

US A-10 Gunships Armed with Depleted Uranium Re-Join War on Iraq

A squadron of twelve US A-10 gunships has arrived in the Middle East and is being made ready for airborne attacks against ISIS in Iraq. The Pentagon previously confirmed that the warplanes will use depleted uranium (DU) weapons “if they need to.” Earlier this summer, Iraq called for a global ban on the toxic and radioactive munitions and asked for help from the international community in dealing with DU contamination left from 1991 and 2003.

The aircraft arrived with 300 US airmen from the 122nd Fighter Wing at Fort Wayne Air National Guard Station, Indiana.

The US Air Force announced Nov. 24 that the 163rd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, which previously provided close air support for the war in Afghanistan, had arrived with “several A-10 Thunderbolt IIs.” It did not disclose the precise number. “They’re going over there because there’s a need ... to be postured for a combat rescue mission,” said Jennifer Cassidy, an Air Force spokeswoman.

The Air Force declined to say where the A-10s would be stationed. However *Janes Defense Weekly* reported that they are based in Kuwait, a country familiar with cleaning up DU and one where the unauthorized use of DU on training ranges has caused political and diplomatic tension in the past.

In a report to the United Nations Secretary General earlier this year, Iraq urged: “[T]he United Nations, the specialized agencies (International Atomic Energy Agency, World Health Organization and UN Environment Program), all state members of the UN and non-governmental organizations to adopt a proactive approach towards the danger of the use of depleted uranium in armaments and ammunitions and to condemn such use. ... efforts should be made to draft a binding and verifiable international treaty prohibiting the use, possession, transfer and trafficking of such armaments and ammunitions.”

DU is classed as a Group 1 Carcinogen by the World Health Organization, and there has been a dramatic jump in miscarriages and premature births among Iraqi women, particularly in areas where heavy US military operations occurred, such as Fallujah in 2004, and Basra during the 1991 US war on Iraq.

“The US’s utter disregard for the views of the government of Iraq, which it claims to be helping, is staggering,” said International Campaign to Ban Uranium Weapons Coordinator Doug Weir. “It has done everything possible to avoid responsibility for historical contamination in Iraq and continues to oppose efforts to clean up and determine the public health impact of the weapons—even as it builds on that hazardous legacy by deploying the weapons once again.”

On Dec. 2, the United Nations, for the second time in two months voted overwhelmingly for a resolution urging member states to provide assistance to states affected by DU contamination. The vote was 150 to four, with only the US, France, Israel and England voting against. On Oct. 31, the same resolution passed 143 to four.

—*Al Jazeera, Nov. 29; International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons, Nov. 27, 2014*

Muslim Countries the United States has Bombed or Occupied Since 1980

By Glenn Greenwald

Barack Obama, in his post-election press conference, announced that he would seek an Authorization for Use of Military Force from the new Congress, one that would authorize Obama’s bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria—the one he began three months ago. If one were being generous, one could say that seeking congressional authorization for a war that commenced months ago is at least better than fighting a war even after Congress explicitly rejected its authorization, as Obama lawlessly did in the now-collapsed country of Libya.

When Obama began bombing targets inside Syria in September, I noted that it was the seventh predominantly Muslim country that had been bombed during his presidency (that did not count Obama’s bombing of the Muslim minority in the Philippines). I also previously noted that this new bombing campaign meant that Obama had become the fourth consecutive US president to order bombs dropped on Iraq. Standing alone, these are both amazingly revealing facts.

US violence is so ongoing and continuous that we barely notice it. [In November], a US drone launched a missile that killed 10 people in Yemen, and the dead were promptly labeled “suspected militants,” which actually just means they are “military-age males.” Those killings received almost no discussion.

To get a full scope of US violence in the world, it is worth asking a broader question: How many countries in the Islamic world has the US bombed or occupied since 1980? That answer was provided in a recent *Washington*



An A-10 gunship’s nose-mounted Gatling gun fires 3,900 rounds per minute.

Coordinates Needed for Clean-up of Dangerous Sites in Iraq

The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) has submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to the Department of Defense and the State Department on behalf of itself and Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) seeking the firing coordinates of weapons used in Iraq that contained depleted uranium.

As the US launches new military actions in the Middle East, the groups say getting information about the military’s use of DU in weaponry and its long-term effects is as urgent as ever. According to “In a State of Uncertainty,” a report by the Netherlands-based organization PAX, Iraq has been subject to the largest use of DU munitions of all areas of conflict and test sites, conservatively estimated to be at least 440 metric tons, though the UN Environment Program has estimated an amount up to five times that based on satellite imagery. Iraqi civilians thought to have been exposed to DU and remaining debris have suffered high rates of cancer and birth defects and US veterans report unexplained illnesses.

“DU is but one example of the toxic legacy left by our wars in Iraq,” said CCR Attorney Jeena Shah. “Veterans who served in Iraq are suffering side effects, while many Iraqis still live surrounded by piles of metal debris left over from the war and with soil and ground water potentially contaminated by DU. The only way to deal with its effects and to ensure it is cleaned up is to have a full accounting of where weapons containing DU were deployed.”

