the next several days. The next highest designation is “Immediate.” That means that the message requires an immediate response or some other immediate action. An Immediate cable can also have a sub-designator assigned to it. That’s NIACT, which means “Night Action.” If a cable has NIACT on it, it means that the recipient’s agency has to wake the recipient up, get him to the office, and have him respond to the cable immediately.

NIACT cables are unusual. They’re usually reserved for times when lives are at stake. But believe it or not, there are two precedence designators that are above Immediate NIACT. The first is FLASH. Just as it sounds, FLASH means something terrible is happening. An army is crossing a border, rioters have breached the embassy walls, or an embassy employee has been assassinated. FLASH cables are exceedingly rare. I only saw a few dozen in my career at the CIA in what were probably millions of cables over the course of 15 years.

The rarest precedence designator of all is CRITIC. A CRITIC is so serious that it means, for all intents and purposes, to take cover. At the very beginning of my career, I saw a lot of CRITICs. They all came during the first Gulf War when Iraq was launching Scud missiles at Israel and Saudi Arabia. A sister agency of the CIA would send a cable marked “CRITIC,” saying, “A missile launch was detected originating at coordinates XX’XX” by ZZ’ZZ.” We knew that if the coordinates were in western Iraq, the missile was going to Israel. If the coordinates were in southern Iraq, the missile was going to Saudi Arabia. Again, it’s as simple as that.

So why haven’t we seen any tearlines on the al-Ahli bombing? We can be confident that a CRITIC was likely issued as soon as the rocket was launched. The intelligence services of a half-dozen countries likely know the information. So why don’t the Israeli or American governments, at least, just come out and show us the evidence? Could it be that they have something to hide?

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John Kiriakou was a CIA analyst and case officer from 1990 to 2004. In December 2007, John was the first U.S. government official to confirm that waterboarding was used to interrogate

al-Qaeda prisoners, a practice he described as torture. Kiriakou was a former senior investigator for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a former counter-terrorism consultant. While employed with the CIA, he was involved in critical counter-terrorism missions following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but refused to be trained in so-called "enhanced interrogation techniques," nor did he ever authorize or engage in such crimes. John can be reached at: jkiriakou@mac.com.

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