



There are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq – they are ours

- by David Wilson, Stop the War Coalition UK

“DU is a crime against God and humanity. It has to be stopped.”

Major Doug Rokke, Health Physicist assigned to US Army DU Assessment Team, 1991. US Army DU Project Director, 1994-1995

“I’m horrified. The people out there – the Iraqis, the media and the troops – risk the most appalling ill health. And the radiation from depleted uranium can travel literally anywhere. It’s going to destroy the lives of thousands of children, all over the world. We all know how far radiation can travel. Radiation from Chernobyl reached Wales and in Britain you sometimes get red dust from the Sahara on your car.”

Dr. Chris Busby, British radiation expert, Fellow of the University of Liverpool, Faculty of Medicine and UK representative on the European Committee on Radiation Risk

“DU will remain part of our arsenal for the foreseeable future because we have a duty to provide our troops with the best available equipment with which to protect themselves and succeed in conflict.”

Then Secretary of State for Defense, Geoff Hoon, March 2003



Depleted uranium (DU) is the waste product from the process of enriching uranium ore for use in nuclear weapons and reactors. It is “a very heavy substance, 1.7 times denser than lead, it is highly valued by armies for its ability to punch through armored vehicles. When a weapon made with a DU tip or core strikes a solid object, like the side of a tank, it goes straight through it and then erupts in a burning cloud of vapor. The vapor settles as dust, which is both chemically poisonous and also radioactive.” (BBC News, 4 January 2001)

As an alpha particle emitter, DU has a half life of 4.5 billion years.

DU materials are in the warheads of 23 weapon systems, including cruise missiles, bunker busting bombs and cluster bombs. DU munitions were central to the ‘shock and awe’ attack on Iraq in 2003 and the continued military conflict since.

The initial attack on Iraq was one of the most devastating assaults in modern warfare. In the first 24 hours more than 1,500 bombs and missiles were dropped on Baghdad. During the conflict A10 “tankbuster” planes — which use munitions containing depleted uranium — fired 300,000 rounds. Al Jazeera reported that invading US forces fired two hundred tons of radioactive material into buildings, homes, streets and gardens in Baghdad alone. A reporter from the 'Christian Science Monitor' took a Geiger counter to parts of Baghdad that had been subjected to heavy shelling by U.S. troops. He found radiation levels 1,000 to 1,900 times higher than normal in residential areas.



One unconfirmed estimate suggests the total tonnage of DU used could be about 1,500 tons across Iraq as a whole, five times more than was used in the 1991 Gulf war. There is considerable evidence that DU has continued to be used, not only as a battlefield weapon as in the First Gulf War, but

increasingly in urban areas throughout Iraq in the occupation forces battles against the Resistance. Meanwhile, in what has become the standard government response to the issue of DU in weaponry, the BBC reported on 24 April 2003 that "the Ministry of Defence could give no figure for the amount of DU used in the initial attack and invasion of Iraq".

When asked if he thought that DU weapons operate in a similar manner as a dirty bomb Marion Falk, a retired chemical physicist who worked on nuclear bombs at Lawrence Livermore Lab said, "That's exactly what they are. They fit the description of a dirty bomb in every way ... I would say that it is the perfect weapon for killing lots of people."



An impacting DU missile burns at 10,000°C. 30% of the shell fragments into shrapnel, with the remaining 70% vaporizing into three highly-toxic oxides, including uranium oxide. Its target is left covered in black dust, while further particles remain suspended in the air and can travel over great distances according to wind and weather.

The impact of one 120mm DU shell fired from an American Abrams tank creates between 900 and 3,400 grams (roughly 2 to 7 pounds) of uranium oxide dust. 52 to 83% of these particles are insoluble in lung fluids.

Particles less than 5 microns in diameter are easily inhaled or ingested and may remain in the lungs or other organs for years. Once inhaled this radioactive vapor can mutate 35% of cells in surrounding tissue. Internalized DU may cause kidney damage, cancers of the lung and bone, non-malignant respiratory disease, skin disorders, neurocognitive disorders, chromosomal damage, immune deficiency syndromes and rare kidney and bowel diseases. Parents exposed to DU may give birth to infants bearing genetic defects, moderate to severe deformities, rare illnesses and cancers.



Reporting from Iraq before the invasion in October 2002, Felicity Arbuthnot visited the Al Mansour Children's Hospital in Baghdad. Doctors there told her that slow-motion nuclear weapons had been used on Iraq during the first Gulf War. Cases of child cancers and leukemia seemed to have a common denominator; they all came from heavily-bombarded areas.

Dr Ali, doctor in charge at the Al Mansour, estimated a fivefold rise in child cancers since the first Gulf War: "though since we are not allowed the scientific facilities to implement a proper investigation and statistical survey, we have no proof."

He said that between 1978 and 1992 there were two hundred and seventy cancer and leukemia cases recorded at the Al Mansour. Between November 1992 and 2002 the hospital had recorded 1,714 cases.

