

# Pentagon Admits Use of White Phosphorus

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The U.S. government has now admitted its troops used white phosphorous as an incendiary weapon against Iraqis during the assault on Fallujah a year ago. Chemical weapons experts say such attacks are in violation of international law banning the use of chemical weapons. We speak with columnist George Monbiot and the news director of RAI TV, the Italian TV network that produced the film "Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre."

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Chemical weapons experts say such attacks are in violation of international law banning the use of chemical weapons.

Peter Kaiser, of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, said, "Chemicals used against humans or animals that cause harm or death through the toxic properties of the chemical are considered chemical weapons."

White phosphorous is often compared to napalm because it combusts spontaneously when exposed to oxygen and can burn right through skin to the bone.

The Pentagon's admission comes after a week of denials that it used white phosphorous as a weapon in Fallujah. While reporters have noted the use of white phosphorous since the war began, it only became a major story last Tuesday when Italian state broadcaster RAI TV aired the documentary "Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre."

On that same day Democracy Now aired an excerpt of the documentary and interviewed Lt. Col. Steve Boylan, the director of the Pentagon's Combined Press Information Center in Baghdad. During our show Boylan denied the claims made in the documentary that white phosphorous was used as a weapon to target Iraqis.

- Lt. Col. Steve Boylan interviewed..

But the Pentagon was caught in a lie after it was revealed that an official Army publication called Field Artillery magazine had disclosed that the Army had in fact used white phosphorous as a weapon.

The magazine, in its March-April issue, reported "[White Phosphorous] proved to be an effective and versatile munition... [and] as a potent psychological weapon against the insurgents in trench lines and spider holes."

The magazine went on to report "We fired "shake and bake" missions at the insurgents, using WP [White Phosphorous] to flush them out and HE [high explosives] to take them out."

On Tuesday, Lt. Col. Barry Venable, another Pentagon spokesperson, admitted on the BBC that white phosphorous was used as an offensive weapon to target insurgents.

- Lt. Col. Barry Venable interviewed on BBC.

The Pentagon has defended its use of white phosphorous by claiming it is a not chemical weapon and that it was only used against Iraqi insurgents, not civilians. However even this would have been illegal according to the Army's own rules of combat. In 1999 the Army published a handbook that read, "It is against the law of land warfare to employ WP against personnel targets."

An Iraqi human rights team has reportedly gone into Fallujah to investigate the use of white phosphorus as a weapon by U.S. forces.

- Maurizio Torrealta, News Editor for the Italian state broadcaster RAI and co-producer of the documentary "Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre."
- George Monbiot, a columnist for the Guardian of London. He published an article titled "The US Used Chemical Weapons in Iraq - And Then Lied About It."

Note: We contacted Pentagon spokesperson Lt. Col Barry Venable yesterday but he refused to come on the program.

AMY GOODMAN: While reporters have noted the use of white phosphorus since the war began, it only became a major story last Tuesday when Italian state broadcaster, RAI TV, aired the documentary, Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre. On that same day, Democracy Now! aired an excerpt of the documentary here in the United States and interviewed Lieutenant Colonel Steve Boylan, the director of the Pentagon's Combined Press Information Center in Baghdad. During our broadcast, Boylan denied the claims made in the documentary that white phosphorus was used as a weapon to target Iraqis.

LT. COL. STEVE BOYLAN: I know of no cases where people were deliberately targeted by the use of white phosphorus. Again, I did not say white phosphorus was used for illumination. White phosphorus is used for obscuration, which white phosphorus produces a heavy thick smoke to shield us or them from view so that they cannot see what we are doing. It is used to destroy equipment, to destroy buildings. That is what white phosphorus shells are used for.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Lieutenant Colonel Steve Boylan, speaking on Democracy Now! last Tuesday. But the Pentagon was caught in a lie after it was revealed that an official Army publication called Field Artillery magazine had disclosed the Army had, in fact, used white phosphorus as a weapon. The magazine in its March/April issue reported, quote, "White phosphorus proved to be an effective and versatile munition and a potent psychological weapon against the insurgents in trench lines and spider holes." The magazine went on to report, quote, "We fired 'shake and bake' missions at the insurgents using W.P. [white phosphorus] to flush them out and H.E. [high explosives] to take them out." On Tuesday, Lieutenant Colonel Barry Venable, another Pentagon spokesperson, admitted on the BBC that white phosphorus was used as an offensive weapon to target insurgents.

