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early 2000s

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# The radioactive wasteland that was once Iraq

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It might have something to do with her real area of expertise. Dr. Ammash is the author of "*Toxic Pollution, the Gulf War and Sanctions*," a research paper which examines the lingering effects of the Gulf War, 12 years of sanctions and sporadic bombing by British and U.S. warplanes (***Iraq Under Siege***, South End Press, 2002). She has also authored "*Impact of Gulf War Pollution in the Spread of Infectious Diseases in Iraq*" (Soli Al-Mondo, Rome, 1999), and "*Electromagnetic, Chemical and Microbial Pollution from War and Embargo and Its Impact on the Environment and Health*" (***Journal of Academy of Science***, Baghdad, 1997). Dr. Ammash is very likely the leading expert on the effects of DU walking the earth.

(update, may 2010 – dr. ammash was detained and eventually released under house arrest)

Sources –

Websites:

Campaign Against Depleted Uranium

Thomas Paine

Periodicals

"***Radioactive Waste is Good for the Economy***," The Rearguard, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, Jan. 23, 2003.

"DU-Lally," Schews, Brighton, UK, May, 23, 2003.

"***Operation Iraqi Freedom Pop Quiz***," Portland Alliance, Portland, Oregon, July 2003.

Some information overheard on radio stations KBOO and KOPB, Portland, Oregon



Two military campaigns of dubious merit, initiated by the former President Bush and his son's ruling junta, have scattered tons of radioactive material over Iraq. Along with Afghanistan and the nations which once formed Yugoslavia, Iraq has been used as a laboratory to test the long-term effects of depleted uranium munitions on people and the environment. The Bush junta is also using this opportunity to check out how much misinformation it can successfully spew in order to carry out its objectives.

The U.S. military admitted to using 320 tons of DU-enhanced ammunition during the Gulf War. Despite massive evidence about the lethal effects of prolonged exposure to DU residue in Iraq, the Bush junta and its military propagandists still claim DU presents no clear health risks, at any level of exposure. Unless, of course, one is targeted by weapons firing DU projectiles.

There are still no reliable estimates of how much DU was used during the conquest of Iraq. The lower estimates have been 500 tons, while some guesses range as high as 2,000 tons. No doubt, the expanded use of DU in missiles and bombs – much of it carried out in secret – makes it difficult to accurately come up with a reliable figure. There is, however, substantial evidence regarding the effects of DU exposure, as the land and people of Iraq have been so exposed for over 12 years. In the southern city of Basra, for example, radiation levels were 84 times greater than what is considered safe, before the latest war of conquest. Cancer and other ailments associated with exposure to radiation are epidemic throughout southern Iraq, Kuwait and across their borders into Saudi Arabia and Iran. Eight years after the Gulf war, Canadian soldiers who participated in the conflict were still passing uranium 238 in their urine.

## Supporting Our Troops

The effects of DU exposure are terrible. Since Bush I's Gulf War of 1991, 43 percent of American veterans of that campaign have sought medical treatment for illnesses associated with radiation poisoning. Over 90,000 US and tens of thousands of British veterans have experienced symptoms like leukemia, lung cancer and chronic liver and kidney disorders. Birth defects in children born to Gulf War vets are two to three times higher than in the general public. UK vets have rates of bone marrow and lymphatic cancers at 10 times the rate in the civilian population.

And all this in people who were only briefly exposed to DU. Imagine how much worse it is for people who live in areas contaminated by DU.

Despite massive evidence to the contrary – not only from Iraq, but from Bosnia and Kosovo as well – the U.S. Department of Defence insists DU presents no significant health risks, either to soldiers using it or to the people living in areas polluted by DU residue. Not everyone buys their line, though.

NATO has warned their soldiers stationed in the former Yugoslavia not to eat locally grown food, or drink the water. The UN has passed two resolutions listing DU as a "weapon of mass or indiscriminate destruction," and asked that it be banned, along with chemical or biological weapons.

Currently, 15 nations utilize DU-enhanced ammunition. Why, if it is so lethal, do governments willingly expose their own troops to DU?

