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Depleted uranium: a strange way to protect Libyan civilians

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In-depth Report: Depleted Uranium

"[uranium tipped missiles] fit the description of a dirty bomb in every way… I would say that it is the perfect weapon for killing lots of people." Marion Falk, chemical physicist (retd), Lawrence Livermore Lab, California, USA

In the first 24 hours of the Libyan attack, US B-2s dropped forty-five 2,000-pound bombs. These massive bombs, along with the Cruise missiles launched from British and French planes and ships, all contained depleted uranium (DU) warheads.

DU is the waste product from the process of enriching uranium ore. It is used in nuclear weapons and reactors. Because it is a very heavy substance, 1.7 times denser than lead, it is highly valued by the military for its ability to punch through armored vehicles and buildings. When a weapon made with a DU tip strikes a solid object like the side of a tank, it goes straight through it, then erupts in a burning cloud of vapor. The vapor settles as dust, which is not only poisonous, but also radioactive.

An impacting DU missile burns at 10,000 degrees C. When it strikes a target, 30% fragments into shrapnel. The remaining 70% vaporises into three highly-toxic oxides, including uranium oxide. This black dust remains suspended in the air and, according to wind and weather, can travel over great distances. If you think Iraq and Libya are far away, remember that radiation from Chernobyl reached Wales.

Particles less than 5 microns in diameter are easily inhaled and may remain in the lungs or other organs for years. Internalized DU can cause kidney damage, cancers of the lung and bone, skin disorders, neurocognitive disorders, chromosome damage, immune deficiency syndromes and rare kidney and bowel diseases. Pregnant women exposed to DU may give birth to infants with genetic defects. Once the dust has vaporised, don't expect the problem to go away soon. As an alpha particle emitter, DU has a half life of 4.5 billion years.

In the 'shock and awe' attack on Iraq, more than 1,500 bombs and missiles were dropped on Baghdad alone. Seymour Hersh has claimed that the US Third Marine Aircraft Wing alone dropped more than "five hundred thousand tons of ordnance". All of it DU-tipped.

Al Jazeera reported that invading US forces fired two hundred tons of radioactive material into buildings, homes, streets and gardens of Baghdad. A reporter from the Christian Science Monitor took a Geiger counter to parts of the city that had been subjected to heavy shelling by US troops. He found radiation levels 1,000 to 1,900 times higher than normal in

residential areas. With its population of 26 million, the US dropped a one-ton bomb for every 52 Iraqi citizens or 40 pounds of explosives per person.

William Hague has said that we are in Libya ” to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas”.You don’t have to look far for who and what are being ‘protected’.

In that first 24 hours the ‘Allies’ ‘expended’ £100 million on DU-tipped ordnance. The European Union’s arms control report said member states issued licences in 2009 for the sale of £293.2 million worth of weapons and weapons systems to Libya. Britain issued arms firms licences for the sale of £21.7 million worth of weaponry to Libya and were also paid by Colonel Gadaffi to send the SAS to train his 32nd Brigade.

For the next 4.5 billion years, I’ll bet that William Hague will not be holidaying in North Africa.