Dr. Janan Ghalib Hassan, a neo-natalogist at the Women and Children's Hospital in Basra, said that in 2001, 611 babies were born with no limbs, no eyes or other birth defects, compared with 37 such cases in 1990. The area where the children were born was subjected to heavy shelling with DU munitions in the first Gulf War.

Dr Ahmad Hardan, scientific adviser to the World Health Organization and the UN, has estimated that DU use in Iraq at the time of the first Gulf War "has caused a health crisis that has affected almost a third of a million people." He said that women as young as 35 had been developing breast cancer and sterility among men had increased tenfold.

Dr Hardan has stated that one of the worst affected areas was Basra and its surrounding area: if the experience of Basra was played out across the rest of the country, Iraq was looking at an increase of more than 300% in all types of cancer over the next decade. In Basra, he says, every form of cancer had jumped at least 10%, with the exception of bone tumours and skin cancer, which had only risen 2.6% and 9.3% respectively.

As well as having carcinogenic qualities, Dr Hardan stated that the use of DU has another tragic outcome: "The effects of ionizing radiation on growth and development are especially significant in the prenatal child. Embryonic development is especially affected."



It is important to remember that the evidence mentioned here and collected by researchers such as Dr Hardan refers back to the effects of DU in the 1990s. It is sketchy as a result of ten years of UN sanctions which cut off Iraq's hospitals, universities and their research staff from the outside world. A 2003 analysis of already available data by the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP), however, concluded the latest invasion had "undoubtedly" worsened the serious environmental problems that have accumulated in Iraq. That is as far as we can get with government or UN research and statements!

The absence of any 'official' evidence on DU and its affects since the 2003 invasion and four years of occupation allows our governments to deny their culpability, but they have played an active part in preventing more detailed knowledge emerging. Indeed, barriers have been placed in the way of those who search for that knowledge. "I arranged for a delegation from a Hiroshima hospital to come and share their expertise in the radiological related diseases we are likely to face over time," Dr Hardan told Aj Jazeera in January 2005. "The delegation told me the Americans had objected and they had decided not to come. Similarly, a world famous German cancer specialist agreed to come, only to be told later that he would not be given permission to enter Iraq."

It is no different back in the US. Professor John Hanchette of St Bonaventure University and one of the founding editors of *USA Today*, has stated that he had prepared news-breaking stories about the effects of DU on Gulf War soldiers and Iraqi citizens, but that each time he was ready to publish, he received a phone call from the Pentagon asking him not to print the story. He has since been replaced as editor.



Dr. Keith Baverstock, for many years the World Health Organization's chief expert on radiation and author of an unpublished study on DU, has claimed that his report "on the

cancer risk to civilians in Iraq from breathing uranium contaminated dust" was suppressed.

You can search through extensive websites on DU, as I have done, and the paucity of information is shocking.

DU has been used in the Balkans and in Afghanistan. At the Uranium Weapons Conference held in October 2003 in Hamburg, Germany, independent scientists from around the world testified to a huge increase in birth deformities and cancers wherever DU had been used. Professor Katsuma Yagasaki, a scientist at the Ryukyus University, Okinawa, calculated that the 800 tons of DU used in Afghanistan is the radioactive equivalent of 83,000 Nagasaki bombs. The amount of DU used in Iraq is equivalent to 250,000 Nagasaki bombs.



The problem is an emergency for humankind. The emission of predominantly Alpha, as well as Beta and Gamma, radiation from DU particles and debris will persist for the life of the planet. And we may all be affected. Chris Busby, of Liverpool University's department of human anatomy and cell biology, carried out research in the UK and claims that radiation detectors in Britain recorded a fourfold increase in uranium levels in the atmosphere after the "shock and awe" bombing campaign against Iraq. (Sunday Times, 19 Feb 2006)

Meanwhile, in Iraq the American and British occupation forces are responsible for:

- Forbidding any release of statistics related to civilian casualties from use of DU weapons, both before and after the war and occupation
- Refusal to clean up contaminated areas
- Depriving international agencies and Iraqi researchers the right to conduct full (DU) related exploration programmes by US/UK occupation forces *.

Laws which are breached by the use of DU shells include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the Charter of the United Nations; the Genocide Convention; the Convention Against Torture; the four Geneva Conventions of 1949; the Conventional Weapons Convention of 1980 and the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. These forbid employing 'poison or poisoned weapons' and 'arms, projectiles or materials calculated to cause unnecessary suffering'.

One hesitates, but only for a moment, before linking the two words 'depleted uranium' with the one word 'genocide'. Our governments are involved in a massive crime against humanity and it is past time for them to be brought to account.

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* **Note:** The assassination of an estimated 300 Iraqi scientists since the invasion of Iraq by occupation militias is the best way to prevent any kind of research including DU-related research in Iraq. See <http://www.brusseltribunal.org/academicsList.htm>