

Depleted Uranium — a Way Out?

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The term Persian Gulf War Syndrome is now known worldwide — but — after the 1991 Iraq war, as formerly A1 fit soldiers fell ill with debilitating symptoms in their thousands, the cause was, for two years, a “mystery”.

It was in 1993, when a group of twenty-four affected soldiers approached Professor Asaf Durakovic, one of the world’s leading experts on the effects of radiation, that a cause came to light.

They had many times the “safe” level of chemically toxic and radioactive depleted uranium (DU) in their bodies. Durakovic, although a senior officer in the U.S. Army during the first Persian Gulf War, had been unaware that the weapons used had contained depleted uranium.

“I was horrified,” he said. “I was a soldier, but above all I am a doctor.” By 1997, it was estimated that ninety thousand U.S. veterans were suffering from Persian Gulf War Syndrome.

Durakovic, who is also medical consultant for the Children of Chernobyl project at Hadassah University, Jerusalem, lost his job as Chief of Nuclear Medicine at the Veteran’s Administration Medical Facility at Wilmington, Delaware as a direct result of his work with Persian Gulf War veterans contaminated with radiation, he states.

Two other physicians, Dr. Burroughs and Dr. Slingerland of the Boston VA, also lost their jobs when they asked for more sensitive equipment to better diagnose the soldiers referred to them by Professor Durakovic.

Oddly, all the records pertaining to the sick soldiers at the Delaware VA went missing, a syndrome of another kind which has become familiar on both sides of the Atlantic.

Two years before Durakovic’s discovery, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) “self initiated” a report warning the government that if fifty tons of the residual dust from the explosions of the weapons on impact was left “in the region”, they estimated it would generate “half a million” extra cancer deaths by the end of the century (2000.)

Iraq’s cancers and birth deformities have become an anomaly, compared to those in the Pacific Islands and amongst British troops after the nuclear testing in the 1950s.

Further, “depleted” is a misnomer. These weapons are made from waste from the nuclear fuel cycle and thus contain the whole lethal nuclear cocktail. DU weapons (sold to seventeen countries that are known and possibly others — why let poisoning the planet and its population get in the way of numerous millions of quick bucks) are equivalent to spreading

the contents of a nuclear reactor around the globe.

And far from fifty tons and that chilling warning, in Iraq several thousand tons now cover this ancient Biblical land, and with the bombs raining daily, the audit rises nearly hour by hour. The U.S. is currently by far the largest user of DU weapons. Over the past decade, they have bought more than sixteen million DU shells and bullets from Alliant Tech Systems alone. (Source: Janes.)

Strangely, this time, there have been few reports of soldiers with the terrible effects of 1991, where they were only in the region for a few weeks. Although troops now remain for months or a year, Persian Gulf War Syndrome mark 2 seems not an issue. Perhaps it is because, reportedly, doctors treating returning troops have been threatened with jail and or hefty fines if they say anything regarding DU-related symptoms.

The implication regarding compensation to countries affected by this poisoned legacy (DU's lethality lasts for four and a half billion years) and troops is financially stratospheric. Since the 2003 invasion, U.S. troops have denied entry to International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors and all other radiation experts seeking to test ground and air levels.

In Bosnia and the other parts of the former Yugoslavia where DU weapons were used (with missiles also dropped accidentally in neighboring countries, by the U.S., to whom all the world's lives are seemingly cheap) the "Iraq Syndrome" quickly became apparent.

Even European peacekeepers on relatively short tours of duty became ill and developed leukemia and other cancers, and a number died. A five man film crew from BBC Scotland all tested DU positive after filming for less than a week there.

Afghanistan too was "liberated" in 2001, by uranium weapons, which continue to be routinely used, condemning generations yet to be born to deformities and the living — the newborn and under fives the most susceptible — to cancers and other horrific DU-related conditions.

Durakovic also found high levels of uranium in hospital patients there, as there will undoubtedly be in the occupying forces. He also found identical conditions to Iraq amongst the young: "Children born with no limbs, no eyes, or with tumors protruding from their mouths and eyes."

The latest country to fall victim to uranium weapons is Lebanon — but with a difference; it transpires. Dr. Chris Busby*, founder of the Low Level Radiation Campaign and Green Audit, is Scientific Secretary of the European Committee on Radiation Risk and also sits on the (UK) Ministry of Defence Uranium Oversight Board.

Israel is one of the countries that possess uranium weapons. "The first evidence that the IDF (Israeli Defense Force) were using them (in the July-August 2006 Israeli bombardment) was a Getty Picture Library image of an Israeli soldier carrying a DU anti-tank shell," says Busby.

He then noted a report in Lebanon's Daily Star saying that Dr. Khobeisi, a scientist, had measured gamma radiation in a bomb crater at Khiam in the south of the country, at ten to twenty times higher (samples taken from different locations in the crater) than naturally occurring background radiation.

