

Low Intensity Nuclear War

NATO War Crimes in the Balkans

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Editorial Note

This article was originally published by [Telepolis](#) (Germany) on 15 March 2001 and by Global Research on 20 August 2002.

We are posting this text with a view to establishing the record of US-NATO war crimes in Kosovo. This initial report published in early 2001 is presented in the context of recent and ongoing findings on the impacts of depleted uranium radiation in Iraq, the Balkans and Afghanistan.

The comparative study of these three war theaters is crucial in establishing the broader record of US-NATO war crimes.

Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research, 5 November 2006

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) convey the illusion (contrary to scientific evidence) that the health risks of depleted uranium can easily be dealt with by cordoning off and “cleaning up” the “affected areas” targeted by the US Air Force’s A-10 “anti-tank killers.” What they fail to mention is that the radioactive dust has already spread beyond the 72 “identified target sites” in Kosovo. Most of the villages and cities including Pristina, Prizren and Pec lie within less than 20 km. of these sites, confirming that the whole province is contaminated, putting not only “peacekeepers” but the entire civilian population at risk.

The death from leukemia of eight Italian peacekeepers stationed in Bosnia and Kosovo sparked an uproar in the Italian Parliament, following the leaking of a secret military document to the Italian newspaper La Repubblica. In Portugal, the Defense Ministry was also involved in what amounted to a deliberate camouflage of “the cause of death” of Portuguese peacekeeper Corporal Hugo Paulino. ““Citing “herpes of the brain”, the army refused to allow his family to commission a postmortem examination.”¹ Amidst mounting political pressure, Defense Minister Julio Castro Caldas advised NATO Headquarters in November that he was withdrawing Portuguese troops from Kosovo: “They were not, he said, going to become uranium meat”. ²

As the number of cancer cases among Balkans “peacekeepers” rises, NATO’s cover-up has started to fracture. Several European governments have been obliged to publicly

acknowledge the “alleged health risks” of depleted uranium (DU) shells used by the US Air Force in NATO’s 78-day war against Yugoslavia.

The Western media points to an apparent “split” within the military alliance. In fact there was no “division” or disagreement between Washington and its European allies until the scandal broke through the gilded surface.

Italy, Portugal, France and Belgium were fully aware that DU weapons were being used. The health impacts –including mountains of scientific reports– were known and available to European governments. Italy participated in the scheduling of the A-10 “anti-tank killer” raids (carrying DU shells) out of its Aviano and Gioia del Colle air force bases. The Italian Defense Ministry knew what was happening at military bases under its jurisdiction.

Washington’s European partners in NATO including Britain, France, Turkey, Greece have DU weapons in their arsenals. Canada is one of the main suppliers of depleted uranium. NATO countries share full responsibility for the use of weapons banned by the Geneva and Hague conventions and the 1945 Nuremberg Charter on war crimes. 3

Since the Gulf War, Washington launched a “cover-up” on the health impacts of DU toxic radiation known as the “Gulf War Syndrome”, with the tacit endorsement of its NATO partners.

While NATO had until recently denied using DU shells in the 1999 war against Yugoslavia, it now admits that although it did use DU ammunition, the shells “have negligible radioactivity...and [a]ny resulting debris posing any significant risk dissipates soon after the impact.” 4 While casually denying “any connection between illness and exposure to depleted uranium”, the Pentagon nonetheless concedes –in an ambiguous statement– that “the main danger posed by depleted uranium occurs if it is inhaled.” 5

And who inhales the radioactive dust, which has spread across the Land?

The shrouded statements from European governments convey the uncomfortable illusion that only peacekeepers “might be at risk”, –i.e. radioactive particles are only inhaled by military personnel and expatriate civilians, as if nobody else in the Balkans were affected. The impacts on local civilians are not mentioned.

In docile complicity, a new media consensus has unfolded: the mainstream press concurs without further scrutiny that only “peace-keepers” breathe the air. “But what about everybody else.”6 In Kosovo some 2 million civilian men, women and children have been exposed to the radioactive fallout since the beginning of the bombing in March 1999. In the Balkans, more than 20 million people are potentially at risk:

“The risk in Kosovo and elsewhere in the Balkans is augmented by the uncertainty of where DU was dropped in whatever form and what winds and surface water movements spread it further. Working the fields, walking about, just being there, touching objects, breathing and drinking water are all risky. A British expert predicted that thousands of people in the Balkans will get sick of DU. The radioactive and toxic DU-oxides don’t disintegrate. They are practically permanent.” 7