The former head of the Pentagon's DU project, Professor Rocke, says he was instructed to lie about the health effects of DU exposure. "Even though," he related in a TV interview, "we know there are health and environmental effects…" he was told to …" make sure that we can always use uranium munitions in combat because they are so effective."



## Misinformation

A journalist I overheard on the radio related how U.S. corporations no longer needed to lobby the government. They are the government. So, instead of investigations into schemes and misdeeds by energy corporations, we get cover-ups, propaganda and misinformation. What have been the consequences of the California energy swindle of 2001, for example?

Despite UN resolutions condemning the use of DU munitions as "weapons of indiscriminate destruction," the U.S. military insists on developing further applications for these heinous weapons. And there is no end to how far they'll go to suppress information about the health effects of DU. We certainly aren't getting any such information from the corporate media.

Instead, the media jumped all over one of the sexist stories of Bush's war of conquest: the search for Dr. Huda S. Ammash. What an intriguing story it was, too. Women are, naturally, one of the spoils of war to be won by the invading armies. And here was a feisty one: a beautiful, exotically dark, sultry scientist who was "in hiding" as one of Saddam Hussein's inner circle – the brains behind his program to develop weapons of mass destruction, according to the Bush junta. In the Pentagon's deck of cards featuring wanted Iraqis, Dr. Ammash was the five of hearts.

Prior to the conquest, she had quite a different reputation. As an environmental biologist and professor, she was a respected enough scholar to be named Dean of Baghdad University. The UN's Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) did not question Dr. Ammash while searching for weapons of mass destruction, as they couldn't find any connection between her and such programs.

Yet, still on May 5, 2003, she was detained for questioning by the Bush occupation forces. Why? Who knows?

That's a fairly large list of ailments associated with DU exposure. Remember reports of soldiers from the Gulf War suffering "Gulf War Syndrome?" Almost 100 percent of the symptoms described by these vets are caused by DU. You don't hear much talk about Gulf War Syndrome anymore, do you?

This can mostly be explained by the heavy influence of energy interests within the Bush junta, almost all of whom have financial ties to energy corporations. These corporations own oil wells and refineries, coal mines – and nuclear power plants. They need to find some way to get rid of radioactive waste materials. And, why not turn a profit while they're at it?

So, they came up with ways to make their hazardous waste marketable. And they are expanding their product's applications. In addition to military uses, DU is currently being used in hospital equipment, and governments are researching more ways to "recycle" nuclear waste in consumer products.

Another application they've found for DU is as ballast in jet airliners. What happens when such an aircraft crashes? Like the 1992 EL-AL jet that crashed near Amsterdam? If you don't' remember, this crash resulted in a "much greater than normal" explosion and fire, according to media reports at the time (see CADU News #3).

Let's not forget – it's a small world, after all. Last summer, dust storms in China raged so severely, the dust was carried high into the atmosphere, where wind currents blew it over the Artic Circle, eventually to fall to land again across Canada, and into the U.S., as far south as Colorado. It's not unreasonable to think that at least some of that dust had previously been blown across the deserts of Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, into China. This is not an environmental problem isolated in one, distant part of the world – it's something everyone on Earth will have to contend with. For 4.5 billion years.



## So, Just What is the Big Deal with DU?

Since nuclear reactors were first built, they've presented a difficult problem: What is to be done with the radioactive waste materials? There are several minerals created as by-products of nuclear reactions. Plutonium is one, manufactured for use in weapons of mass destruction.

Depleted uranium is actually uranium-238. This is what is left over when uranium-235 is separated from uranium ore for use in nuclear weapons. The process "depletes" uranium by a whopping 2 percent. Though u-235 is a much more volatile substance, DU is still quite radioactive.

Other waste by-products which build up inside nuclear reactors include Neptunium and Americium. These materials produce metals that are extremely dense and therefore make superior bullets and other projectiles, capable of penetrating thick concrete bunkers and conventional steel armour, such as that used on tanks. Just ***this*** quality makes DU munitions desirable for military applications. It has, however, other aspects which elevate it into an entirely unique category as a weapon of indiscriminate destruction.