The following month, independent researcher Dai Williams** went to Lebanon on behalf of Green Audit to investigate and bring back samples to the UK for testing. He also brought back an air filter from an ambulance. Tested at the Harwell UKAEA laboratory: “The results were astonishing.”

Both soil and filter contained enriched uranium with the soil sample containing uranium about nine times higher than the natural background. (Remember how threatening the West has become towards Iran’s efforts to enrich uranium?)

The soil sample was also sent to the School of Ocean Sciences in North Wales for a second test by a different method for certainty. The results were the same.

Busby asks, “Why use enriched uranium? It is a bit like shooting your enemy with diamonds.” He contends it is possible that it is a smoke screen for the wider use of depleted uranium, as the final contamination “when all gets mixed up after the war has a natural isotopic signature” (i.e.: can be read as uranium which occurs naturally in nature).

There are two other chilling possibilities says Busby: a fusion bomb or a thermobaric bomb, both of which would need enriched uranium. Certainly, doctors were reporting bodies in conditions they could find in no medical manuals, as in the attack on Falluja, Iraq.

Lebanese authorities denied the presence of enriched uranium; Israel denied using it. The bombardment had ended on the agreement that UN peacekeepers went in. Given their debilitation and mortality rate in the Balkans, this lethal presence might well have deterred them. To be certain, the incident was not isolated. Williams returned to Lebanon and brought back soil and water samples from Khiam and other sites. Enriched uranium was found in water samples from two separate craters in Khiam and in one of the soil samples. Then the money ran out.

The samples tested had already cost £2,000. Donations from an Arab friend and Swiss supporters totaled £850 — and Dai Williams had paid the rest out of his own money. More work is needed, but it is now known that the IDF used enriched uranium in Lebanon.

“Since it is in the ambulance air filter, it is also in the lungs of the inhabitants... the Lebanese people have been sacrificed to cancers, leukemia, birth defects, like the people of the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq,” says Busby, adding, “and it may be worse: since we still do not know what the weapon was.”

And have these weapons been used on the people of Gaza and the West Bank? Furthermore, Israel is not only decimating those she perceives as her enemies, but her own people, neighboring countries, and even those further afield.

In context, Green Audit studied airborne uranium at sites in the UK between 1998 and 2004. There was only one period in which uranium in the air “significantly” exceeded the naturally occurring background presence: during the bombing of Iraq, in March and April 2003.

As with the radionuclides from Chernobyl, which affected Europe and the globe and still contaminate agricultural land, the potentially deadly wave of invisible particles traveled on the wind from Iraq. “We are all (Persian) Gulf War victims now,” commented Busby’s colleague Richard Bramhill.

Can anything be done to halt the use of these genocidal weapons? Francis Boyle, Professor

of International Law at the University of Illinois and author of *The Criminality of Nuclear Deterrence*, thinks so. He has launched a campaign for a global pact against uranium weapons.

Boyle points out that the 1925 Geneva Protocol prohibits “the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases and of all analogous liquids, materials or devices.” Clearly, he says, DU is “analogous” to poison gas.

The government of France is the official depository for the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Boyle contends that rather than aiming for an international treaty prohibiting the use of DU, which would probably take years, pressure should be put on every state to submit a letter to the French government to enforce a ban.

“All that needs to be done is for anti-DU citizens, activists and NGOs in every country to pressure their foreign minister to write to their French counterpart, drawing attention to the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare of 17th June 1925, prohibiting uses as above.”

The letter should add that this Protocol is believed to “already prohibit the use in war of depleted uranium ammunition, uranium armor plate and all other uranium weapons.” A request should be made that the letter be circulated to all other High Contracting Parties to the 1925 Protocol and addressed to:

His Excellency,

The Foreign Minister,

Republic of France,

37, Quai d’Orsay,

75351 Paris, France.

Or Fax: 33-1-43-17-4275.

Professor Boyle points out, “As the Land Mines Treaty demonstrates, it is possible for a coalition of determined activists and NGOs, acting in concert with at least one sympathetic state, to bring into being an international treaty to address humanitarian concerns.”

Such a sympathetic state exists. Belgium outlawed uranium weapons earlier this year. If the rest of the world does not follow, what will happen is what Richard Bramhill calls “a DU-locaust” — of the children of the countries where these weapons have been used, of soldiers, of the uranium miners, and of the munitions workers, as the living, dead, and deformed prove.

Dr Chris Busby is author of *Wings of Death* and *Wolves of Water* (2007) essential reading on radiation’s horrors, published by Green Audit (admin@greenaudit.org). Busby is also involved in *Radioactive Times*, the journal of the Low Level Radiation Campaign, a detailed quarterly update on nuclear industry shenanigans (<http://www.llrc.org>).

** See <http://www.eoslifework.co.uk> for a wealth of DU related material.

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