

BBC Media Fabrications on Alleged Incendiary Bomb Attack in Aleppo, Syria

By [Global Research News](#)

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[Media Lens Forum](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

BBC Complaints
PO Box 1922
Darlington
DL3 0UR4 October 2013
To Whom It May Concern

I wish to complain that the report purporting to show the aftermath of an alleged incendiary bomb attack in Aleppo, transmitted by the BBC on 29 August and published on the BBC news website here <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-23892594> contains a large degree of fabrication.

I understand that the first thirty seconds of the report were filmed by an unnamed non-BBC party, and so presume that, as Panorama reporter Ian Pannell is visible between 1:44 and 1:46 (walking, at the left of the picture) and again at 2:18 beside Dr Rola, that the remainder of the report, from 0:30 onwards, was filmed by BBC cameraman Darren Conway. Please correct me if I am wrong and if any part of the footage beyond 0:30 was filmed by other BBC employees or non-BBC third parties.

The piece begins with Ian Pannell's narration over a short piece of the non-BBC footage stating "an old blanket to cover a corpse". However what is shown from 00:16 to 00:23 is a blanket being draped over a ledge.

At 2:08 in the report a man with a naked back and tattered blue shirt on his left shoulder is seen climbing down from a truck, as the voice of the British doctor (Dr Rola) is heard asking "more coming? More? More?". The suggestion is that these are fresh casualties arriving at the "basic hospital"; however the same man with the tattered blue shirt had already been shown walking into the hospital, from 1:44 onwards. It is clear that the footage has been edited and the words of Dr Rola crafted to create the impression of a larger number of alleged victims than were in fact present.

The supposed eyewitness Mohammed Abdullatif, who speaks from 2:55, is plainly reading out a letter, drafted by a person or persons unknown, from a cue card; he commences with the words "Dear United Nations" and proceeds to stumble over unfamiliar text ("...you're recalling peace - you're calling for peace"). The obvious conclusion is that the spontaneity and passion are artificial.

In the section commencing immediately after Mr Abdullatif's recitation, at 3:02, a number of alleged victims are shown, including the man seen twice earlier in the tattered blue shirt. This group is initially fairly static and quiet; then at 3:03 the man in the tattered blue shirt looks into the camera, and at 3:04, as he raises his left arm, the entire group suddenly begins to writhe and moan in unison. The adolescent in the white shirt, second from the right in the shot, rises to the floor with perfect ease and equanimity, and is clearly not in the least distress. The seemingly prostrate young man in red, third from the right, had previously had no difficulty climbing down from the back of the truck at 2:08. Viewed several times over, this obviously stage-managed sequence quickly becomes risible, and because the white cream on the skin of the alleged victims seen here is of a piece with that seen on other alleged victims throughout the report, the inescapable conclusion is that all of them are equally fake.

The text under the BBC online piece talks of "napalm-like burns"; Ian Pannell states "the injuries and debris suggests something like napalm or thermite" (1:52) and Dr Rola suggests (2:30) that the supposed injuries are the result of "maybe napalm, something similar to that".

These statements betray at best a basic lack of journalistic acumen, and, in the case of Dr Rola, medical knowledge. The most cursory web research reveals the vast difference in severity between burns caused by napalm - which sticks to the skin and generates temperatures of 800 to 1,200 degrees Celsius - and the supposed injuries of the alleged victims in the Panorama footage.

Kim Phuc, a napalm bombing survivor known from a famous Vietnam War photograph has said "Napalm is the most terrible pain you can imagine" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napalm#Effects_on_people. It is entirely implausible to suggest that the relatively composed woman featured from 2:38 to 2:44, the shaking child Ahmed featured from 2:45 to 2:54 (who appears to nod as if in communication to someone off-screen at 2:46 before turning to speak to the camera), and the adolescent featured from 3:20 to 3:27 - who repeats, rather than "gasps" as your reporter would have it, the word for "water" - are suffering "the most terrible pain you can imagine". Footage of genuine napalm victims would likely be far too horrific and distressing to broadcast and to describe the alleged injuries depicted in these scenes as "napalm-like" is an insult to those who have suffered the reality.

Other aspects of this story are extremely dubious.

Wikipedia states that "One firebomb released from a low-flying plane can damage an area of 2,500 square yards"

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napalm#Effects_on_people. In the footage of the Panorama crew's visit to the site of the alleged incendiary bomb attack, commencing at around 00:30, a modestly sized crater surrounded by some charring to the immediate vicinity only is visible. The infant's swing seen from 1:00 onwards, just yards away from the alleged impact crater, would surely have been incinerated in a firebombing attack, suggesting that it may have been placed at the scene after the event as "window dressing".

The ages of many of the alleged victims in the footage seems at odds with the description of the site of the attack as a "playground". The man in the tattered blue shirt featured heavily in the footage, the man on the stretcher from 2:00, the woman being carried on a stretcher at 2:27 and the woman featured from 2:38 are all adults. Nowhere in the report are any victims that would seem to fit the age range suggested by the infant's swing and the small girl's shoe shown seen at 1:11.

The Panorama team might also have speculated as to what kind of a "playground" possesses a swimming pool, visible from 0:33 onwards. "Courtyard" would perhaps be a more accurate and less emotive term to describe the scene of the incident.

The background and affiliations of the charity Hand in Hand for Syria and of Dr Rola are also worthy of scrutiny.

