

Outrage Grows as Pentagon Confirms Depleted Uranium Rounds Headed to Ukraine

By [Jake Johnson](#)

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The Pentagon [confirmed](#) Wednesday that the U.S. will send depleted uranium ammunition to Ukraine as part of a new \$175 million military aid package, drawing outrage from progressive foreign policy advocates who have warned against such a move and noted the horrific impact such weapons have had in Iraq and elsewhere.

A byproduct of natural uranium enrichment, depleted uranium is highly dense and often used for projectiles designed to pierce tanks and other armored vehicles. On impact, depleted uranium weapons [produce a cloud of particles](#) that can be inhaled by soldiers and nearby civilians.

The Pentagon said it is sending Ukraine 120mm depleted uranium rounds that can be fired from the Abrams tanks the U.S. is also [set to begin delivering](#).

The announcement came weeks after the U.S. shipped [widely banned](#) cluster munitions to Ukraine, ignoring human rights groups' [warnings](#) about the potentially devastating consequences for civilians in the present and years into the future.

"It wasn't enough for the U.S. to send [cluster bombs](#) that will kill children for generations to Ukraine," Aída Chávez, communications director for the progressive anti-war group Just Foreign Policy, [wrote](#) on social media. "Now, the Biden admin is sending depleted uranium—which will cause babies to be born with severe deformities and cancer."

"To this day," Chávez added, "children in places like Fallujah are being born with gruesome birth defects due to the U.S. military's use of depleted uranium."

The U.S.-led coalition that invaded Iraq in 2003 used [thousands of tonnes](#) of depleted uranium bombs and shells over just a three-week period that year.

Research suggests the lasting health effects for Iraqis have been severe.

According to a [study](#) published in the journal *Environmental Pollution* in 2020, proximity to a U.S. military base in Iraq was linked to “higher levels of uranium and thorium” and a [greater risk of birth defects](#), including heart problems and missing limbs.

The study notes that thorium is “a radioactive compound and a direct depleted uranium decay product.”

A 2021 [study](#) published in *BMJ Public Health* also found “possible associations between exposure to depleted uranium and adverse health outcomes among the Iraqi population,” though the authors noted that “U.S. sanctions on Iraq may have played a role in limiting research and publication on the health impacts of weaponized uranium.”

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The U.S. is not the first country to send depleted uranium to Ukraine as it fights invading Russian forces. The United Kingdom [announced](#) in March that it would deliver thousands of rounds of depleted uranium ammunition to the Ukrainian military.

Moscow [decried](#) the U.S. decision to arm Ukrainian forces with depleted uranium as “an indicator of inhumanity” and has [threatened to use](#) its own stockpile of depleted uranium.

Phil Miller, chief reporter for *Declassified UK*, said in a *Democracy Now!* [appearance](#) on Wednesday that “Biden’s decision to send tanks with depleted uranium to Ukraine has been made possible in large part because Britain led the way on this.”

Earlier this week, Miller [reported](#) that a U.K. tank capable of firing depleted uranium rounds was destroyed in Ukraine, prompting contamination fears.

“What we’ve seen in other conflicts, notably in Iraq, is that these tank hulls litter the battlefield for many years after the conflict,” Miller said Wednesday. “Children go and play on them, thinking they’re some kind of climbing frame, and they can become contaminated with depleted uranium, leading to very rare forms of cancer.”

“It really is quite alarming to now think that this is going to be used or is being used in Ukraine in areas where, you know, we want Ukrainian civilians to be able to live after the conflict,” Miller added. “On top of dealing with unexploded cluster munitions, they’re also going to have this huge hazard of depleted uranium to contend with, as well.”

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Jake Johnson is a senior editor and staff writer for Common Dreams.

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