

# The BBC's Big White (Phosphorus) Lie

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Finally, the 'white phosphorus' obscenity made it into the BBC's main news, at least for a couple of days before being relegated into the Beeb's dustbin of 'allegations' which of course, at least according the BBC, is where the story belongs. Of course, 'making it into the news' is a bit of a misnomer as it took the BBC nearly two weeks for the story to actually 'break' into its mainstream news coverage, no doubt because it was us non-entities, the independent news sources that made such a big fuss about it.

A search of the BBC's Website revealed six stories on the issue, all of which are essentially the same, offering nothing new on the issue, indeed they all contain identical paragraphs, most prominent being that white phosphorus is not considered an outlawed weapon and that it was not used against 'civilians' (although the BBC is fast and loose with its choice of words, not being able to make up its mind between the use of the word "people" or "civilians" when it comes to describing the recipients of Western 'democracy', or for that matter "incendiaries" versus "chemical" to describe White Phosphorus).

One story is however worth analysing. Titled "White phosphorus: weapon on the edge" By Paul Reynolds, World Affairs correspondent, it contains one illuminating section, illuminating that is, the BBC's attitude toward independent journalism, especially journalism that goes against the official 'line'

## **'Shake 'n Bake'**

This line however [that white phosphorus had only been used as a smokescreen] crumbled when bloggers (whose influence must not be under-estimated these days) ferreted out an article published by the US Army's Field Artillery Magazine in its issue of March/April this year.

[news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4442988.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4442988.stm)

Consider the language, 'bloggers influence must not be under-estimated' and the use of the word 'ferreted'. Had the BBC 'ferreted' out the story it would no doubt be considered as 'investigative journalism' and what are we to make of the BBC's 'influence'? Oh, I forgot, the BBC doesn't 'influence' people, it merely 'reports the news'.

The use of this kind of language is quite deliberate as it implies that 'bloggers' have some kind of hidden agenda, after all, using the word 'ferret' suggests that there is some kind of malicious intent. Had the BBC been doing the job it's meant to do, it too, rather than take the DoD's word for it, would have done some of its own ferreting.

And what if Gabriele Zamparini's '[Cats Dream](#)' Website had not done the 'ferreting' and

discovered not only the US military description of its use but also the interview with the US soldier who used the term “shake and bake”, would we know about it? Don’t hold your breath folks, it would have disappeared, along with all the other stories that don’t fit into the BBC’s worldview. And in a fit of what can only be described as vindictiveness, the BBC fails to mention the fact that it was the Cats Dream website that first used the DoD story but hey, we’re only ‘bloggers’, though later in the BBC story it does mention two Websites by name

There is an intense debate on the blog sites about this issue. “It’s not a chemical weapon” says Liberal Against Terror. “CONFIRMED: WP is a CW if used to cause harm through toxic properties,” says Daily Kos.

Though debate is one thing missing from the BBC on the issue, it is as the BBC said in an email to [Medialens](#)

Thank you for your further email. However, I do not believe that further dialogue on this matter will serve a useful purpose.

Yours sincerely  
Helen Boaden  
Director, BBC News

The BBC’s position hinges on the issue of whether or not White Phosphorus is illegal or not and it has since the story broke gone to great pains to (mis)inform its readers about the subject, quoting various and sundry ‘experts’ who all confirm the pre-ordained view that WP is not an illegal weapon although it does finally concede that the debate, such as it is, comes down to a load of legal nitpicking and juggling of words. Hence we read

So WP itself is not a chemical weapon and therefore not illegal. However, used in a certain way, it might become one. Not that “a certain way” can easily be defined, if at all.

Amazing stuff from an organisation that has entire department that deals with the ‘right’ way to pronounce words! It is therefore odd to read in the same article by Paul Woods that

This [Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.” Agreed in 1980, its Protocol III covers “Prohibitions or Restrictions on use of Incendiary Weapons.”] prohibits WP or other incendiaries (like flamethrowers) against civilians or civilian objects and its use by air strikes against military targets located in a concentration of civilians. It also limits WP use by other means (such as mortars or direct fire from tanks) against military targets in a civilian area. Such targets have to be separated from civilian concentrations and “all feasible precautions” taken to avoid civilian casualties.