I can fully understand that a medic working in a violent and politically fraught situation may wish to conceal her identity altogether, however as Dr Rola is willing to appear on camera it seems oddly reticent for her to conceal her last name. Moreover, Dr Rola appeared on Newsnight on 30 August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-23909554>, as well as on other BBC output, expressing her disappointment at the UK parliament's decision to reject possible military action against the Syrian government.

In addition to the very startling scenario of a medical doctor implicitly calling for military strikes which would inevitably lead to deaths and injuries, as this website puts it http://wikispooks.com/wiki/Dr_Rola "You do not volunteer to appear on the flag-ship BBC Politics TV program advocating for a military bombing campaign with any realistic expectation - let alone right - to remain anonymous".

I do not accept all the assertions and suggestions of the Wikispooks page, for instance, while it seems clear that Dr Rola uses more than one surname ("Hallem" here <http://atfal.co.uk/the-team.html> and "Alkurdi" here <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/anaesthesia/people/Alkurdi>) I do not agree that the Dr Rola who appeared on Newsnight on 30 August is not the same woman who appears in the Panorama footage I am complaining about. I have also been unable to verify the site's claims that the incident took place during Syrian school holidays, when there is no clear reason why children would be in a school playground, or that the Arabic language website that is linked to hosts a comment from a contributor, said to be from the vicinity of the attack, stating that the building in the report is in fact "a fairly standard construction villa with a swimming pool on the other side of the buttressed wall".

However the site does make the indisputable point that the Hand in Hand for Syria logo <http://www.handinhandforsyria.org.uk/index.php> is clearly based on the flag of the Syrian opposition, specifically the Syrian National Coalition and the Free Syrian Army http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_opposition. It is entirely negligent of the BBC to fail to inform its viewers of the crucial fact of this affiliation.

In short, I am shocked and astonished that the BBC should present as genuine such self-evidently falsified and stage-managed scenes, which would appear to have almost certainly been manufactured by parties with an interest in seeing western intervention in Syria on the side of opposition forces.

I trust you will seek a full explanation from Ian Pannell, Darren Conway and the Panorama editorial department as to how this patently fraudulent footage came to be presented as authentic.

I await your response to all the points I have raised above, which I shall be sharing widely, with great interest.

Yours sincerely

Robert

PS I have just seen the follow up piece by Ian Pannell "Syria: Agony of victims of 'napalm-like' school bombing" <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-24288698>.

Some further points arise which I would ask you to please clarify:

- The words spoken by Dr Rola have been altered between the two reports.

In the original item <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-23892594> (from 2:18 to 2:32) Dr Rola's words are:

"..It's just absolute chaos and carnage here, erm we've had a massive influx of what looks like serious burns, er seems like it must be some sort of, I'm not really sure, maybe napalm, something similar to that.."

In the newer item, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-24288698> (from 2:00 to 2:13) these have been changed to:

"..It's just absolute chaos and carnage here, erm we've had a massive influx of what looks like serious burns, er seems like it must be some sort of chemical weapon, I'm not really sure.."

The audio in both of these segments is identical, with all the same inflections, up to the point "...must be some sort of.." after which the soundtrack in one or the other has been overdubbed. Please can you provide the name of the individual who carried this out, when it was done and to what purpose?

The two segments are shot from slightly different angles, and it is not immediately clear to me whether it is the same scene filmed from two different angles or whether they are two different "takes" filmed moments apart. If the former is the case, please can you provide the names of both camera people involved, and say whether they are both BBC employees; if the latter, please can you explain why a large part of the audio from one has been dubbed onto the other, and in at least one case subsequently interfered with?

- Ahmed Darwish (previously reported as being 15 years old, now 13, an understandable error), seems to have developed burns to his upper and lower lips (2:46) which were not in evidence in the original footage.

- The plea of the young girl Siham, featured in the text of the piece ("Please let it be over now", she said. "We need to find a way out. We've had all we can take.") seems remarkably politicised and reflective for someone of her age, alleged to be "suffering with 70% burns".

- Dr Saleyha Ahsan, featured from 2:15 to 2:24, is a filmmaker with a military background:

<http://oneworldaction.wordpress.com/100-unseen-powerful-women/arts-and-media/saleyha-ahsan/>

<http://knightayton.co.uk/female-presenters/saleyha-ahsan>

Please can you confirm whether Dr Ahsan had any involvement in the making or editing of any of the footage in the two reports?

Responses

- [Re: Complaint to BBC re: Panorama Aleppo “school playground” “incendiary bomb”/ “napalm” reports](#)- marknadim Today, 6:06 pm
 - [Re: Complaint to BBC re: Panorama Aleppo “school playground” “incendiary bomb”/ “napalm” reports](#)- Robert Today, 7:11 pm
 - [Re: Complaint to BBC re: Panorama Aleppo “school playground” “incendiary bomb”/ “napalm” reports](#)- spike Today, 8:19 pm
 - [Re: Complaint to BBC re: Panorama Aleppo “school playground” “incendiary bomb”/ “napalm” reports](#)- Robert Today, 8:40 pm
 - [Re: Complaint to BBC re: Panorama Aleppo “school playground” “incendiary bomb”/ “napalm” reports](#) - spike Today, 9:58 pm
 - [Re: Complaint to BBC re: Panorama Aleppo “school playground” “incendiary bomb”/ “napalm” reports](#)- walter Today, 9:42 pm
 - [Great Work Robert! The BBC caught red handed promoting war by the sounds of it \(nm\)](#) - Ed Today, 9:47 pm

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