

## BBC Newsspeak - 'Credible sources'

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In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

By now it must surely be obvious to pretty well everyone that the BBC's messing with reality is rife, the twists and turns are tortuous and on-going as anyone following the British State's Broadcasting Company's coverage of the White Phosphorus will know. The [Cat's Dream Website](#) pretty well blew it apart, so much so that the B(S)BC finally gave up any pretence of trying to defend its position ([see the latest MediaLens piece](#)).

A search of *Inl* reveals over 300 items relating to events in Falluja going back to early 2004 that included many eyewitness accounts of the atrocities committed in Falluja by US occupation forces as well as analysis of the B(S)BC's lack of coverage including stock responses to queries regarding the B(S)BC's abysmal coverage of the destruction of Falluja. Even a cursory search reveals a wealth of evidence to support the view that WMD have been used against the people of Iraq, but one that B(S)BC chooses to call over and over again "allegations".

"All of them dismissed allegations of chemical weapons use, or of the use of dispersal weapons in general." – Paul Wood quoting Iraqi doctors based in Falluja.

But as subsequent revelations show, this is clearly not the case. So whilst the B(S)BC does its damnest to cover up the use of illegal weapons against Iraqi civilians, the US military, anxious to show to its own how effective its weapons are, gets hoisted by its own petard by publishing an in-depth account of WP as an offensive weapon, not once but in three different accounts, even going as far as to document the use of WP as far back as WWII [1].

Back in November 2004, I wrote a piece '[Fixing Falluja](#)' concerning an article penned by no less than the same 'embedded' BBC journalist, Paul Wood who has outdone his earlier so-called coverage of the destruction of Falluja with his latest pieces on the use of White Phosphorus. The BBC article penned by Wood was titled "Fixing the Problem in Fallujah", (7/11/04)

"Troops say they are ready to reclaim Falluja for its citizens"

"But for the highly-professional marines, Falluja is also a return to the simplicity of combat after the complexities of peacekeeping and an enemy that never shows itself."

Neglecting to mention of course that all but about 30,000 of the 300,000 inhabitants of the city had been forcibly removed by the occupation troops and that the city had pretty much

been flattened with 500, 1000 and even 2000lb percussion bombs. 500lb bombs have a destructive radius of over half-kilometre, not exactly a precision weapon when used on a city. As Falluja is still a city barred to journalists, unless 'embedded' of course, aside from journalists such as Dahr Jamail, it is very difficult to obtain figures on the number of civilian casualties but judging by the reports available, the figure seems to be at least 1000.

"At our forward base, rockets from the insurgents fizzed overhead a couple of times a day, sending the marines scrambling for cover."

Note the possessive "our" used by Woods, who given the conditions covering being 'embedded' (or in bed with) with US troops is hardly likely to be able to tell the truth regardless of what he claims to have or have not seen in Falluja, not if he wants to stay 'embedded'. Being 'embedded' means being subject to military censorship. Journalists who agree to get into bed with the military have to sign a document the size of the Oxford English dictionary. Failure to comply means instant removal.

Meanwhile, exchanges whiz back and forth over whether WP is a chemical or incendiary weapon, whether or not it is 'legal', with the B(S)BC toeing the USUK line as its lengthy defences of its coverage quite clearly demonstrates. For the record, here is a partial description of what White Phosphorus is and does

### **White Phosphorus**

"A side benefit [sic] of white phosphorus is that white phosphorus smoke is toxic and readily penetrates protective mask filters. Phosphorus smokes are generated by a variety of munitions. Some of these munitions such as the MA25 (155-mm round) may, on explosion, distribute particles of incompletely oxidized white phosphorus. [my emph. WB]"

Note the description of WP as "toxic" and as the interview with the US serviceman who figured in the initial exposure of its use by the DoD, a single WP mortar shell spreads its toxic smoke over an area of 150 metres, rendering anybody caught within that radius dead.

"These weapons are particularly nasty because white phosphorus continues to burn until it disappears. If service members are hit by pieces of white phosphorus, it could burn right down to the bone. Remove quickly all clothing affected by phosphorus to prevent phosphorus burning through to skin. If this is impossible, plunge skin or clothing affected by phosphorus in cold water or moisten strongly to extinguish or prevent fire. Then immediately remove affected clothing and rinse affected skin areas with cold sodium bicarbonate solution or with cold water. Moisten skin and remove visible phosphorus (preferably under water) with squared object (knife-back etc.) or tweezers. Do not touch phosphorus with fingers! Throw removed phosphorus or clothing affected by phosphorus into water or allow to bum in suitable location."

It is immediately obvious that WP is not merely an "incendiary weapon" as the B(S)BC reported and reveals why the B(S)BC changed its headline from "chemical weapon" to "incendiary weapon". The change was made not for factual reasons but for a political purpose. We can only guess at what went on the editorial offices of the B(S)BC when they realized that calling WP a "chemical weapon" ran counter to official the British government position as British occupation forces also use WP in Iraq and if Blair and his cohorts were to

be charged with war crimes, then having the official voice of the state endorse the view that WP is indeed a chemical weapon could be somewhat of an embarrassment.

“...Systemic toxicity may occur if therapy is not administered. Therapy consists of topical use of a bicarbonate solution to neutralize phosphoric acids and mechanical removal and debridement of particles.

A Wood’s lamp in a darkened room may help to identify remaining luminescent particles. The early signs of systemic intoxication by phosphorus are abdominal pain, jaundice, and a garlic odor of the breath; prolonged intake may cause anemia, as well as cachexia and necrosis of bone, involving typically the maxilla and mandible (phossy jaw).