Keep in mind that the heavily armed “peacekeepers” together with United Nations staff and

civilian personnel of “humanitarian” organisations entered Kosovo in June 1999. The spread of radioactive dust from DU, however, started on “day one” of the 78 day bombing of Yugoslavia. With the exception of NATO Special Forces –who were assisting the KLA on the ground– NATO military personnel was not present on the battlefield. In other words, there was no radioactive exposure to NATO troops during a “push button” air war, which the Alliance forces waged from the high skies. Yugoslav civilians are, therefore, at much greater risk because they were exposed to radioactive fallout throughout the bombings as well in the wake of the war. Yet the official communiqués suggest that only KFOR troops and expatriate civilians “might be at risk” implying that local civilians simply do not matter. Only servicemen and expatriate personnel have been screened for radiation levels.

Childhood Cancers

The first signs of radiation on children, including herpes on the mouth and skin rashes on the back and ankles have been observed in Kosovo.⁸ In Northern Kosovo –the area least affected by DU shells ([see Map](#)) — 160 people are being treated for cancer.⁹ The number of leukemia cases in Northern Kosovo has increased by 200 percent since NATO’s air campaign, and children have been born with deformities.¹⁰ This information regarding civilian victims –which the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has been careful not to reveal— refutes NATO’s main “assumption” that radioactive dust does not spread beyond the target sites, most of which are in the Southwestern and Southern regions close to the Albanian and Macedonian borders.



CLICK MAP TO ENLARGE

These findings are consistent with those from Iraq, where the use of depleted uranium weapons during the 1991 Gulf War resulted in “increases in childhood cancers and leukemia, Hodgkin’s disease, lymphomas, and increases in congenital diseases and deformities in fetuses, along with limb reductional abnormalities and increases in genetic abnormalities throughout Iraq.”¹¹ Pediatric examinations on Iraqi children confirm that:

“childhood leukemia has risen 600% in the areas [of Iraq] where DU was used. Stillbirths, births or abortion of fetuses with monstrous abnormalities, and other cancers in children

born since [the Gulf War in] 1991 have also been found.” 12

Cover-up

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have tacitly accepted NATO-Pentagon assumptions concerning the health impacts of depleted uranium. When UNEP conducted its first assessment of DU radiation in Kosovo in 1999, NATO refused to provide the mission with maps indicating the locations of “affected areas” (points of impact where DU shells had fallen).

On the pretext that “there was insufficient data available to comprehensively address the issue of the impacts of depleted uranium ordnance,” UNEP produced an inconclusive and noncommittal “desk study” which was appended to the 1999 Balkans Task Force Report (BTF) on the environmental impacts of the War. 13 UNEP’s desk study pointed to the “possible use of DU” thereby implying that it was still unsure as to whether DU shells had actually been used.

UNEP’s evasiveness -claiming lack of sufficient data- contributed, in the wake of the bombings, to temporarily dissipating public concern. More generally, the UNEP-UNCHS Balkans Task Force report tends to downplay the seriousness of the environmental catastrophe triggered by NATO. Amply documented, the catastrophe was the deliberate result of military planning.¹⁴

NATO maps (indicating where DU shells had been targeted) were not required for UNEP and the WHO to conduct an investigation on the health impacts of depleted uranium radiation. A study of this nature -inevitably requiring a team of medical specialists in pediatrics and cancer working in liaison with experts on toxic radiation- was never carried out. In fact, UNEP’s stated “scientific” assumption precluded from the outset a meaningful assessment of the health impacts. According to UNEP:

“the effects of DU are mainly localized in the places DU has been used and the affected areas are likely to be small”. 15 See the 1999 desk study, op. cit.)

This proposition (which is presented without scientific proof) is shared by UNEP’s sister organization, the WHO:

“You would have to be very close to a damaged tank and be there within seconds of it being hit...These soldiers were very unlikely to have been exposed.” 16

These statements by UN bodies (quoted by NATO and the Pentagon to justify the use of DU weapons) are part and parcel of the camouflage. They convey the illusion that the health risks to peacekeepers and local civilians can easily be dealt with by cordoning off and “cleaning up” the “targeted areas.”

The WHO has warned, in this regard, that depleted uranium could affect children playing in these areas “because children... tend to pick up pieces of dirt or put their toys in their mouth.”¹⁷ What the WHO fails to acknowledge is that the radioactive dust has already spread beyond the affected areas, implying that children throughout Kosovo are at risk.

