

Uranium Weapons to Poison Ukraine?

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The *Wall St. Journal* acknowledged that “The United Nations Environment Program said in a report last year that the [depleted uranium] metal’s ‘chemical toxicity’ presents the greatest potential danger, and ‘it can cause skin irritation, kidney failure, and increase the risks of cancer.’”

However, the paper “balanced” this U.N. warning by quoting John Kirby, a National Security Council coordinator, who reportedly dared to say last March that “studies indicate it isn’t a radioactive threat.”

In fact, the most damning reports about the harmful health and environmental effects of exposure to DU contamination come from the U.S. military itself. (See below.)

If the shells are used in the Ukraine war, the soil and water of the territory being contested will likely be contaminated with uranium and the other radioactive materials that are in the armor-piercing shells.

In 2003, experts at the Pentagon and the United Nations estimated that between 1,000 and 2,000 tonnes of DU were used by U.S.-led forces during their attack on Iraq in March and April that year.

That same year, the British Royal Society, declared that hundreds of tons of DU used by Britain and the U.S. against Iraq should be removed to protect the civilian population, contradicting Pentagon claims it was not necessary.

After NATO’s use of DU weapons in Kosovo in 1999, the Council of Europe called for a world-wide ban on the production, testing, use, and sale of DU weapons, asserting that DU pollution would have “long term effects on health and quality of life in South-East Europe, affecting future generations.” The call went unheeded.

Background

Depleted uranium is *uranium hexafluoride* or uranium-238, a waste material left from reactor fuel and nuclear warhead production. It is radioactive and a toxic heavy metal, and there are between 560,000 and 700,000 metric tons of this waste stored in the United States. On March 25, 1997 the *New York Times* reported the volume as 1.25 billion pounds.

The military calls the DU munitions “armor piercing cartridges” avoiding the taint of the word “uranium.”

As Nukewatch reported in the 2000s, when DU smashes through tank armor, it becomes an aerosol of dust or gas-like particles that can be inhaled and carried long distances on the wind, contaminating soil and water.

In 1991, between 300 and 800 tons of DU munitions were blasted into Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait



A U.S. soldier holds a 120-mm depleted uranium anti-tank round which disperses poison heavy metal dust when it burns through hard targets. Photo by the U.S. Department of Defense.

by U.S. forces. The Pentagon says the U.S. military fired about 10,800 DU rounds — about three tons — into Bosnia in 1994 and 1995. Over 31,000 DU rounds — about ten tons — were shot into Kosovo in 1999 according to NATO. In Iraq, in the number of birth abnormalities skyrocketed following the massive use of DU in the Persian Gulf War.

The U.S. Department of Energy admitted in January 2000 that the metal in DU shells is often contaminated with plutonium, neptunium, and americium, long-lived, highly radioactive isotopes, much more hazardous than DU, or uranium-238.

While the U.S. military repeatedly declares that its uranium weapons contain only uranium-238, and that its DU shells “are less radioactive than natural uranium,” the United Nations Environment Program and others proved that uranium shells used by the U.S. and the U.K. were spiked with fission products including plutonium.

In *Plutonium: Deadly Gold of the Nuclear Age* (International Physicians Press, 1992), the authors say “A safe conclusion is that plutonium is probably the

most carcinogenic substance known.

Government evidence of harm

* The Army’s Office of the Surgeon General’s 1993 manual “Depleted Uranium Safety Training” says the expected effects of DU exposure include a possible increase of cancer (lung and bone) and kidney damage. It recommends that the Army “... convene a working group ... to identify countermeasures against DU exposure.”

* The U.S. Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute found in 2002 that DU produces one-million times as much chromosome damage as would be predicted from its radioactivity alone, and that it causes a form of long-term “delayed reproductive death” of cells. The institute then canceled the funding of this research.

* In 1979, the U.S. Army Mobility Equipment, Research & Development Command warned, “Not only the people in the immediate vicinity (emergency and fire-fighting personnel) but also people at distances downwind from the fire are faced with potential over exposure to airborne uranium dust.”

