

# The mysterious case of white phosphorous

Or: how the BBC learned to stop worrying and love the bomb

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“There is a great deal of misinformation feeding on itself about U.S. forces allegedly using “outlawed” weapons in Fallujah. The facts are that U.S. forces are not using any illegal weapons in Fallujah or anywhere else in Iraq.” - U.S. Department of State, 9 December 2004 (1)

“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.” - Helen Boaden, Director of BBC News, 14 April 2005 (2)

## INTRODUCTION

On November 10, 2005, the U.S. Department of State added the following note to its own article **Did the U.S. Use “Illegal” Weapons in Fallujah?** originally published on December 9, 2004 on its own website USINFO:

*[November 10, 2005 note: We have learned that some of the information we were provided in the above paragraph is incorrect. White phosphorous shells, which produce smoke, were used in Fallujah not for illumination but for screening purposes, i.e., obscuring troop movements and, according to an article, “The Fight for Fallujah” in the March-April 2005 issue of Field Artillery magazine, “as a potent psychological weapon against the insurgents in trench lines and spider holes ....” The article states that U.S. forces used white phosphorous rounds to flush out enemy fighters so that they could then be killed with high explosive rounds.] (3)*

This “note,” though very cleverly packaged, is much more revealing than on first reading.

### Tuesday, November 08, 2005

On Tuesday morning, November 8, 2005, the BBC NEWS website published an article with the title [US ‘used chemical arms’ in Iraq](#). This was after RAI NEWS 24 broadcast the documentary [“Fallujah. La strage nascosta”](#) (Fallujah. The Concealed Massacre) on the same morning, depicting the use of white phosphorous on civilians in Fallujah last year.

During that morning, the same article changed several times. Probably the most meaningful change was in the title. From **US ‘used chemical arms’ in Iraq** to **US ‘uses incendiary arms’ in Iraq**.

When asked about the reason for such a change, the BBC editor e-mailed me: *“A little research has indicated that White Phosphorous is not a chemical weapon, nor is the US a signatory to conventions restricting its use.”* (4)

The BBC NEWS’ article now reads: *“Rai says this amounts to the illegal use of chemical arms, though such bombs are considered incendiary devices”.*

Also, in the same e-mail I received from the BBC NEWS’ editor, the RAI documentary was described as *“factually inaccurate and misleading”.*

I replied to the BBC, sending them the words of Peter Kaiser (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons): *“Any chemical that is used against humans or against animals that causes harm or death through the toxic properties of the chemical, ARE considered chemical weapons and as long as the purpose is to cause harm – that is prohibited behaviour.”* (5)

I didn’t receive any reply from the BBC. The same day I wrote **“Fallujah, the RAI NEWS 24 documentary and my e-mail exchange with the BBC”** (6)

### **Wednesday, November 09, 2005**

On Wednesday morning, November 9, 2005, I wrote **“BBC and Fallujah: War Crimes, Lies and Omertà”**. (7) I wanted to show that the BBC article was *“factually inaccurate and misleading”*, to use the very same words used by the BBC against the RAI documentary, giving proof that what the US Government had said and written about the use of white phosphorus is false.

The BBC article reported that: *“The US military admits using the weapon in Iraq to illuminate battlefields. But US military officials deny using it in built-up areas.”* In a later version, the BBC rephrased the article to: *“The US military denies [that White Phosphorus was used in built-up areas] but admits using white phosphorus bombs in Iraq to illuminate battlefields.”* That’s the official story given by the US Government at USINFO (8)

In **“BBC and Fallujah: War Crimes, Lies and Omertà”** I included evidence that proves that the official story is false: **“The Fight for Fallujah”**, a *“memorandum for record”* by Captain James T. Cobb, First Lieutenant Christopher A. LaCour, and Sergeant First Class William H. Hight, published in the March-April 2005 issue of the US Army’s *Field Artillery* magazine. The point 9 of the memorandum reads:

**9. Munitions.** *The munitions we brought to this fight were 155-mm highexplosive (HE) M107 (short-range) and M795 (long-range) rounds, illumination and white phosphorous (WP, M110 and M825), with point-detonating (PD), delay, time and variable-time (VT) fuzes. (...) White Phosphorous. WP proved to be an effective and versatile munition. We used it for screening missions at two breeches and, later in the fight, as a potent psychological weapon against the insurgents in trench lines and spider holes when we could not get effects on them with HE. We fired “shake and bake” missions at the insurgents, using WP to flush them out and HE to take them out. (...) We used improved WP for screening missions when HC smoke would have been more effective and saved our WP for lethal missions. (...)* (9)

Also in the same article, I reported what Darrin Mortenson, a *North County Times* journalist embedded in the Camp Pendleton Marines, wrote back in April 2004 about “shake and bake” missions:

*“Bogert is a mortar team leader who directed his men to fire round after round of high explosives and white phosphorus charges into the city Friday and Saturday, never knowing what the targets were or what damage the resulting explosions caused. (...)”*“Gun up!” Millikin yelled when they finished a few seconds later, grabbing a white phosphorus round from a nearby ammo can and holding it over the tube. “Fire!” Bogert yelled, as Millikin dropped it. The boom kicked 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.” (10)

## **Thursday, November 10, 2005**

On November 10, 2005 – the day after my article came out on a number of websites around the globe – the U.S. Department of State published the “note” that I reproduced in the introduction. In the note, however, there is no mention of interesting details from **“The Fight for Fallujah”** memorandum, such as the **“shake and bake”** missions.

## **Tuesday, November 15, 2005**

On Tuesday, November 15, 2005 The Independent published a letter by Mr. Robert H. Tuttle, US Ambassador to the UK. In the letter, Mr. Tuttle writes:

*“US forces participating in Operation Iraqi Freedom continue to use appropriate lawful, conventional weapons against legitimate targets. US forces do not use napalm or white phosphorus as weapons.”*

Did the Ambassador ignore what his employer, the US State Department, had been forced to admit five days earlier?

## **Wednesday, November 16, 2005**

On Wednesday, November 16, 2005, the BBC News website ran an article with the title **“Iraq probes US phosphorus weapons”**. The BBC writes:

*“Washington is not a signatory to an international treaty restricting the use of the substance [white phosphorus] against civilians.”*

On the same day, Wednesday, November 16, 2005, the BBC News website, published a special page **“Q&A: White phosphorus”**. Under the title **“The BBC News website looks at the facts behind the row”**, the BBC writes:

*“Washington is not a signatory to any treaty restricting the use of white phosphorus against civilians.”*

## **Thursday, November 17, 2005**

On Thursday, November 17, 2005, I published **“Shameless BBC: When Misinformation Means War Crimes”**, an exclusive interview with Karen Parker, Chief Counsel of the Association of Humanitarian Lawyers, based in San Francisco. In this interview, Ms. Parker says:

*The comment “Washington is not a signatory to an international treaty restricting the use of the substance [WP] against civilians.” assumes that therefore civilians may be targeted by*

WP weapons. This is an outrageous assumption because civilians may NEVER be the target of military operations — whether using bows and arrows or white phosphorous, or any other weapon. (11)

## Monday, November 21, 2005

On Monday, November 21, 2005, I discovered and published on my blog and on a number of other on-line publications a de-classified report from the US Department of Defense. The report, dated April 1991 and titled “Possible use of phosphorus chemical” reads:

(...) DURING THE BRUTAL CRACKDOWN THAT FOLLOWED THE KURDISH UPRISING, IRAQI FORCES LOYAL TO PRESIDENT SADDAM ((HUSSEIN)) MAY HAVE POSSIBLY USED WHITE PHOSPHOROUS (WP) CHEMICAL WEAPONS AGAINST KURDISH REBELS AND THE POPULACE IN ERBIL (...) (12)

In other words, the Pentagon considers the white phosphorous an illegal chemical weapon.

