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## Afghan girl's burns show horror of chemical strike

Emma Graham-Harrison, Reuters



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[:: ONU - XX Assemblea Generale \(1965\):](#)

La XX Assemblea Generale dell'ONU (1965) dichiara "la legittimità della lotta da parte dei popoli sotto oppressione coloniale, per esercitare il loro diritto all'autodeterminazione e all'indipendenza".

May 8, 2009

Life as 8-year-old Razia knew it ended one March morning when a shell her father says was fired by Western troops exploded into their house, enveloping her head and neck in a blazing chemical. Skip related content

Now she spends her days in a U.S. hospital bed at the Bagram airbase, her small fingernails still covered with flaking red polish but her face an almost unrecognisable mess of burnt tissue and half her scalp a bald scar.

"The kids called out to me that I was burning but the explosion was so strong that for a moment I was deaf and couldn't hear anything," her father, Aziz Rahman, told Reuters.

"And then my wife screamed 'the kids are burning' and she was also burning," he added, his face clouding over at the memory.

The flames that consumed his family were fed by a chemical called white phosphorous, which U.S. medical staff at Bagram said they found on Razia's face and neck.

It bursts into fierce fire on contact with the air and can stick to and even penetrate flesh as it burns.

White phosphorus can be used legally in war to provide light, create smokescreens or burn buildings, so it is not banned under international treaties that forbid using chemicals as weapons.

Colonel Gregory Julian, a spokesman for the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, General David McKiernan, confirmed that Western forces in the country use the chemical.

"In the case of white phosphorus it is used on the battlefield in certain applications ... It is used as an incendiary to destroy bunkers and enemy equipment; it's used for illumination."

But U.S. military training manuals say firing it at people is illegal. Its use in populated areas has been a persistent source of controversy.

Razia and her family are the first known civilian casualties of its use in Afghanistan.

WHO FIRED?

Rahman said the shell that burnt his daughter landed after a firefight near their house in the eastern province of Kapisa. The NATO-led international force there is made up mainly of French troops, with U.S. support.

"(Western) troops were on the road, the Taliban were on the mountain and

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Inoltre, l'Assemblea invita "tutti gli Stati a fornire assistenza morale e materiale ai movimenti di liberazione nazionale nei territori coloniali".

:: ONU - Risoluzione 1514

"L'Assemblea Generale dichiara che: la soggezione dei popoli a dominio straniero, conquista e asservimento costituisce una negazione dei diritti umani fondamentali, contraria alla Carta delle Nazioni Unite ed un impedimento alla promozione della pace e della cooperazione mondiali. Tutti i popoli hanno diritto all' autodeterminazione; in virtù di tale diritto essi devono liberamente determinare il loro status politico e liberamente perseguire il loro sviluppo economico, sociale e culturale".

:: Convenzione di Ginevra, Protocollo Addizionale I (1977): La lotta armata può essere usata, come ultima risorsa, come mezzo per esercitare il diritto all' autodeterminazione.

:: Tribunale penale internazionale  
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we were at the house, sandwiched between them. When the Taliban began retreating, they fired artillery at them, 12 rounds. One hit my house," Rahman said.

A spokeswoman for the NATO-led force rejected Rahman's account, saying an internal investigation into the incident concluded that it was "very unlikely" the weapon that hit Razia's house was theirs, because of the timing and location.

U.S. Major Jennifer Willis suggested instead that the Taliban had fired the shot: "An enemy mortar team, known to have been operating in that area, may have been responsible."

The Afghan government, military specialists and experts on the Taliban told Reuters, however, that insurgents have never been observed using white phosphorus. The only forces on the battlefield known to use it are the United States and NATO.

"I am not aware that the Taliban have used this in any of their attacks," said Zaher Murad, a Defence Ministry spokesman.

Ahmed Rashid, Pakistan-based author of a widely acclaimed book on the hardline Islamists, said that he was also not aware of such reports.

The use of the chemical for illumination and concealment of troop movements suit the tactics of foreign forces in a hostile environment, but it would be of little use to insurgents who know the terrain and can blend into the civilian population.

"To think they (the Taliban) are employing white phosphorus as a weapon in their arsenal is very far-fetched," said Marc Garlasco, senior military analyst at Human Rights Watch and a former senior intelligence analyst at the Pentagon.

"The U.S. has optics that will allow them to see through the smoke, so it is useless for (the Taliban). They don't need to illuminate because that is telegraphing to the United States where they are going to go and fight. Plus they know the area."

"They want high explosive to shock and kill; flames raining down from the sky aren't going to frighten the U.S. forces."

NATO spokeswoman Willis said insurgents had been observed using white phosphorus weapons in the past. Asked to provide examples of the Taliban using the chemical, she wrote back to say that she was unable to do so.

The Taliban also denied that they used it. "This is not true, it is just a mere allegation," said spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid.

### NEVER NORMAL

When Rahman saw his daughter on fire, he rushed her out to the yard, where he put out the flames with water stored to mix mud for a new wall. Her hair came away in clumps in his hand.

He raced inside and found two other children dead from head wounds. He hoisted Razia on his back and staggered towards the local base where soldiers arranged a U.S. airlift that almost certainly saved her life.

Colleen Fitzpatrick, a U.S. military paediatric surgeon who has been treating Razia, confirmed Razia was hit by white phosphorous and had burns to 40 percent of her body.

"The way we treat that is with skin grafts ... (but) because her burns were so extensive we had to allow some of those donor sites to heal first, so we would go back to take skin from the same place more than once," Fitzpatrick said.

Razia, who did not want her picture taken, is now suffering mentally as well as physically.



L'Impero si è fermato a Baghdad, by Valeri Poletti

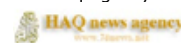
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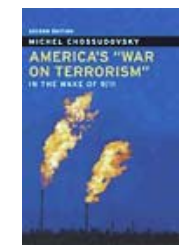
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America's "War on Terrorism", book by Michel Chossudovsky

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"My daughter is really sad and really lonely and she misses her family and mother. When I call home in the afternoon ... she talks with her mother and is always saying 'mum, I miss you.'"

Rahman says he is grateful for the medical help she has received from U.S. doctors, and reserves his anger for the provincial governor who visited his daughter but who offered no comfort, saying only "she will never get a husband."

When she leaves the hospital she will face an uphill struggle to rebuild her life. Although doctors say it may be possible to reduce her disfigurement, U.S. help may one day be cut off.

"It's never going to be normal, but there is still certainly room to improve on what she has," Fitzpatrick said.

"We would like to be able to offer her things down the line, but a lot of that just depends on the tempo of the war ... Obviously our primary mission is to support our troops."

(Additional reporting by Sayed Salahuddin; Editing by Peter Graff and John Chalmers)

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That's the only thing the Americans know how to do.  
Burn, rape and kill little girls...Sick bastards.



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