* In 1995, the U.S. Army Environmental Policy Institute reported, “The radiation dose to critical

organs depends upon the amount of time that depleted uranium resides in the organs. When this value is known or estimated, cancer and hereditary risk estimates can be determined.” Depleted uranium has the potential to generate “significant medical consequences” if it enters the body, the AEPI found.

* In 1997, the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute reportedly found that, “In animal studies, embedded DU, unlike most metals, dissolves and spreads throughout the body depositing in organs like the spleen and the brain, and a pregnant female rat will pass DU along to a developing fetus.”

* In 1990, the Army’s Armaments, Munitions and Chemical Command radiological task group said that depleted uranium is a “low level alpha radiation emitter ... linked to cancer when exposures are internal, [and] chemical toxicity causing kidney damage.” The report said that “long term effects of low doses [of DU] have been implicated in cancer ... there is no dose so low that the probability of effect is zero.”

Nukewatch Staffer Appeals to European Court, Claims Unfair Trial Court Decisions in Germany

By Nukewatch Staff

Nukewatch co-director John LaForge has appealed to a European human rights court claiming that his criminal trespass convictions stemming from nuclear weapons protests in Germany were based on unfair judicial errors.

LaForge was convicted of two charges of trespass and damage to property after separate protest actions at Germany’s Büchel Air Force Base, 80 miles southeast of Cologne. The base stations approximately 20 U.S. hydrogen bombs, that German pilots train to use in attacks on Russia, as part of a controversial program called “nuclear sharing.”

Now, in an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France filed June 9, LaForge argues that the ECHR’s rules were violated by German courts which, he claims, effectively denied him the right to present a defense. The ECHR reviews complaints from across the European Union if defendants, who have exhausted their legal alternatives in European member states, can demonstrate that their convictions were made in error. The ECHR will initially consider LaForge’s “application,” and then decide whether it merits formal review, a process that can take many months.

LaForge’s convictions were affirmed by the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe, Germany’s highest, which over the last 20 years has refused to hear 19 similar appeals by anti-nuclear weapons activists. In January this year, LaForge became the first U.S. citizen incarcerated in Germany in the long-running, international campaign against “nuclear sharing” and the threatened use of the U.S. nuclear weapons at Büchel.

LaForge was sent to Glasmoor prison near Hamburg for 50 days, and was released February 28. A second U.S. citizen, Dennis DuVall, a member of Veterans for Peace who now lives in Germany, finished a 60-day sentence on April 19, 2023 for a similar charge.

In the appeal, filed by attorney Anna Busl of Bonn, LaForge argues that the German courts erred by refusing to consider expert witness testimony, which he says would have corroborated his defense of “crime prevention.” In particular, the courts refused to hear from University of Illinois Professor of International Law Francis A. Boyle, author of *The Criminality of Nuclear Deterrence*, and many other books. “The courts mistakenly neglected to consider international law, binding on the United States and

Germany, that criminalizes planning and preparation of nuclear weapons attacks, and which forbid the transfer of nuclear weapons from the United States to Germany,” LaForge said.

The appeal to the ECHR is not altogether new in the campaign to oust the U.S. weapons. In April 2022, Stefanie Augustin and Marion Kúpker of Germany’s campaign “Büchel is Everywhere: Nuclear Weapons-Free Now!” filed an appeal which has not yet been answered. In addition, Johanna Adickes of Germany filed an appeal April 26, and two other resisters, Ariane Dettloff of Germany, and Susan Crane of California, intend to appeal later this year.

In a related initiative, while nuclear resisters were facing trial and prison sentences in Germany, Oscar Arias, the former president of Costa Rica and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and Jonathan Granoff, president of the Global Security Institute, recommended in July 2022 that the U.S. withdraw all its nuclear weapons from Europe as a demonstration of good will and trust building that they said could move Russian President Putin to support negotiations leading to a cease fire and eventually an end to the war in Ukraine.