## Epilogue

I'd like to end on the same note as I losed **“BBC and Fallujah: War Crimes, Lies and Omertà”**.

The silence and the lies of the mainstream media have resulted in war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Iraq war has started with lies — and lies have allowed it to continue. We shall never forget the words used at the Nazi criminals' trials:

*“To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.”* - **Judgment of the International Military Tribunal for the Trial of German Major War Criminals - Nuremberg, Germany 1946**

Now, it's up to us...

## Notes

1) **Did the U.S. Use “Illegal” Weapons in Fallujah? Media allegations claim the U.S. used outlawed weapons during combat in Iraq**, U.S. Department of State, 9 December 2004 - 27 January 2005 (**last update 10 November 2005**)

[http://usinfo.state.gov/media/Archive\\_Index/Illegal\\_Weapons\\_in\\_Fallujah.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/media/Archive_Index/Illegal_Weapons_in_Fallujah.html)

2) **Did BBC ignore weapons claim?**, NewsWatch, BBC News, Thursday, 14 April, 2005

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ukfs/hi/newsid\\_4390000/newsid\\_4396600/4396641.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ukfs/hi/newsid_4390000/newsid_4396600/4396641.stm)

3) See note 1

4) You can read the entire e-mail correspondence between the BBC NEWS website editor and Gabriele Zamparini in **“Fallujah, the RAI NEWS 24 documentary and my e-mail exchange with the BBC”**, by Gabriele Zamparini, The Cat's Blog

<http://www.thecatsdream.com/blog/2005/11/exclusive-bbc-is-wrong.htm>

5) See note 4

6) See note 4

7) **BBC and Fallujah: War Crimes, Lies and Omertà** by Gabriele Zamparini, The Cat's Blog

<http://www.thecatsdream.com/blog/2005/11/bbc-and-fallujah-war-crimes-lies-and.htm>

The article was published by [Global Research](#), [Uruknet](#), [US Labor Against the War](#), [Global Echo](#), Indymedia and many other on-line outlets. At the same time I distributed the same article through my e-newsletter which goes to thousands of people, organizations and news outlets around the world. [**Note:** On November 8, 2005, after reading my article "EXCLUSIVE: the BBC is WRONG!!! Fallujah, the RAI NEWS 24 documentary and my e-mail exchange with the BBC" (See Note 4) Mark Kraft of insomnia.livejournal.com sent me two pieces of information:

a) "The Fight for Fallujah," a "memorandum for record" by Captain James T. Cobb, First Lieutenant Christopher A. LaCour, and Sergeant First Class William H. Hight, published in the March-April 2005 issue of the US Army's *Field Artillery* magazine.

b) Darrin Mortenson's "[Violence Subsides for Marines in Fallujah](#)," published in the *North County Times*, on 10 April 2004.]

8) See note 1

9) See note 7

10) **Violence Subsides for Marines in Fallujah**, by Darrin Mortenson, North County Times, Saturday, April 10, 2004 (Staff writer Darrin Mortenson and staff photographer Hayne Palmour are reporting from Iraq, where they are with Camp Pendleton Marines.)

[http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2004/04/11/military/iraq/19\\_30\\_504\\_10\\_04.txt](http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2004/04/11/military/iraq/19_30_504_10_04.txt)

11) **Shameless Bbc: When Misinformation Means War Crimes. Exclusive Interview With Karen Parker, Chief Counsel Of The Association Of Humanitarian Lawyers** By Gabriele Zamparini, The Cat's Blog

<http://www.thecatsdream.com/blog/2005/11/shameless-bbc-when-misinformation.htm>

12) **A De-Classified Report from the US Department of Defense calls WP "CHEMICAL WEAPONS"** by Gabriele Zamparini, The Cat's Blog

<http://www.thecatsdream.com/blog/2005/11/de-classified-report-from-us.htm>

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