LT. COL. BARRY VENABLE: White phosphorus is a conventional munition. It's not a chemical weapon. They are not outlawed or illegal. We use them primarily as obscurants, for smoke screens or for target marking in some cases. However, it is an incendiary weapon and may be used against enemy combatants.

BBC REPORTER: Can you confirm, then, that it was used as an offensive weapon against enemy troops during the siege of Fallujah?

LT. COL. BARRY VENABLE: Yes. It was used as an incendiary weapon against enemy combatants.

BBC REPORTER: There are suggestions here that if used in that way, an incendiary weapon such as white phosphorus would be against the various conventions governing the use of weapons during war. You disagree?

LT. COL. BARRY VENABLE: Cite the conventions.

BBC REPORTER: The Chemical Weapons Convention.

LT. COL. BARRY VENABLE: Okay. Does it list white phosphorus as a chemical?

BBC REPORTER: No, it doesn't. But it says a chemical weapon can be any chemical which, through its chemical action, on life processes can cause death, temporary incapacitation or permanent harm.

LT. COL. BARRY VENABLE: But this isn't -- we're talking white phosphorus is an incendiary weapon, not a chemical weapon.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Pentagon spokesperson, Lieutenant Colonel Barry Venable, being interviewed on the BBC. The Pentagon has defended its use of white phosphorus by claiming it's not a chemical weapon and that it was only used against Iraqi insurgents, not civilians. However, even this would have been illegal according to the Army's own rules of combat. In 1999 the Army published a handbook that read, quote, "It's against the law of land warfare to employ W.P. against personnel targets." An Iraqi human rights team has reportedly gone into Fallujah to investigate the use of white phosphorus as a weapon by U.S. forces.

To discuss this controversy, we're joined by two guests. On the phone from Italy, Maurizio Torrealta. He's News Editor for the Italian state broadcaster, RAI, co-producer of the documentary, Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre. We're also joined

from Britain by George Monbiot, a columnist for The Guardian of London. On Tuesday, he published an article entitled, "The U.S. Used Chemical Weapons in Iraq and Then Lied About It." We first go to Maurizio Torrealta. You did the documentary. Your response to the new statement of the Pentagon, following up on the Pentagon's denial when you were on the broadcast last week, saying they didn't use white phosphorus as a weapon against people in Fallujah.

**MAURIZIO TORREALTA:** Well, first of all, I want to say that any time any institution corrects itself, I think, is a great event. And I would like to see many more institutions that are able to admit their mistakes. Then, the correction is not complete, because the Pentagon said that they used white phosphorus as a weapon, but not on civilians. And unfortunately we got really hundreds of pictures of people that seemed to be killed by white phosphorus. And I think an investigation, a United Nation investigation, on that could really finally say the last word about how much has been used against civilian people.

And then there is another couple of questions that I have in my mind. First of all, since the news are something that wasn't unknown -- The Independent, The Guardian wrote about the use of white phosphorus, and a lot of Arabian website was -- they published information about that. And what make that became news right now? It is a question that I really can't answer. And I think we should discuss a little bit about this second question.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** George Monbiot, I'd like to ask you, the Pentagon is trying to split hairs in terms of how it defines chemical weapons; your perspective on their attempt to get through their own contradictions on this?

