S.K.E.T.

DEPLETED URANIUM WEAPONS

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FOUR BILLION YEARS OF CONGENITAL DEFORMATIES

The Weapons of War are quietly changing. With virtually no public oversight, radioactive weapons have replaced conventional weapons as the cornerstone of American military force. The U.S. military's armour piercing ammunition is now packed with depleted uranium (DU), a waste leftover from uranium enrichment processes for nuclear bombs and power plants. The legal situation of Du ammunition is not affected by the nuclear disarmament treaty because its principle of operation is not based on nuclear fission.

At first view, the use of DU ammunition does not conflict with any current agreement regarding warfare.
The harm potential of DU is similar to chemical and biological weapons already banned by the United Nations but it has a higher sustainability. DU weapons have not been categorised as a special weapon technology like nuclear, chemical or biologic weapons and so currently it is handled like conventional weaponry.

Different sources state about 330 - 375 metric tons of DU ammunition was fired in the 1991 gulf war, 7 - 20 metric tons on the Balkan conflict in 1999 and about 1000 metric tons in the 2003 Iraq conflict, mostly in cities or urban areas. DU ammunition has also been used in the Afghan conflict and in Somalia.
After almost twenty years of using DU weapons the long-term consequences are still unknown. After the first gulf war in 1991 in the area of Basrah (south Iraq) cases of cancer rose ten times and there have been twenty times more babies with congenital deformities. Current studies of the effects of the use of DU show there is no doubt that uranium ammunitions are to blame.

DU has a half-life of 4.5 billion years and trials in the Balkan area are showing that it is difficult and very expensive to clean the former battlefields containing the DU projectiles. So far several studies of different independent organisations prove that DU has plenty negative effects on living organisms such as aberrations of chromosomes. Combatants of both sides and non combatants during the conflicts are equally affected. For example a 2001 study of 15 000 1991 - Gulf war veterans and 15 000 control veterans found that the Gulf War veterans were 1.8 (male) to 2.8 (female) times more likely to have children with birth defects. After examination of children's medical records two years later, the birth defect rate increased by more than 20%. Thus beside the toxic potential of DU the long-term damage might be immense.

700 000 TONS TO WIPE OUT HUMAN KIND

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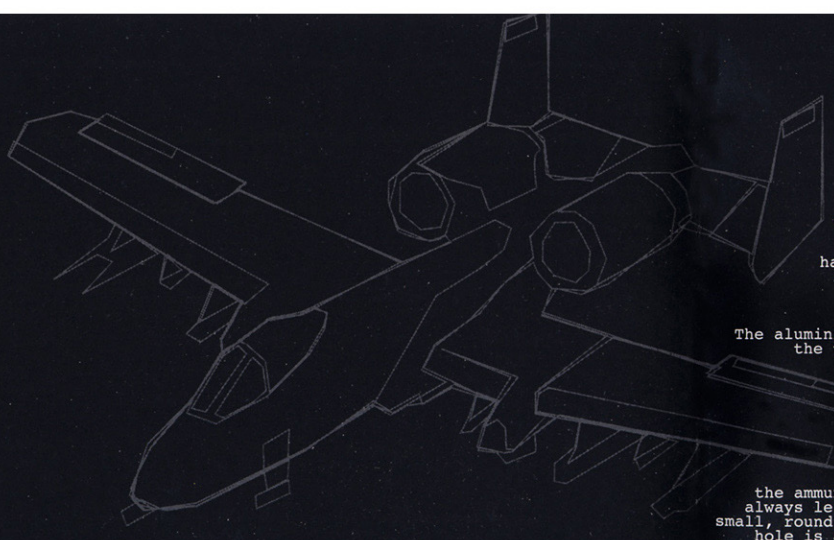
In natural Uranium, the proportion of the isotope 235 is only about 0.7%, the greater part is Uranium 238. As only Uranium 235 is suitable as fissile material for use in nuclear power stations, the Uranium ore has to be enriched by artificially increasing the proportion of this isotope. As a result there are large quantities of Depleted Uranium (DU) produced by this procedure.

