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The Wall Street Journal

Horrific Afghan Hospital Neglect — Kabul Aid at Risk in Hospital Probe

By Maria Abi-Habib

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KABUL - A U.S. congressman said funding for the Afghan government could be withheld if a congressional investigation finds no changes at Afghanistan's main military hospital following allegations of corruption and deadly neglect there.



Initially patched up by American doctors, he spent his last days

starving there while his brother Sher sold off what little land the poor farming family had in order to bribe nurses and doctors for care and food, the brother said in an interview. In photos, Ali's flesh hangs off his frail, boney frame, his eyes heavy with pain. He died on Dec. 27, Afghan government documents show."

Incidents of Afghan service members dying of neglect and starvation, and of being denied medication, at the American-funded Dawood National Military Hospital were first reported by The Wall Street Journal in September.

If the hospital hasn't reformed sufficiently, American funding could be cut, says Rep. Mike Coffman (R., Colo.), who requested the investigation.

The congressional inquiry, as well as investigating alleged Afghan corruption, will also look into whether U.S. military officers involved in oversight at the hospital have done enough to stop the abuses there.

"I strongly believe that this incident is not just an example of Afghan corruption but also of a failure of U.S. military leadership," Rep. Coffman said in an interview. "I'm worried that the incident will be covered up in that no U.S. military personnel will be held accountable for their lax oversight. By not holding anyone accountable we are encouraging the same pattern of corruption to occur again and again."

Rep. Coffman visited Kabul last month as part of the investigation into the hospital. He was unable to visit the facility because U.S. officials in Kabul cited security concerns, he says.

The hospital is under the command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Training Mission-Afghanistan, which supervises the training and funding of Afghan security forces and provides U.S. mentors. A spokesman for the command said he couldn't comment on an ongoing congressional investigation.

The Pentagon continues "to produce documents on a rolling basis" about problems at the hospital, according to an aide to Rep. Darrell Issa (R., Calif.), chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

The hospital's former Surgeon General, Gen. Ahmed Zia Yaftali, was accused by U.S. military officials of pilfering up to \$153 million worth of U.S.-funded pharmaceuticals and failing to ensure that Afghan soldiers and police received basic medical care. Gen. Yaftali has maintained his innocence.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai issued a decree replacing Gen. Yaftali last December, but he continues to collect a salary, mostly paid for with U.S. money, and hasn't been charged.

U.S. military officials alleged that the hospital's staff was selling U.S.-bought pharmaceuticals in Kabul's bazaars and replacing them with counterfeits. In dozens of surgeries, patients would be operated on without medication or sedatives, according to U.S. mentors.

Several other Afghan veterans died of starvation-related medical complications, including one who had been awarded a medal by the then NTM-A commander, Lt. Gen. William Caldwell.

The U.S.-led military coalition plans to withdraw most combat troops by 2014, and establishing a viable Afghan government to take over security responsibilities is crucial to facilitating the pullout.

Rep. Issa sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta in October, informing him of the investigation and asking for documentation relating to the hospital.

The "inability of all parties to purge corruption from the Afghan government is a detriment to U.S. efforts," Mr. Issa wrote. "The ability of the Afghan people to place trust in their institutions—and by extension, the U.S. government—is the cornerstone of the counterinsurgency strategy."