This tacit complicity of specialized agencies of the UN is yet another symptom of the deterioration of the United Nations system, which now plays an underhand role in covering up NATO war crimes. Since the Gulf War, the WHO has been instrumental in blocking a meaningful investigation of the health impacts of depleted uranium radiation on Iraqi children, claiming “it had no data to conduct an in-depth investigation” 18

UNEP and NATO Working Hand in Glove

Amidst the public outcry and mounting evidence of cancer among Balkans military personnel, UNEP conducted a second assessment in November 2000 which included field measurements of beta and gamma particle radiations in 11 so-called “affected areas” of Kosovo.¹⁹

Despite NATO’s earlier refusal to collaborate with UNEP, the two organizations are currently working hand in glove. The composition of the mission was established in consultation with NATO. The representative from Greenpeace (involved in the 1999 study) had been dumped. NATO maps were readily available; the investigation was to focus narrowly on the collection of soil, water samples, etc. in 11 selected sites (“affected areas”) out of a total of some 72 sites within Kosovo (see NATO map below, at <http://balkans.unep.ch/du/targetmap.html>).

The broader health issues were not part of the mission’s terms of reference. The two medical researchers dispatched by the WHO in 1999 (as part of the desk study mission) had been replaced with experts from the US Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (see <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/default.htm>) and AC Laboratorium Spiez (ACLS), a division of the Swiss Defense Procurement Agency.

AC Laboratorium Spiez (ACLS) has actively collaborated in chemical weapons inspections in Iraq. Under the disguise of Swiss neutrality, ACLS constitutes an informal mouthpiece for NATO. ACLS has been on contract with NATO’s “Partnership for Peace” financed by the Swiss government’s contribution to the PfP.²⁰

Although the November mission was still under UNEP auspices, the Swiss government was funding most of fieldwork with ACLS –a division of the Swiss military– playing a central role. The mission –integrated by representatives linked to the Military establishment– was working on the premise (amply reviewed on ACLS’s web page) that DU radioactive dust does not (under any circumstances) travel beyond the “point of release.” ²¹

The results of the report to be published in March 2001 are a foregone conclusion. They focus on radiation levels in the immediate vicinity of the target sites . According to the mission’s “back to office report” (January 2001):

“... [A]lready at this stage the Team can conclude that at some of the DU locations, the radiation level is slightly higher above normal at very limited spots. It would therefore be an unnecessary risk to the population to be in direct contact with any remnants of DU ammunition or with the spots where these have been found.” ²²

Double Standards If radioactivity were confined to so-called “very limited spots”, why then have KFOR troops been instructed by their governments “not to eat local produce... have drinking water flown in ...and that clothes must be destroyed on departure and vehicles decontaminated.”²³ According to Paul Sullivan, executive director of the National Gulf War

Resource Center, depleted uranium in Yugoslavia could affect “agricultural areas, places where livestock graze and where crops are grown, thereby introducing the specter of possible contamination of the food chain.” (In November 2000, Gulf War veterans affected by DU launched a class action law-suit against the US government).

Contamination Over A Large Geographical Area

According to NATO sources (communicated to UNEP), some 112 sites in Yugoslavia (of which 72 are in Kosovo) were targeted during the war with depleted uranium antitank shells. Between 30,000 and 50,000 DU shells were fired.

Scientific evidence amply confirms that the DU radioactive aerosol spreads from “the point of release” over a large geographical area suggesting that large parts of the province of Kosovo are contaminated. “[R]adioactive derivatives can linger in the air for months... ”Just one particle in the lungs is enough... a single particle could travel to the lymph nodes, where the radioactivity would lower the body’s defenses against lymphomas and leukemia” 24

According to World renowned radiologist Dr. Rosalie Bertell:

When used in war, the depleted uranium (DU) bursts into flame [and] releasing a deadly radioactive aerosol of uranium, unlike anything seen before. It can kill everyone in a tank. This ceramic aerosol is much lighter than uranium dust. It can travel in air tens of kilometres from the point of release, or be stirred up in dust and resuspended in air with wind or human movement. It is very small and can be breathed in by anyone: a baby, pregnant woman, the elderly, the sick. This radioactive ceramic can stay deep in the lungs for years, irradiating the tissue with powerful alpha particles within about a 30 micron sphere, causing emphysema and/or fibrosis. The ceramic can also be swallowed and do damage to the gastro-intestinal tract. In time, it penetrates the lung tissue and enters into the blood stream. ...It can also initiate cancer or promote cancers which have been initiated by other carcinogens”. 25

The targeted sites within Kosovo (see NATO map at <http://balkans.unep.ch/du/targetmap.html>) although concentrated on the South-western border are scattered throughout the province. Most of the villages and cities including Pristina, Prizren and Pec lie within less than 20 km. of the 72 DU target sites confirming that the entire province is contaminated.

