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Doctors Without Borders Staff Shot While Fleeing Kunduz Hospital, Report Finds

"MSF doctors and other medical staff were shot while running to reach safety in a different part of the compound."

Alana Horowitz Satlin and Willa Frej
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Andrew Quilty via Doctors Without BordersThe interior of the MSF hospital in Kunduz a few days after the attack.

The medical humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders released its internal report on Thursday about the October attack on its hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan.

At least 30 people were killed in the airstrikes, led by U.S. forces, the report said. "Patients burned in their beds," it added, and "medical staff were decapitated and lost limbs."

The organization found that "a patient in a wheelchair attempting to escape from the inpatient department ... was killed by shrapnel from a blast."

The report also revealed that pilots shot at staff members fleeing the hospital.

"Many staff describe seeing people being shot, most likely from the plane, as people tried to flee the main hospital building that was being hit with each airstrike," the report said. "Some accounts mention shooting that appears to follow the movement of people on the run. [Doctors Without Borders] doctors and other medical staff were shot while running to reach safety in a different part of the compound."

Although the review isn't finished, Doctors Without Borders President Dr. Joanne Liu said that the organization released the report to "counter speculation and to be transparent."



Fabrice Coffrini the president of Doctors Without Borders, at a press conference in Geneva on Oct. 7, 2015.

The U.S. said last month that the airstrike was a mistake, but Doctors Without Borders, also called Médecins Sans Frontières, or MSF, has called it a war crime and demanded a humanitarian investigation.

"The question remains as to whether our hospital lost its protected status in the eyes of the military forces engaged in this attack -- and if so, why," the report stated. "The answer does not lie within the MSF hospital. Those responsible for requesting, ordering and approving the airstrikes hold these answers."

“Being a doctor in a war zone cannot be punishable by airstrikes,” Doctors Without Borders General Director Christopher Stokes added.



Satellite image of MSF's hospital in Kunduz showing the state of the building after the attack.

The organization said that the hospital was "fully functioning" on the night of the attack, treat over 100 patients. The facility, which opened in 2011, was the only one of its kind in the region and had performed more than 15,000 surgeries since its opening, the report said. It was also "one of the only buildings in the city that had full electricity from generator power on the night of the airstrikes."

Hospitals are generally protected under international combat laws, and Doctors Without Borders had pushed to identify its Kunduz facility as a hospital. On the night before the attack, the group said, "two MSF flags were placed on the roof of the hospital, in addition to the existing flag that was being flown at the entrance to the Trauma Centre."

“The facts inside the hospital speak for themselves,” Stokes said. "The facts, in our view, demand a reaffirmation of the basic rules of war."

Explosions from the attack rocked the northeastern Afghan city in the middle of the night on Oct. 3. It was the 12th U.S. airstrike in the area in a five-day period.

During the hour-long attack, hospital staff made 18 distress calls and texts to officials in both Afghanistan and the U.S.

A week before the bombing, the Taliban had captured Kunduz -- the first time the group had taken a major urban center in almost 15 years.