The presenting complaints of overexposed workers may be toothache and excessive salivation. There may be a dull red appearance of the oral mucosa. One or more teeth may loosen, with subsequent pain and swelling of the jaw; healing may be delayed following dental procedures such as extractions; with necrosis of bone, a sequestrum may develop with sinus tract formation. In a series of 10 cases, the shortest period of exposure to phosphorus fume (concentrations not measured) that led to bone necrosis was 10 months (two cases), and the longest period of exposure was 18 years.

White phosphorus fume causes severe eye irritation with blepharospasm, photophobia, and lacrimation; the solid in the eye produces severe injury. Phosphorus burns on the skin are deep and painful; a firm eschar is produced and is surrounded by vesiculation. Signs and symptoms include irritation of the eyes and the respiratory tract; abdominal pain, nausea, and jaundice; anemia, cachexia, pain, and loosening of teeth, excessive salivation, and pain and swelling of the jaw; skin and eye burns. Phossy jaw must be differentiated from other forms of osteomyelitis. With phossy jaw, a sequestrum forms in the bone and is released from weeks to months later; the sequestra are light in weight, yellow to brown, osteoporotic, and decalcified, whereas sequestra from acute staphylococcal osteomyelitis are sharp, white spicules of bone, dense and well calcified. In acute staphylococcal osteomyelitis, the radiographic picture changes rapidly and closely follows the clinical course, but with phossy jaw the diagnosis sometimes is clinically obvious before radiological changes are discernible.

[www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/munitions/wp.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/munitions/wp.htm)

I’ve printed this lengthy (and partial) description so that there is no disputing the nature of WP as a chemical weapon, indeed the DoD’s own description uses the term “chemical weapon” [2]. Had the B(S)BC done its homework on WP it would surely have to accept the fact that WP is a chemical weapon and its use against civilians is outlawed under international treaties. Hence it should come as no surprise that the core of the B(S)BC’s defence of its coverage hinges on the issue of whether civilians were victims of its use in Falluja.

“We are committed to evidence-based journalism. We have not been able to establish that the US used banned chemical weapons and committed other atrocities against civilians in Falluja last November. Inquiries on the ground at the time and subsequently indicate that their use is unlikely to have occurred. [my emph. WB]” (Helen Boaden, director of BBC News in an Email forwarded to Media Lens, July 13, 2005)

It is also very illuminating to note that the B(S)BC took the almost unprecedented step of

publishing a defence of its coverage of the destruction of Falluja, penned by the 'embedded' journalist Paul Wood, who to demonstrate his 'objectivity', vehemently defends the corporation's coverage. In part the article tells us

Most defence experts agree that a chemical weapon is one which depends for its lethality on its toxic qualities. WP depends on "thermic effect" – it spontaneously combusts at a few degrees above ambient temperature and burns with an intense heat. It is therefore usually described as an incendiary.  
[news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ukfs/hi/newsid\\_4440000/newsid\\_4441700/4441798.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ukfs/hi/newsid_4440000/newsid_4441700/4441798.stm)

Not a description that accords with the one which describes WP as "toxic". And in an amazing but contradictory *mea culpa*, Wood tells us the following

"Adam Mynott was embedded with the US military during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. A missile hit a house which was apparently full of civilians.

"Thirteen members of one family were killed. Adam met two of the men from the house in a US military hospital, both horribly burned. One had the skin peeling off his face, the other had 80 per cent burns and subsequently died.

"Adam reported this at the time as the use of white phosphorus as an incendiary."

How this squares with the rest of Wood's story that there is no proof of the use of WP against civilians, is not explained but it illustrates that given enough public pressure, the B(S)BC is forced to try and justify its biased coverage of the occupation of Iraq.

And it's not only the issue of White Phosphorus over which the B(S)BC prevaricates and obscures the issues and the truth. Every major story that is directly related to UK government policy gets the same treatment. Take for example the B(S)BC's coverage of the assassination of the former Lebanese prime minister Hariri. As I have [reported here](#), the B(S)BC's has taken the accusations of the UN 'investigation' at face value and continues to push the official line that the Syrian government was behind the assassination.

And the still unfolding story of the leaked document concerning George Bush's desire to bomb al-Jazeera, found the B(S)BC having this to say about it

BBC News website world affairs correspondent Paul Reynolds said: "An attack on al-Jazeera would also have been an attack on Qatar, where the US military has its Middle East headquarters. So the possibility has to be considered that Mr Bush was in fact making some kind of joke and that this was not a serious proposition." [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/4459296.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4459296.stm)

How Paul Reynolds arrives at this conclusion is impossible to say given that the full text of the memo has not been made public but the fact that Reynolds even suggests that the idea was a "joke" reveals the political nature of the B(S)BC's editorial policy, making a mockery of its alleged objective and unbiased reporting. Also missing from the story was any reference to previous attacks on al-Jazeera in Afghanistan and Iraq by the US, resulting in the deaths of al-Jazeera reporters which is surely pertinent to contextualize the allegation that the memo makes.

If we can learn one thing from the White Phosphorus experience it's that concerted, well-researched and obstinate persuance of the truth can definitely unnerve the 'powers that be' and force them onto the defensive. I think it's no exaggeration to say that independent journalism is coming of age.

## Notes

[1] [IIR 2 243 1050 91/POSSIBLE USE OF PHOSPHOROUS CHEMICAL](#)

[2] ['The Fight for Falluja'](#) (pdf)

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