**GEORGE MONBIOT:** The Chemical Weapons Convention could not be clearer. There are two kinds of chemicals listed under it: One is the scheduled chemicals, such as phosgene and mustard gas and VX gas which cannot be used under any circumstances; then there is all other toxic chemicals which may be used for purposes which do not depend on the use of their toxic properties. However, the moment you use one of those other chemicals for its toxic properties against human beings, you are in breach of the convention. And what we saw very clearly from that extract in Field Artillery magazine was that they were firing these munitions directly at the combatants in Fallujah in order to exert the toxic effects of those munitions upon those combatants to flush them out so they could then be killed. In doing so, the U.S. Army was acting in direct contravention of the Chemical Weapons Convention. It committed a war crime.

**AMY GOODMAN:** I wanted to play an excerpt from the RAI TV documentary, Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre. This part features an interview with Mohamad Tareq Al Deraji, a biologist from Fallujah who heads the Fallujah Center for Human Rights.

**NARRATOR:** Mohamad opens his PC and shows us images of a victim in Fallujah, a woman lying on the side, clothes intact, hiding a scorched body, a veil covering like a shroud a face melted by the heat.

**MOHAMAD TAREQ AL DERAJI:** In al-Askeri, I hear some witnesses say, 'Here's some bodies -- here's killing by the -- a man died from the [inaudible] burns.'

**REPORTER:** In what state did you find the dead?

**MOHAMAD TAREQ AL DERAJI:** Different type. Children, women, younger youth, older men. All different form of people. But many from them has killing and the dead, inside the chicken room or cooking room, some from them when he [inaudible]. There is some witnesses. He say when American attack some places, the big [in Arabic] -- shower?

**WOMAN:** A shower of fire?

**MOHAMAD TAREQ AL DERAJI:** Yeah, shower, but different color [inaudible]. And after this, all the people in this place is dead.

**REPORTER:** Why was the bombing so severe?

**MOHAMAD TAREQ AL DERAJI:** In the April battle, American say we want to cut the people killing the foreign counters, American counters. After the battle in April, American -- he cannot enter the city, but he search about another reason. He found maybe a terrorist is a suitable reason. He continues to attack Fallujah between April and November. More than one hundred houses destroyed to kill Zarqawi and the assistant of Zarqawi.

**AMY GOODMAN:** That is Mohamad Tareq Al Deraji, a biologist from Fallujah, quoted in the documentary, Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre. We'll get response when we come back. And I should also say we did call the Pentagon. We called the Lieutenant Colonel Venable and asked him to join us, who had stated the reversal of the military position on whether they used white phosphorus as a weapon against people in Fallujah. He was extremely angry, and he refused to come on the broadcast.

We're on the line with George Monbiot, author and columnist for The Guardian of London, wrote the piece, "U.S. Lied About Chemical Weapons in Iraq"; and Maurizio Torrealta, News Editor for the Italian television, RAI, co-producer of the film Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre. We just saw this biologist from Fallujah speaking. Maurizio Torrealta, could you amplify on who he was and what he saw?

MAURIZIO TORREALTA: Yes. He is a member of a human rights organization in Fallujah. He tried a couple of times to be brought to the attention of the Western people what's happening in Fallujah. He visited Rome. And then he went to Strasbourg in the European Parliament, invited by organizations, some political organization and some European deputies. And we met in there, and he told us some information.

But what strikes me is the fact that it's been a year that he was speaking about such things, and just the recent days, I got a lot of letters that have been sent by organizations in Fallujah to the U.N., to Kofi Annan, denouncing the same thing, and nothing happened. And we had to put on video those horrible pictures, in order to have some kind of reaction. And the reaction came before from the society. The politicians didn't really care less. So finally it break through. I mean, it became news. And after a year people knows what happened, knows, at least has some idea, of what happened in Fallujah. And really, as a journalist, I'm really scared by the impossibility that the people in Fallujah had, for years, to brought to the attention of all the media what really happened over there.

JUAN GONZALEZ: George Monbiot, your column also mentions that the Field Artillery article was not the first mention of the use of white phosphorus, that there was actually some reporting by an embedded reporter at the North County Times in Southern California as early as April 2004. Could you talk about that?

