DU behind the surge in Cancer rates in Iraq

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In-depth Report: Depleted Uranium

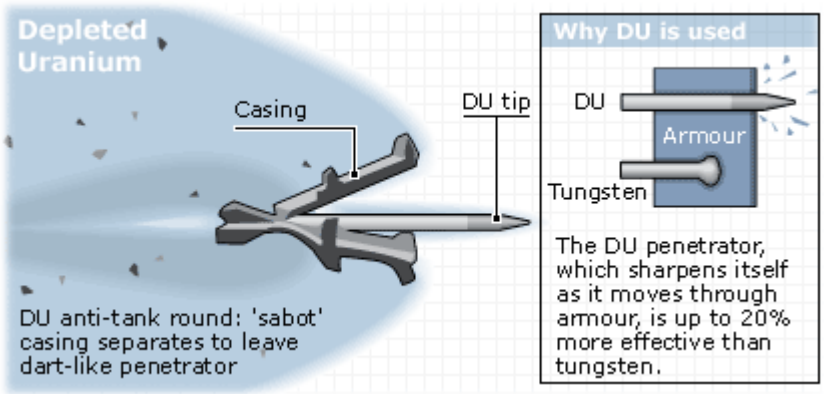
In 1991, Washington and its Persian Gulf War allies used armor-piercing shells made of depleted uranium — the first time such weapons had been used in military conflicts — as the Iraqis retreated from Kuwait.

Up till now, the battlefield remains a radioactive toxic wasteland — and depleted uranium munitions remain a mystery despite many studies and many attempts by scientists to fully discover its secrets.

In military applications, when alloyed, Depleted Uranium [DU] is ideal for use in armor penetrators. These solid metal projectiles have the speed, mass and physical properties to perform exceptionally well against armored targets. DU provides a substantial performance advantage, well above other competing materials. This allows DU penetrators to defeat an armored target at a significantly greater distance. Also, DU's density and physical properties make it ideal for use as armor plate. DU has been used in weapon systems for many years in both applications.

Depleted uranium results from the enriching of natural uranium for use in nuclear reactors. Natural uranium is a slightly radioactive metal that is present in most rocks and soils as well as in many rivers and sea water.

Natural uranium consists primarily of a mixture of two isotopes (forms) of uranium, Uranium-235 (U235) and Uranium-238 (U238), in the proportion of about 0.7 and 99.3 percent, respectively. Nuclear reactors require U235 to produce energy, therefore, the natural uranium has to be enriched to obtain the isotope U235 by removing a large part of the U238.



Once DU round strikes a solid object like a tank, it bursts into a burning spray of radioactive

dust, which can remain on site for years.

Many reports and political experts confirmed that the U.S. and British troops fired more than 940,000 depleted uranium projectiles during the 1991 conflict.

The Pentagon refuses to clarify the exact effects of depleted uranium, but Iraqi doctors attribute the significant increase in cancer and birth defects in the region to the U.S. and British troops' use of DU.

Many researches conducted outside Iraq, and by several U.S. veterans organizations, suggested that depleted uranium could have played a role in Gulf War Syndrome, the still-unexplained malady that has plagued hundreds of thousands of Gulf War veterans.

The U.S. is believed to have used 320,000 tons of depleted uranium during the Gulf War alone. Also British Armed Forces used depleted uranium in some of its ammunition.

Iraqi doctors reported significant growth in cancer and birth defects during the period between 1991 and 2003; the period of the two wars the country fought and in which the U.S. and the British forces were involved.

It was during these two wars that such weapons were used; which led to the noticeable growth in cancer and birth defects in Iraq.

In 2001, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a study on depleted uranium after serious doubts emerged over its damage to health.

The study claimed that depleted uranium had very little risk of spreading.

But a scientist who had worked for the WHO at that time later stated that another study that was kept concealed from the public contradicted WHO's claim, and that it asserts that depleted uranium can cause cancer.

In an interview with *BBC* Radio 4, Dr. Keith Baverstock, who worked on the published study, said that Depleted uranium inhalation has geno-toxic effects on DNA.

"When you breathe in the dust the deeper it goes into the lung the more difficult it is to clear. The particles that dissolve pose a risk – part radioactive – and part from the chemical toxicity in the lung – and then later as that material diffuses into the rest of the body, and into the blood stream, a potential risk at sites like the bone marrow for leukemia, the lymphatic system and the kidney," Dr. Baverstock said, adding that this study was excluded from the report released earlier by WHO.

British and American troops in Iraq today continue using depleted uranium weapons ignoring the deadly impact it has on civilians' lives and health.

It had also been revealed that the Israeli occupation army used uranium in the recent offensive Lebanon.

Cancer rate in Iraq has increased tenfold, and the number of birth defects has multiplied fivefold times since the 1991 war. The increase is believed to be caused by depleted uranium.

Many scientists sought to investigate these events, but Washington is blocking any attempt to inspect the aftermath of the war.

Also the U.S. refused refused to cooperate with the United Nations on the issue.