Nato War Crimes

The bombing of Yugoslavia is best described as a “low intensity nuclear war” using toxic radioactive shells and missiles. Amply documented, the radioactive fall-out potentially puts millions of people at risk throughout the Balkans.

In March 1999, NATO launched the air raids invoking broad humanitarian principles and ideals. NATO had “come to the rescue” of ethnic Albanian Kosovars on the grounds they were being massacred by Serb forces. The forensic reports by the FBI and Europol confirm that the massacres did not occur. In a cruel irony, Albanian Kosovar civilians are among the main victims of DU radiation.

To maintain the cover-up, NATO is now prepared to reveal a small fraction of the truth. The military Alliance –in liaison with NATO member governments– wants at all cost to maintain

the focus on “peacekeepers” and keep local civilians out of the picture, because if the entire truth gets out, then people might start asking questions such as “how is it that the Kosovar Albanians, the people we were supposed to rescue are now the victims?” In both Bosnia and Kosovo, the UN has been careful not to record cancer cases among civilians. The narrow focus on “peacekeepers” is part of the cover-up. It distracts public opinion from the broader issue of civilian victims.

The primary victims of DU weapons are children, making their use a “war crime against children.” The use of depleted uranium munitions is only one among several NATO crimes against humanity committed in Iraq and the Balkans

According to official records, some 1800 Balkans peacekeepers (Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo) suffer from health ailments related to DU radiation.²⁶ Assuming the same level of risk (as a percentage of population), the numbers of civilians throughout former Yugoslavia affected by DU radiation would be in the tens of thousands. British scientist Roger Coghill suggests, in this regard, that “throughout the Balkan region, there will be an extra 10,150 deaths from cancer because of the use of DU. That will include local people, K-FOR personnel, aid workers, everyone.”²⁷ Moreover, according to a report published in Athens during the War, the impacts of depleted uranium are likely to extend beyond the Balkans. Albania, and Macedonia but also Greece, Italy, Austria and Hungary face a potential threat to human health as a result of the use of radioactive depleted uranium shells during the 1999 War.

While no overall data on civilian deaths have been recorded, partial evidence confirms that a large numbers of civilians have already died as result of DU radiation since the war in Bosnia:

“DU radiation and an apparent use of defoliants by US/NATO troops against Serbian land and population [in Bosnia], have caused many birth defects among babies born after the US/NATO bombing and occupation; the magnitude of this problem has stunned Serbian medical experts and panicked the population.” ²⁸

A recent account points to several hundred deaths of civilians solely in one Bosnian village:

The village is empty, the cemetery full. Soon there will be no more room for the dead. Among refugee families who moved to Bratunac from Hadzici [in the outskirts of Sarajevo] there is a hardly a household not cloaked in mourning...On them are fresh wreaths, some with flowers that have not yet wilted. On the crosses the years of death 1998, 1999, 2000 and the grave of a 20 year-old woman at the end of the rows. She died a few days ago... No one could even imagine that in only one or two years the part of the cemetery set aside for civilians would be doubly full... It happens often that one of the natives of Hadzici will suddenly die. Or they will go to see the doctor in Belgrade and when they come back their relatives will tell us that they are dying of cancer... [C]hief doctor Slavica Jovanovic...conducted an investigation and proved that in 1998 the mortality rate far exceeded the birth rate. She showed that it wasn't just a question of fate but something far more serious... 'Zoran Stankovic, the renowned pathologist from the Military Medical Academy (VMA) determined that over 200 of his patients from this area died of cancer, most probably due to the effects of depleted uranium in dropped NATO bombs five years ago. But someone quickly silenced the public and everything was hushed up. 'You see, our cemetery is full of fresh graves while the people from Vinca [Nuclear Institute] claim that uranium isn't dangerous. What other kind

of evidence do you need if people are dying?...’ The refugees from Hadzici arrived in Bratunac in a sizeable number. There were almost 5,000 of them. There were 1,000 just in the collective centers. Now, says Zelenovic, ‘there are about 600 of them left. And they certainly had nowhere else to go’ ... Someone dies of cancer every third day; there is no more room in the cemeteries.”²⁹

Map of Contaminated Areas

[The NATO “Map Of Sites As Being Targeted By Ordnance Containing Depleted Uranium during the 1999 Kosovo Conflict”](#)

Photographs of Iraqi children affected by DU radiation:

<http://www.web-light.nl/VISIE/extremedeformities.html> . **Please Note: these photographs are very disturbing, but at the same time revealing of US war crimes in Iraq, the Balkans and Afghanistan where DU ordnance has been used.**

If unable to access the document, go first to <http://www.web-light.nl/> and follow the link to “Depleted Uranium” and then to “Extreme Deformities in Iraqi Children”. Some of these photographs are by renowned scientist and expert on DU radiation Dr. Siegfried Horst Guenther.