GEORGE MONBIOT: Yes. I'll coach you from what he said. He was an embedded reporter with the Marines during the siege of Fallujah, which, as you say, took place in April 2004. And his article goes as follows: "'Gun up,' Millikin yelled, 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 and bake' into a cluster of buildings where insurgents have been spotted all week." Now, the key term there is into a cluster of buildings. In other words, again they were not using this white phosphorus for the purposes of illumination or for the purposes of smoke screening, both of which are legal uses of white phosphorus in war. They were using it as a weapon in order to flush the insurgents out of those buildings. Doing so is in breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And in both that article and in the Field Artillery, they keep referring to this mixture called "shake and bake," which is obviously a mixture of white phosphorus and explosives at the same time, so it's clearly meant to be used as an offensive weapon, no?

GEORGE MONBIOT: I believe it's a pun on some seasoning which you have in the United States which you put on a chicken before you put it in the oven. And the idea is that you shake them out of their hiding place and then you can bake them or kill them with high explosives, having shaken them out with your white phosphorus. The use of white phosphorus to do that is not legal.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to go back to the documentary, Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre, which is the documentary that RAI Television, the Italian state broadcaster, did last week that Democracy Now! also broadcast. BBC then got this reversal from the military on whether they used white phosphorus as a weapon against people in Fallujah. And this goes to the testimony of Italian journalist Giuliana Sgrena who worked as a reporter in Iraq before she was kidnapped. She spoke to RAI TV after she was released.

GIULIANA SGRENA: [translated from Italian] Not only in Fallujah. I had heard stories from the inhabitants about the use of certain weapons like napalm in Baghdad during the battle at the airport in April 2003. And then I had collected just before going to interview the city refugees testimonies from other inhabitants in Fallujah about the use of guns and white phosphorus. In particular, some women had tried to enter their homes, and they had found a certain dust spread all over the house. The Americans themselves had told them to clean their houses with detergents, because that dust was very dangerous. In fact, they had some effect on their bodies, leading some very strange things. I would have liked to interview those persons, but unfortunately my kidnappers, who were said to be part of Fallujah's resistance, had forbidden me to tell what I have known about Fallujah by kidnapping me. This world cannot have witnessed this. It cannot have witnessed it, because it's based on lies. The Americans have permitted only to embedded journalists to go to Fallujah.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Giuliana Sgrena. And now Jeff Englehart, who is a former U.S. soldier.

REPORTER: Were any chemical weapons used in Fallujah?

JEFF ENGLEHART: From the U.S. military, yeah, absolutely. White phosphorus. Possibly napalm may or may not have

been used; I do not know. I do know that white phosphorus was used, which is definitely, without a shadow of a doubt, a chemical weapon.

REPORTER: Is he sure of it?

JEFF ENGLEHART: Yes. It happened.

REPORTER: How can he be certain?

JEFF ENGLEHART: Well, it comes across radio as a general transmission. When it happens like that, you hear it on the radio through -- we have speakers in our trucks -- speakers and then the transmission goes to the speakers, so it's audible. And as they'd say, "In five [inaudible], we're going drop some Whiskey Pete." "Roger. Commence bombing." I mean, it just comes across the radio, and like, when you hear "Whiskey Pete," that's the military slang.

NARRATOR: Contrary to what was said by the U.S. State Department, white phosphorus was not used in the open field to illuminate enemy troops. For this, tracer was used. A rain of fire shot from U.S. helicopters on the city of Fallujah on the night of the 8th of November. [inaudible] will show you in this exceptional documentary, which proves that a chemical agent was used in a massive and indiscriminate way in districts of Fallujah. In the days that followed, U.S. satellite images showed Fallujah burned out and razed to the ground.

