

“Green Light” to Use of Depleted Uranium Weapons in Libya?

By [International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons](#)

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Global Research Editor's Note

Consult the statements of the UK and the US indicated below. They deny that DU weapons are being used but they also state that NATO allies are “free to use them”. Consult highlighted sections.

UK: allies free to use depleted uranium in Libya if they wish

UK Defence Minister Dr Liam Fox says UK use of DU in Libya unlikely but says that allies are free to use it if they wish to.

15 April 2011 –



Responding to a parliamentary question from UK Green Party leader Caroline Lucas, the Defence Minister Dr Liam Fox has stated that it is unlikely that the UK will use DU in the Libya conflict because they do not foresee UK Challenger tanks being deployed. Challenger 2 tanks can fire the UK's only type of DU ammunition, the 120mm CHARM3 round.

Lucas also asked whether there had been discussions among the coalition taking military action as to whether DU could be used. This question was sidestepped with a claim that other nations are free to choose whatever munitions they wish to engage armoured targets in Libya.

[52204] Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in (a) the US Administration and (b) the governments of other countries forming the coalition for military action in Libya on policy on the use of depleted uranium weapons; and how that policy (a) is applied to and (b) will apply in operations in Libya.

[51481] Dr Liam Fox: The Government's policy is that depleted uranium (DU) can be used within weapons. It is not prohibited under current or likely future international agreements. The UK's armed forces use all munitions in accordance with international humanitarian law. It would be quite wrong to deny our serving personnel a legitimate and effective capability. The only DU munition in service with our armed forces is the Charm 3 antitank round fired from the Challenger 2 tank. With no deployed ground forces it follows that none

of the weapons supplied to UK armed forces for uses over Libya contain DU. Other nations may choose to use DU munitions fired from aircraft guns against armoured targets if they have that capability but that is a choice for them alone to make.

US denies depleted uranium use in Libya, but refuses to rule out future use

Air Force Spokeswoman claims that A-10s were not loaded with DU ammunition, but does not rule out future use in the conflict.

4 April 2011

A US Airforce Spokeswoman has told a Scottish journalist that, as of 2nd April, A-10s fighting in Libya have not been firing DU ammunition. However, she refused to give any assurances about the future use of DU, stating that she didn't want "to speculate on what may or may not be used in the future".

Rob Edwards, a writer for the Sunday Herald, contacted Paula Kurtz, Director of Public Affairs for the 17th US Air Force following ICBUW's updated statement on the situation in Libya and calls by campaigners for the US to clarify the situation. Six A-10s have been deployed to Libya from the 81st Fighter Squadron, 52nd Fighter Wing, which is part of the 17th Air Force. The A-10s are normally based in Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, but are currently operating out of Aviano Air Force Base in Italy.



A-10s at Aviano Air Force Base, Italy. Still from a Video on Russia Today

A-10 planes fire the 30mm PGU-14 Armour Piercing Incendiary DU round from the GAU-8 rotary cannon fitted beneath the cockpit of the A-10. The GAU-8 normally fires a mix of PGU-14 and PGU-13 High Explosive rounds, which are pre-loaded on an ammunition belt before the plane flies. If Kurtz's statement is correct, then this is the first public acknowledgement by the US that A-10s are being loaded with only PGU-13 rounds, although the practice has previously been identified in photographs of A-10 units in Afghanistan.

During congressional hearings in the US last Thursday, Admiral Mike Mullen suggested that the A-10 and AC-130 aircraft, which specialise in attacking ground forces, would only be active for several more days. It is still not known whether US Marines AV-8B Harriers in Libya have been equipped with DU ammunition. US Marine Harriers have historically been armed with the 20mm PGU-20/U Armour Piercing Incendiary round, and fired 11 tons of DU during the 1991 Gulf War. ICBUW has still not seen any clear evidence that this round has been taken out of service, as some reports have suggested.

If the A-10 has indeed been deployed to Libya without DU ammunition, this is certainly good news, though the refusal to rule out future use of DU in this conflict is clearly of concern. Any decision on whether to deploy the A-10s with DU ammunition should be seen in terms of wider US moves to phase out DU in medium calibre rounds, first reported by ICBUW in January 2010. While the US has refused to cede ground publicly to anti-DU campaigners, these moves are a tacit admission that the use of DU is politically unacceptable, and that its properties are so unique that alternatives cannot be found.

ICBUW calls for the US to give a categorical assurance, similar to that given by UK Prime Minister David Cameron, that weapons containing DU have no place in this conflict. A clear statement, covering both A-10 and AV-8B aircraft should be issued at the earliest opportunity.

If the US has taken a strategic decision not to equip US planes with DU ammunition in this conflict, that is a progressive step. However, in the absence of a public declaration that such a decision has been taken, concerns will remain that the door has been left open for the future use of DU in Libya.

ICBUW calls for the US to take steps in a clear and transparent manner to assure the world that no US aircraft will go into the air equipped with DU ammunition, and that pilots will not be cleared to fire it. Any DU ammunition currently in theatre should be separated and left unused.

As ICBUW has long maintained, DU has no place in conventional munitions. The current position of the US affirms that position: if US planes have been able to use alternatives, there is no reason why alternatives should not be found for all ammunition containing DU. We call for all current user states to remove these weapons from their arsenals.

An urgent step to protect civilians in areas where DU weapons have already been used, is for user states to share targeting data with the authorities in affected states – a move endorsed by 148 states in the UN General Assembly last December, and opposed by only four, including the US, France and UK.

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