

The Kunduz MSF Hospital Killers Go Free. Pentagon says Hospital “Targeted by Mistake”

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On the night of October 3, 2015, a United States Air Force AC-130 gunship repeatedly attacked a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan.

Forty-two people were [killed](#) and dozens wounded. The US military plane had conducted five strafing runs over the course of more than an hour despite [MSF pleas](#) to Afghan, US and Nato officials to call off the attack.

As we [reported](#) at the time, MSF were [unequivocal](#) in their condemnation of the American attack. The hospital was ‘intentionally targeted’ in ‘a premeditated massacre’; it was a ‘[war crime](#)’. The medical charity rejected US assurances of three inquiries by the US, Nato and the Afghan government.



MSF [demanded](#) instead an independent international investigation. It was to no avail. The US ignored public outrage and went ahead with its standard whitewashing procedures when it commits war crimes that get exposed. The outcome was announced on March 18. BBC News [reported](#):

‘The US military has disciplined more than a dozen service members after an air strike on a Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) hospital in Afghanistan killed 42 people last year.

‘The Pentagon has acknowledged that the clinic was targeted by mistake, but no personnel will face criminal charges.’

Note that the BBC wording – ‘the Pentagon has *acknowledged that the clinic was targeted by mistake*’ – is deceptive bias. The BBC made no mention that MSF had presented [strong evidence](#) that the clinic was ‘deliberately targeted’, that the attack was a ‘[war crime](#)’, and that there was an urgent need for an independent inquiry.

The BBC continued:

‘the sanctions, which were not made public, were mostly administrative.

‘Some received formal reprimands while others were suspended from duty.

‘Both officers and enlisted personnel were disciplined, but no generals were punished.’

MSF said that they would not comment until the Pentagon makes the details of its report public. (At the time of writing, this has yet to happen).

On the morning of March 18, we noted that the BBC’s report was, for a while at least, linked from the front page of its news website. But it was soon removed from this prominent position and instead buried deep in the international news section. This is not unusual when reporting the crimes of the West; if they are reported at all.

Our subsequent online searches revealed just four low-key, relatively brief newspaper reports in the British press that US personnel had been ‘punished’ for the Kunduz bombing: in the [Independent](#), the [Daily Mail](#), the [Telegraph](#) and the [Guardian](#). The Telegraph reported that the Pentagon would shortly ‘publish a version of its report on the attack. It will be redacted to remove classified material.’ In other words: anything too embarrassing or damaging to US interests.

A few days later, on March 23, a tiny news item on page 34 of The Times carried the headline ‘US commander sorry for hospital attack’. The entirety of the piece, *all of 61 words*, was this:

‘The new commander of US-Nato forces in Afghanistan has apologised for a mistaken attack on a hospital in Kunduz last October that killed 42 people. General John Nicholson of the US army went to the northern city to meet relatives of those who died at the hospital run by the charity Médecins Sans Frontières. He said the incident was a “horrible tragedy”.’

As ever, Western atrocities are described as ‘tragedy’ rather than ‘war crime’. No other UK national newspaper, as far as we could see, even reported General Nicholson’s ‘apology’.

The [New York Times](#) did better, and included this telling quote from Zabiullah Niazi, a nurse who had lost an eye, a finger and the use of one hand, as well as suffering other injuries in the US attack:

‘They hit us six months ago and are apologizing now. The head of the provincial council and other officials who said we accept the apology, they wouldn’t have said it if they had lost their own son and eaten ashes, as we did.’

According to Mr. Niazi, General Nicholson did not even appear at an arranged meeting in the governor's office with two survivors and male members of victims' families. Instead, he made a speech in a packed auditorium where family members and survivors did not get a chance to speak. As a further sign of the tightly stage-managed proceedings, the general's wife stopped by 'for one minute to say hello and express sorrow', said Mr Niazi. She spent more time - five minutes - with female survivors and family members in a separate room.

The general's 'apology' was similarly dismissed by an Afghani doctor whose brother, also a doctor, was killed in the US attack. Dr. Karim Bajaouri [said](#):

'They are asking forgiveness for killing civilians?! They're only making an apology? First they fire on civilians and then apologize. Personally, I don't need such apologies, I do not accept them. Our moral wounds cannot be healed this way.'

The Guardian made a recent passing reference to Kunduz in an [article](#) by Simon Tisdall, an assistant editor and foreign affairs columnist. The focus of the piece was on Afghanistan as an election issue in the US Presidential race:

'The fact that the most memorable US contribution to the battle for Kunduz was the destruction of a Médecins Sans Frontières hospital with the loss of at least 22 lives, none of them insurgents, only emphasised how hapless and haphazard the US mission in Afghanistan has become.'

(Oddly, Tisdall's article was originally published on October 15, 2015, but then updated on March 29, 2016; presumably to include the above line.)

Once again, compliant 'liberal' journalism is marked by its readiness to label war crimes as merely 'hapless' and 'haphazard'.

In the wake of the Pentagon's announcement of 'punishments' for the Kunduz killers, an [article](#) on the *Foreign Policy* website noted:

'Human rights advocates denounced the U.S. military's decision not to file criminal charges against troops'.

Andrea Prasow of Human Rights Watch told *Foreign Policy*:

'It's incredibly disappointing and discouraging. We have come up with our own analysis of the case, and we think there should be a criminal investigation.'

As Prasow observed, the American military 'has a vested interest in protecting its own'.

HRW [added](#):

'For good reason the victims' family members will see this as both an injustice and an insult: the US military investigated itself and decided no crimes had been committed'.

The statement continued:

'The failure to criminally investigate senior officials liable for the attack is not only an affront to the lives lost at the MSF hospital, but a blow against the rule of law in Afghanistan and elsewhere.'

Such comments contrast starkly with the bland indifference of the 'liberal' press.

Summing up, then, the reaction to the Pentagon's 'punishment' of the Kunduz killers in the 'mainstream' press was as instructive as ever. True to form, we found *not a single editorial or column denouncing this latest US whitewashing of US crimes.*

Then again, it is standard practice for the Western media to [mock](#) Official Enemies, while being blind to the crimes of 'our' own Glorious Leaders.

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