

Pentagon Announces U-turn on Use of Depleted Uranium Ammunition in Iraq and Syria

By [Global Research News](#)

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The Pentagon has announced that depleted uranium (DU) munitions have not, and will not, be used by US aircraft in the conflict against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The policy U-turn contrasts with statements made over previous months, where Pentagon officials claimed that DU would be used if needed; the decision reflects a growing stigmatisation of the controversial weapons.

Since the decision to deploy 12 A-10 Thunderbolt II gunships to the Middle East as part of Operation Inherent Resolve last December, concerns have been raised that the US would once again use DU in Iraq – already the world’s most DU contaminated country. Just months before the deployment was announced, Iraq had [called on](#) the United Nations for technical assistance in dealing with the legacy of the 404,000kg DU that was fired by the US and UK in the conflicts in 1991 and 2003. Iraq also argued in favour of a global treaty ban on the weapons.

In spite of Iraq’s clear and highly visible position against DU weapons, in October a Pentagon spokesperson [had said](#) that 30mm DU ammunition would be loaded onto the A-10 gunships and used as needed: “If the need is to explode something — for example a tank — [depleted uranium] will be used.” However, in a remarkable change in policy and in response to questioning from Joe Dyke, Middle East editor of IRIN, the Pentagon has now [confirmed](#) that: “Combined Joint Task Force can confirm that US and Coalition aircraft have not been, and will not be, using depleted uranium munitions in Iraq or Syria during Operation Inherent Resolve.”

[PAX](#)’s Wim Zwijnenburg welcomed the US U-turn, arguing that the conflict is complex enough:

“The further use of these chemically toxic and radioactive munitions would have been yet another burden on the Iraqi population. They are already facing a humanitarian crisis and have grave concerns over the health legacy of historic DU use. The Iraqi government is still struggling with the clean-up of past US DU use, with Iraqi workers and civilians at risk of exposure.”



A-10 being loaded with 30mm PGU-13/B high explosive incendiary (HEI) ammunition in Afghanistan. It can fire either HEI alone, or its standard combat load, which is a mixture of HEI and DU armour piercing incendiary (API) ammunition. It cannot select between ammunition types once airborne, one of the reasons why DU has historically been used against a far wider range of targets than just tanks.

Depleted uranium isn't becoming any more acceptable

Since last October, campaigners and parliamentarians in Belgium, the Netherlands and UK have urged their governments to challenge the US on the issue. The decision to deploy the A-10s came days before 150 countries backed a United Nations General Assembly [resolution](#) calling for international assistance to states affected by DU and for greater transparency over past use to allow clean-up.

[ICBUW](#) Coordinator Doug Weir said;

“The overwhelming majority of states have grave concerns over the acceptability of DU weapons. ICBUW believes that this U-turn by the US reflects the growing global stigmatisation of DU. Coalition partners are responsible for the actions of their peers and it would have been unthinkable for the US to once again use DU on the territory of a country that has so recently called for a global ban on the weapons.”

Fears that DU would be used in the conflict with IS had [recently emerged](#) in the besieged Syrian town of Raqqa, where concern has been expressed over the long-term public health and environmental legacy of Coalition's use of munitions.

From 2011, and as part of ICBUW, PAX has had a programme in Iraq studying the use and impact of DU. PAX has [demonstrated](#) the complexity of identifying, assessing and cleaning-up DU-contaminated military scrap metal: a problem that remains even a decade after the conflict. Iraq's effort to reduce the risks DU poses to civilians continue to be hampered by

the US refusal to hand over firing coordinates, in spite of calls to do so by a US [Congressman](#) and US [civil rights organisations](#).

The Pentagon statement referred only to the use of DU by coalition aircraft. In the event that US land forces are employed in the conflict, there remains a risk that DU may be used by US armoured vehicles and tanks.

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