JEFF ENGLEHART: The gases from the warhead of the white phosphorus will disperse in a cloud. And when it makes contact with skin, then it's absolutely irreversible damage, burning flesh to the bone. It doesn't necessarily burn clothes, but it will burn the skin underneath clothes. And this is why protective masks do not help, because it will burn right through the mask, the rubber of the mask. It will manage to get inside your face. If you breathe it, it will blister your throat and your lungs until you suffocate, and then it will burn you from the inside. It basically reacts to skin, oxygen and water. The only way to stop the burning is with wet mud. But at that point, it's just impossible to stop.

REPORTER: Have you seen the effects of these weapons?

JEFF ENGLEHART: Yes. Burned. Burned bodies. I mean, it burned children, and it burned women. White phosphorus kills indiscriminately. It's a cloud that will within, in most cases, 150 meters of impact will disperse, and it will burn every human being or animal.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Jeff Englehart, who is a former U.S. soldier, speaking from Colorado. As we wrap up, Maurizio Torrealta of RAI, where he is being broadcast, the documentary Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre. The response in Italy, not to mention the rest of the world, to this documentary?

MAURIZIO TORREALTA: The response in Italy is bizarre, because when we broadcast it, we had one day before, having some response, because then we had two days of strike. The newspaper were on strike. So there were a few newspaper that wrote about it, and then there was a silence for two days. And then again there was nothing, nothing for three or four days. But actually, now, yesterday and the day before, it was the first news on the first page. Why? Because it came from outside.

At that point, the news had been bounced in the United States, in England, and it became -- some information transformed themselves in news and now is the news. And now, yesterday was a major newsbreak of the major channel of the Italian television. So it has been a strange, very strange [inaudible]. The news really has been diffused, but didn't have a reaction right now.

It seemed like there are two different media that are fighting: One media which is based on the internet and which is based on the net and on streaming and has a different way to spread around; and the other media, the mainstream media, which is very slow, very much controlled, and doesn't come out right away with information, only after it became something bigger. That is my impression, which is not -- doesn't make me happy at all.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And George Monbiot, this news is now beginning to spread on the corporate media here in the United States. But what's happening in Britain? Are you having similar battles between the corporate media and the internet?

GEORGE MONBIOT: Well, the corporate media has picked it up pretty well comprehensively, and they have messed it up pretty well comprehensively. The misreporting of this issue is second almost to none that I've ever come across before. They have managed to mix up the use of white phosphorus against military versus civilian targets. For example, repeatedly, I'm saying, in the media, that it's a war crime if it's used against civilians but not if it's used against the military. The Chemical Weapons Convention does not mention the word civilian. It does not mention the word non-combatant. There is no distinction made. If you use white phosphorus as a weapon against human beings, that is a war crime. It doesn't matter whether those human beings are civilians. It doesn't matter whether they are military. It remains a war crime.

They've mixed up several other things, as well. And the result of this is that if we're not careful, we can see excuses made for the use of this weapon as a weapon of war. And the whole point of the Chemical Weapons Convention is to prevent that from recurring. If we look back to the first World War and saw how mustard gas and phosgene were used and saw in the subsequent commemorations of that war these lines and lines of men with their hands on each other's shoulders walking along, because they could not see, because they had been blinded by this gas or their lungs had been destroyed by this gas, the undermining of the Chemical Weapons Convention threatens to bring about the kind of gas warfare which we saw in the first World War and which we saw in the war between Iran and Iraq. It's absolutely essential that we get this story right and we make it completely impossible for states such as the United States or, indeed, any other, to use poison toxic chemicals as a weapon of war and to use it ever again.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, George Monbiot and Maurizio Torrealta, I want to thank you both very much for being with us. And I want to point out I don't think the military is confused, because when Lieutenant Colonel Boylan first on Democracy Now! denied the use of white phosphorus as a weapon, he said as a weapon against people. He didn't say insurgents or civilians. He said we didn't use it against people. So that's an interesting point, and I wish they had joined us today. George Monbiot of Tthe Guardian of London, and Maurizio Torrealta, News Editor for the Italian television, the state broadcaster, RAI, co-producer of the film Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre, thanks so much for joining us.