Endnotes

1 The Independent, London, 4 January 2001.

2 See Felicity Arbutnot, “It Turns out that Depleted Uranium is Bad for NATO” Troops, Emperors Clothes, <http://emperors-clothes.com/articles/arbuth/port.htm> . 11 October 2000. See also interview with F. Arbutnot.

3 In all, some 17 countries including Russia, Israel, Saudi Arabia and South Korea are known to have DU weapons in their arsenal. See Vladimir Zajic, Review of Radioactivity, Military Use, and Health Effects of Depleted Uranium, 1999 at <http://vzajic.tripod.com/>. See John Catalinotto and Sara Flounders, Is the Israeli Military using Depleted Uranium Weapons against the Palestinians? International Action Center, <http://www.iacenter.org/> , New York, 2000

4 Agence France Presse, 4 January 20001.

5 United Press International, 5 January 2001.

6 See Felicity Arbutnot, op cit.

7 Piot Bein, “More on Depleted Uranium”, Emperors Clothes at <http://emperors-clothes.com/articles/arbuth/port.htm> .11 October 2000.

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Second Edition, International Action Center, <http://www.iacenter.org/> , New York, 2000.

9 Beta News Agency, Belgrade, 13.50 GMT, 10 Jan 2001, in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 12 January 2001.

10 Ibid.

11 See Rick McDowell, "Economic Sanctions on Iraq", Z Magazine, November 1997.

12. Carlo Pona, "The Criminal Use of Depleted Uranium", International Tribunal for U.S./NATO War Crimes in Yugoslavia, International Action Center, <http://www.iacenter.org/>, New York, June 10, 2000. See also "Metal of Dishonor", op. cit.

13 See UNEP/UNCHS Balkans Task Force Final Report "The Kosovo Conflict -Consequences for the Environment & Human Settlements" at <http://balkans.unep.ch/fry/fry.html>; see the "desk study" on "The Potential Effects on Human Health and the Environment of the Possible Use of Depleted Uranium (DU)" at <http://balkans.unep.ch/du/du.html>; see also "UN considers New Data on Depleted Uranium in Kosovo", UNEP, Geneva, 20 September 2000.

14 See Michel Chossudovsky, NATO Willfully Triggered an Environmental Disaster, <http://emperors-clothes.com/articles/chuss/willful.htm>

15 See the 1999 UNEP "desk study", op. cit.

16 According to a toxicologist at the International Agency for Research on Cancer which is a division of the WHO, Associated Press, January 5 2001.

17 According to WHO specialist, quoted in the Boston Globe, January 10, 2001.

18 Boston Globe, June 27 2000, statement of Mark Parkin, an expert with the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

19 See UNEP Press Release at <http://balkans.unep.ch/du/missions.html> .

20 See AC Laboratorium Spiez (ACLS) website at <http://www.vbs.admin.ch/internet/gr/acls/e/index.htm>

21 Ibid

22 Se UNEP Press Release at <http://balkans.unep.ch/du/missions.html> ; see also UNEP, "Advisory Note on Current work on DU by UNEP" at. <http://balkans.unep.ch/press/press010111.html> .

23. Arbuthot, op cit.

24 According to British radiologist Roger William Coghill, quoted in Associated Press, 5 January 2000.

25 Rosalie Bertell, Email Communication, May 1999.

26 RTBF, Belgian French Language Television, 9 January 2001

27 Calgary Herald, 4 January 2001.

28 Tika Jankovitch, "Chemical/Nuclear Warfare in Bosnia: Eyewitness To Hell" Comments by Jared Israel, Emperors Clothes at <http://emperors-clothes.com/articles/tika/hell.html> ., 9 January 2001.

29 Dubravka Vujanovic "Someone Dies of Cancer every Third Day; There is no More Room in the Cemeteries" , Nedeljni Telegraf, Belgrade, 10 January 2001. On the same subject see Robert Fisk, "I see 300 Graves that could bear the Headstone: 'Died of Depleted Uranium', The Independent, London, 13 January 2001

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