DU is a by-product of enriching uranium and is used in armor-piercing weapons due to its high density. When DU hits a target, its fragments burn and vaporize into a fine dust. If a person inhales, ingests, or is exposed to radiation by DU, radioactive material can be absorbed into the lungs, bone, kidney, skeletal tissue, reproductive system, brain, and other organs. A report recently published by the

Post op-ed by the military historian and former US Army Col. Andrew Bacevich:

As US efforts to “degrade and ultimately destroy” Islamic State militants extend into Syria, Iraq War III has seamlessly morphed into Greater Middle East Battlefield XIV. That is, Syria has become at least the 14th country in the Islamic world that US forces have invaded or occupied or bombed, and in which US soldiers have killed or been killed—and that’s just since 1980.

Let’s tick them off: Iran (1980 & 1987-1988), Libya (1981, 1986, 1989 & 2011), Lebanon (1983), Kuwait (1991), Iraq (1991-2011, & 2014-), Somalia (1992-1993, 2007-), Bosnia (1995), Saudi Arabia (1991 & 1996), Afghanistan (1998 & 2001), Sudan (1998), Kosovo (1999), Yemen (2000 & 2002-), Pakistan (2004-) and now Syria.

Col. Bacevich’s count excludes the bombing and occupation of still other predominantly Muslim countries by key US allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, carried out with crucial US support. It excludes coups against democratically elected governments, torture, and imprisonment of people with no charges. It also, of course, excludes all the other bombing and invading and occupying that the US has carried out during this time period in other parts of the world, including in Central America and the Caribbean, as well as various proxy wars in Africa.

—*Excerpted from investigative journalist Greenwald who wrote this piece for The Intercept, Nov. 7, 2014*

International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons concluded after reviewing approximately fifty peer-reviewed studies on DU that it is clearly a genotoxic agent, known to be involved in the development of cancer and potentially responsible for genetic damage. Some of the wreckage left behind from the war has entered the unregulated trade in scrap metal, sometimes even made into cooking pots. No safe levels of exposure to DU have been established, and researchers advise that all exposure should be avoided.

Said Maggie Martin, Organizing Director of IVAW, “Veterans have been fighting for decades to have our injuries recognized by the US government—from Agent Orange to Military Sexual Trauma. We were promised health care in re-

turn for our service, and we deserve to know if we’ve been exposed to depleted uranium. This is an important matter of health for over two million veterans and for the people of Iraq and Afghanistan who are experiencing the worst of the toxic legacy of war.”

“Laid to Waste,” a report by Wim Zwijnenburg of PAX, details the difficulty of limiting civilian exposure to DU in the absence of reliable information about locations where it was used and the limited efforts to address the issue.

“In addition to regular bombardment, our country and our communities have been left with a toxic legacy from decades of US war in Iraq,” said Yanar Mohammed, President of the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq. “If the US is truly concerned about civilian well-being, it should assist in a full accounting of DU contamination and rigorous study of its health effects by making public the locations where weapons containing DU were deployed.”

CCR and IVAW are seeking this information as part of the Right to Heal Initiative, which they launched together with the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq and the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq. Visit ccrjustice.org to learn more about the Right to Heal Initiative.

—*Center for Constitutional Rights, Sept. 25, 2014*

WIPP Update

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evaluates waste that is to be stored at WIPP, implied that the policy manual revision accidentally included the word “organic” instead of the intended “inorganic.”

“General consensus is that the ‘organic’ designation was a typo that wasn’t caught,” Percy wrote. Oddly, the policy change was made just after a visit made by Governor Martinez to commend LANL for staying on track to meet its waste shipment deadline. In any case, the new policy took effect almost immediately, with waste packagers using wheat-based litter as early as September 2012—meaning that the number of incorrectly labeled drums containing the potentially explosive mixture number up to 5,565.

At the same time LANL was speeding up its packaging process, in 2012 and 2013, it was rebuffing attempts made by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) to carry out regular inspections and audits to ensure the facility was complying with its state permits. NMED officials claim they were told to stay out of the waste handling facility because they did not have the appropriate training to be around the radioactive waste. On Dec. 6, following a nine-month investigation, NMED announced it had found 13 permit violations at WIPP and 24 at LANL. The state imposed civil penalties in the amounts of \$17.6 million and \$36.6 million, respectively, on the facilities.

According to the recovery plan released by the Energy Department in September, officials were sending workers into the underground WIPP facility four times a week with plans to resume daily entries. Experts have raised concerns that not only are other mislabeled barrels with dangerous ingredient combinations still remaining in the site, but temperatures in the storage area following the rupture of Drum 68660, which reportedly soared to 1,600 degrees Fahrenheit, may have made their contents even more volatile. Though WIPP operators assure workers the facility is safe for them to enter, they have not responded to requests from the workers’ union to provide safety reports that include the detailed risk and radiation measurement numbers.

Official estimates on the cost of the clean-up at WIPP, which experts have called conservative, are around \$500 million. With 5,564 more potentially explosive radioactive waste barrels spread throughout nuclear facilities in the Southwest, no one knows what the negligence of the Energy Department and its contractors will ultimately cost us.

—*Albuquerque Journal, Nov. 13 & Dec. 6; New Mexican (Santa Fe), Nov. 15 & 29, 2014*