Upon impact, DU projectiles explode, bursting into flames that burn at temperatures exceeding 6,000 degrees F. The projectile is pulverized into extremely fine dust particles, much of which burns up in the initial impact's explosion, creating a radioactive cloud. This cloud will immediately kill anyone who inhales it, searing the victim's lungs, nasal passages and throat.

A single bullet fired by a .50 calibre machine gun can destroy a tank or a bunker, penetrating and filling the interior with flames, killing the people inside and igniting any munitions or other combustible materials on hand. Remember all the images of burnt-out Iraqi vehicles during Bush's war of conquest? DU.

DU projectiles form tiny, glass particles upon impact. This dust emits radiation at all levels – alpha, beta and gamma –

so it is extremely toxic. DU has a radioactive half-life of 4.5 billion years. **Let's emphasize this point:** residual dust from DU munitions will be lethal for a longer period of time than life has existed on Earth. Basically, DU kills forever.

One of the other nuclear wastes used in DU ammunition, Americium-243, will eventually decay into plutonium-239, which is ***200,000*** times more radioactive than uranium-238 (DU), and is the most carcinogenic substance known. For millions of years to come, this toxic dust will be killing everything unlucky enough to come into contact with it.

## Health Effects of DU Exposure

The Bush junta and Department of Defence (DoD) are not interested in studying the health risks associated with exposure to DU. Instead, the Republican Party-controlled Congress is cutting back on health benefits for U.S. military veterans by 25 billion dollars. The ruling junta is also cutting millions from education programs for children of military personnel. Bush has also instructed the Department of Veteran Affairs to stop publicizing health benefits still available for veterans and their families.

The Assistant Secretary of Defence for Health Affairs William Winkerwerder, issued a memo on May 30, 2003, called "*Policy for the Operation Iraqi Freedom Depleted Uranium Medical Management*," concerning troops exposed to high levels of DU. These would include soldiers "… on, in, or near combat vehicles at the time they were struck, who entered immediately after to attempt rescue…" and "… personnel who routinely entered DU-damaged vehicles or who fought fires involving DU munitions." The memo concluded that the military needs "bio-assay" tests for soldiers exposed to such conditions. Instead, the DoD has decided such tests are unnecessary. With no scientific research to establish



health risks related to DU, it is up to **each, individual** soldier to prove a link between his/her exposure and its effects on his/her health.

The above-mentioned conditions are "high risk" exposure, but are not the only risks associated with the use of DU. It's interesting to note that doctors from Italy and Germany who have treated civilians and military personnel in Serbia and Kosovo have identified specific syndromes which correspond with different conditions of DU exposure, while the Pentagon continues to insist it is not a significant health concern.

DU is so radioactive, it has caused radiation burns and skin cancer in areas adjacent to where soldiers carry their ammo; on their hips, where the ammo is carried on their belts, and even on their hands, from handling it. Children who gather spent DU shells also experience radiation burns on their hands.

As mentioned above, DU bullets easily penetrate conventional armour. To prevent this, the U.S. military now armours its tanks with DU. Imagine the result of a DU-on-DU impact: a cloud of burning, radioactive gas, but the projectile doesn't penetrate through the armour. The fire, however, must be quickly suppressed or the tank crew will suffocate, or cook. And the tank and surrounding area get a double dose of DU dust. Most likely, the DU-on-DU impact would result in a massive explosion, much like a nuclear bomb.

If DU can damage soldiers who just carry it, what are the health effects of being encased in it? The DoD doesn't want to know.

Such environmental exposure causes lymphoma, leukemia, skin cancer and radiation burns.

Long after the shooting is over, there remains the fine, radioactive dust. Inhalation of this dust causes liver, kidney and lung damage, memory loss, headaches, fever and low blood pressure. Those unfortunate enough to have their skin penetrated by DU schrapnel experience internal tumours and cancers, often affecting bone marrow and internal organs.