These waste products from the uranium industry are stored in specially shielded deposits at considerable cost, because of they are highly toxic and radioactive. In order to reduce costs, DU of the isotope 238 is passed on to interested parties like the arms industry, even free of charge.

As of June 1998, the US Department of Energy (DOE) owned approximately 57 800 steel cylinders of Depleted Uranium hexafluoride (UF6) that hold a maximum 12.6 metric tons each, for a total mass of 734 000 metric tons. DU alone amounts to 67.6% of this mass, or 496 000 metric tons. The total radioactivity of depleted UF6 is approximately 8.6 Ci/cylinder for a total of 527 000 Ci and the a-activity 3.16 Ci/cylinder for a total of 193 000 Ci. Depleted UF6 continues to be produced at the rate of about 150 cylinders or 1900 metric tons per year.



HOW DU WORKS

Depleted Uranium (DU) is a low cost material that is readily available. DU's high density (19.05 g/cm³, 1.7' more than 11.35 g/cm³ for lead) and low cost makes it a material of choice for aircraft counterweights and also a highly effective material for military armour and anti-armour ammunitions.

In the early 70's, the US Army began researching the use of DU and tungsten metal in kinetic energy penetrators and tank armour. DU was selected due to its availability and pyrophoricity. While 50% of tungsten has to be imported, mainly from China, DU is provided free of charge to arms manufacturers. Tungsten also has a much higher melting point (3410°C) than uranium (1132°C) and lacks pyrophoricity. Consequently, a tungsten projectile becomes blunt on impact and is, compared to DU, a less effective penetrating armour.

The aluminium sabot of a DU tank round drops off within the first 100 m of the trajectory and the bare DU projectile then moves with a velocity of 1.5 km/sec. The surface of a DU penetrator ignites on impact (especially with steel), partially liquefies due to the high temperature generated by the impact and relatively low melting point and the projectile sharpens as it melts and pierces the heavy armour. The projectile loses 40% to 70% of its mass and disperses a fine dust like aerosol that can be carried long distances by winds or absorbed directly into the soil and groundwater. The inside of the target burns at high temperatures and the ammunition and the fuel explodes. The target and the projectiles are always left behind. Depleted uranium impacts are often characterized by a small, round entry hole. If the penetrator goes through the target, the exit hole is also round and slightly larger than the entry hole. For example, 30 mm DU rounds from GAU-8A Avenger seven-barrel Gatling gun mounted on A-10 Warthog aircraft can pierce steel armour up to 9 cm (3.5 in.) thick.

The United States is no longer the only country with DU munitions. Depleted uranium weapons have been acquired by 17 countries including Britain, France, Russia, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Pakistan, Thailand, South Korea, Taiwan and other countries which the Pentagon will not disclose for national security reasons. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) export licenses reveal the United States to be a major supplier of DU for military systems.

HIGHWAY OF DEATH

More than 2000 vehicles and tens of thousands of charred and dismembered bodies littered the sixty miles of highway 80.

IS THE BABY NORMAL?

During the last few years several scientists have carried out extensive studies in Iraq. The results have produced ample evidence to prove the fact that contact with DU ammunition has the following consequences, especially for children:

- A considerable increase in infectious diseases caused by severe immune-deficiencies in a great part of the population.
- Frequent occurrence of massive herpes and zoster afflictions, also in children.
- AIDS - like syndromes
- A hitherto unknown syndrome caused by renal and hepatic dysfunctions, now so-called 'Morbus Gunther'.
- Leukaemia, Aplastic anaemia and malignant neoplasm
- Congenital deformities caused by genetic defects; also partly diagnosed in animals.

The results of the studies show similarities to the symptoms of 'Gulf War Syndrome' or 'Balkan Syndrome' in allied soldiers and their children. The congenital deformities in American and Iraqi children are identical. These are serious malformations children born without eyes, limbs, fingers and toes. The average Iraqi woman giving birth no longer says, 'Is it a boy or a girl?' She asks, 'Is the baby normal?'

According to US Government and Pentagon statements, vaccinations against anthrax, botulism, and malaria; benzenes used for delousing, pyridostigminbromides DEET or permethrin, as well as the DU ammunition used, are held responsible for the development of this syndrome. Allied troops were not informed of the dangers of DU until nine days after the war.