Hence the BBC’s prevaricating on the phrase “certain way” is most odd to say the least.

Exchanges with the BBC on the issue of ‘unfounded allegations’ are legendary, based largely on the fact that the BBC’s ‘embedded’ journalist in Fallujah in December 2005 never witnessed the use of phosphorus, hence the report by another ‘embedded’ reporter, Darrin

Mortenson of the North County Times in California who wrote

The boom kicked the dust around the pit as they ran through the drill again and again, sending a mixture of burning white phosphorus and high explosives they call 'shake 'n bake' into a cluster of buildings where insurgents have been spotted all week.

obviously doesn't count. So what do we make of director of news, Helen Boaden's comment

But I repeat the point made by my editors, over many weeks of total access to the military operation, at all levels, we did not see banned weapons being used, deployed, or even discussed. We cannot therefore report their use.

Of course, we keep an open mind and will always investigate, and report, any hard evidence which comes to light.

Investigate? Hmm... or is that 'ferret'? Well, typically, it was up to other journalists to do the investigating. Note also that Boaden's sleight of hand in using the word "banned", knowing full well that firstly, the US did not sign the treaty that outlaws the use of chemical weapons and in any case the US doesn't view the use of white phosphorus as illegal.

It is interesting to note also that in referring to the interview with the soldier, the BBC chose not to use the most telling comment about the indiscriminate nature of White Phosphorus

Phosphorus explodes and forms a cloud. Anyone within a radius of 150 metres is done for."

In other words, its use in the closed confines of a city means anyone within a radius of 150 metres is dead and we can be sure that many shells were fired using one of the most indiscriminate of weapons, a mortar. And given that the US sealed off the city thus denying journalists (except 'embedded' ones) access to the city, another fact the BBC failed to tell its readers, means that the only source of 'news' the BBC is supplying to its readers is censored by the military, who in the light of the lies it has been telling, cannot be relied upon.

But worse still is the fact that as far as the BBC is concerned, using such a disgusting and indiscriminate weapon is merely a "public relations disaster". So for the apologists of the occupation it's merely a PR disaster whereas for the people of Fallujah it's an altogether different kind of disaster. Is this the height of cynicism or what? As far as the BBC is concerned the 'debate'

about WP centres partly though not wholly on whether it is really a chemical weapon.

The same article goes on to say

The initial denials from the Pentagon suggest a certain hesitation, embarrassment even, about such a tactic. Some decisions must have been taken in the past to limit its use in certain battlefield scenarios (urban warfare for example). It is not used against civilians.

“[He]sitation, embarrassment”? If WP is not illegal, not being used against civilians, why the embarrassment? Why then did the US choose to lie about it if it considers it a legitimate weapon to use? A question the BBC in its infinite and omnipotent wisdom chose not to ask.

And as far as the BBC is concerned, WP is not being used against civilians, but then this comment is based upon its use of reports censored by the US military, yet another fact that BBC has ‘conveniently’ dropped from its coverage, deeming it sufficient to use the term ‘embed’ instead. Back in 2003, when the USUK invaded Iraq, it used to describe reports from its ‘embedded’ reporters as subject to military censorship so one must ask (again) why it no longer considers it necessary to tell its readers so?

The reason is obvious, for it exposes its comments about its reports from its ‘embedded’ journalist in Fallujah, Paul Woods in 2004 as nothing more than US military propaganda. Surely it should be the BBC that should be embarrassed by its shameless and blatant propagandizing on the part of the occupation forces!

Pissed off with the BBC’s alleged news coverage? Write to Helen Boaden and damn well tell her so, politely or otherwise depending on your degree of disgust.

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