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## US officers tell Congress that general blocked probe of hospital in Kabul

**House hears of abuses that went uninvestigated because commanding officer allegedly feared 'bad news' getting out**

Karen McVeigh

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The American general who led a Nato training mission in [Afghanistan](#) opposed an investigation into corruption and "Auschwitz-like" conditions at a US-funded hospital in Kabul for political reasons, [US military](#) officers told Congress on Tuesday.

One active-duty officer testified that the three-star general, Lieutenant General William Caldwell, who headed the training mission in Afghanistan, forced him to retract a request for an inspector general's investigation into the Dawood national military hospital.

Colonel Mark Fassel, said he was shocked when Caldwell brought up the 2010 congressional elections and said: "How could we do this or make this request with an election coming? He calls me Bill." Fassel, who was inspector general for the compound, said he believed it was a reference to President Barack Obama.

Two retired colonels who worked with training command also told the House oversight and government reform committee that Caldwell did not want an inspector general's report of the hospital. In testimony submitted ahead of the hearing, retired Colonel Gerald Carozza, who served as adviser to the US campaign in Afghanistan, said: "The evidence is clear to me that

General Caldwell had the request for a probe [into the hospital] withdrawn and postponed until after the election and then, after the election, tried to intimidate his subordinates into a consensus that it need to move forward at all."

He went on: "The general did not want bad news to leave his command before the election or after the election."

At the hearing, officers described the extent of human suffering at the hospital, where the lack of care forced families of soldiers to empty "vats of blood draining from their wounds". When asked to describe the scene at the hospital, Fassel said it lacked basic facilities. Hygiene was poor and the hospital lacked soap, heat and the means to boil water, he said.

"There were open vats of blood draining out of soldiers' wounds, there was faeces on the floor. There were many family members taking care of their loved ones. The family members were emptying these vats of blood to help their patients out."

Last year, the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported that Afghan soldiers often died from neglect or lack of food as some Afghan doctors and nurses demanded bribes for food. Fassel said he had expected Caldwell to insist on going to the hospital to find out what was going on.

Fassel said: "When I think about what we were trying to do in Afghanistan, which is build the army and police corps, how could we allow this type of suffering to go on when we should be showing the Afghan citizens that their soldiers matter?"

Caldwell is now head of the US army north command and senior commander of Fort Sam Houston in Texas. Colonel Wayne Shanks, spokesman for the command, said: "I am sure that Lieutenant General Caldwell would welcome the opportunity to respond to any inquiry, and I'm confident that once the facts are presented and examined, all allegations will be proven false."

## **'A dog and pony show'**

At the hearing, the military officers spoke of the lack of discipline and rule of law that informed corruption in Afghanistan on a grand scale which prevented them from realising their mission. One committee member described as "the most honest and unvarnished assessment of Afghanistan that Congress has ever heard".

A memo written by another committee witness, retired air force colonel Schuyler Geller, a command surgeon attached to the training mission, confirmed poor treatment and corruption and that Caldwell did not want an inspector general's investigation.

Geller told the hearing that when military officials came to visit the hospital they got a "dog and pony show" that covered up the abuse.

Caldwell eventually agreed to request a limited investigation, but Carozza said it "would not mention the Auschwitz-like conditions at the national military hospital".

Committee officials said the inspector general has now opened two investigations in response to complaints over the response of Caldwell and a deputy, now Major General Gary Patton.

One concerns the Military Whistleblower Protection Act, which stops commanders from restricting subordinates' communication with the inspector general. The second involves allegations of reprisal from a complainant who alleged that Caldwell and Patton cited partisan reasons for requesting postponement of an investigation until after the 2010 elections.

Carozza said the committee should be considering a broader issue than conditions at the hospital. "What this hearing should about are attempts to over-control the message," he said in his testimony. "It is about some leadership that puts the best foot forward and relies on the hard built reputation earned by the military to soften any belief that there is a need to see the other foot."