

The Impacts of Depleted Uranium Ammunition in the War on Libya

By [Global Research](#)

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UK Uranium Weapons Network and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament 3 April 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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UK campaigners issue joint statement on use of depleted uranium in Libya

The UK Uranium Weapons Network and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament today issued a joint statement of concern over the possible use of depleted uranium in Libya.

31 March 2011 - ICBUW Campaigners from the UK Uranium Weapons Network and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament today expressed their growing alarm at the possibility that highly toxic and radioactive depleted uranium (DU) weapons have been used in Libya. The inhalation of DU particles, spread when the weapons hit their target, is thought to be linked to the sharp increases in cancer rates and birth defects reported in affected areas.

On Monday (28th March) the US Admiral William Gortney told the press that: "We have employed A-10s and AC-130s over the weekend" [note 4]. It is believed that six A-10s from 81st Fighter Squadron, which are typically armed with DU rounds, have been deployed [note 5].

A-10 gunships are designed to attack tanks, armour and other ground targets with their primary weapon - a cannon capable of firing either DU or high explosive rounds at a rate of 3,900 a minute. As armoured vehicles are being targeted it seems likely the cannons are loaded with the PGU-14 30mm armour piercing incendiary round, which contains a 300 gram DU penetrator. Strafing runs from A-10s can typically see hundreds of rounds being used, resulting in many kilograms of DU being fired.

A-10s were used against armoured targets in the Balkan and Iraq conflicts in the 1990s and 2003 and were responsible for the majority of DU used in Iraq and all that fired in the Balkans. Other US warplanes may also have deployed DU rounds - see note 8 for details.

Previously Admiral Gortney had suggested that only precision guided ammunition (i.e. bombs, not cannon rounds) was being used and stated that "At this time, [he was] not aware of any use of depleted uranium" [see note 7]. However it is now known for certain that the A-10's cannon was used against two small boats on the evening of 28th March in an encounter involving the Libyan Coast Guard vessel Vittoria [note 6]. This means the Pentagon's earlier assurance on the type of weapons used no longer stands and thus their comments regarding DU use are in doubt.

After MPs raised concerns over the potential use of DU in Libya, David Cameron told the Commons that "we do not use those [depleted uranium] weapons and are not going to use

those weapons.” [note 9] Whilst British DU weapon systems are land-based, campaigners are demanding the UK push all coalition countries to rule out the use of DU.

John McDonnell MP said: “Whilst I welcome the Prime Minister’s assurance that British forces will not use depleted uranium weapons in this conflict, I am concerned that our allies may still do so. These weapons have the potential to cause long term health risks to civilian populations recovering in post-conflict zones – we have seen cancer and birth defect epidemics in Iraqi cities where it is believed that these weapons have been used.

“I have written to the Prime Minister asking for his assurance that he will do all he can to persuade our allies to refrain from using this weapon in Libya, and assure us that the government will add depleted uranium weapons to the list of other weapon systems that have been banned on humanitarian grounds, such as cluster munitions and landmines.”

Kate Hudson, General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, said: “Depleted uranium weapons are weapons of indiscriminate effect – the cancers and birth defects they are thought to cause cannot be ‘targeted’ at troops. Using them in built up areas in effect targets civilians. This runs counter to everything the coalition has claimed about protecting civilians. This would mark the first DU use in conflict in more than eight years and would be an appalling step backwards. It is completely unacceptable – indeed illegal – to use weapons that cause long-term damage both to civilians and the wider environment for years after the conflict. Britain must demand clarity from the US and all coalition partners that DU is not, and will not be used in Libya.”

Lev Eakins, spokesperson for the UK Uranium Weapons Network, said: “The stated purpose of the military action is to protect Libyan civilians. This will not be achieved if depleted uranium weapons are used as they have the potential to harm civilians for decades to come. The coalition of states involved in this action should immediately give an assurance that depleted uranium will not be used and we call on the UK government to dissuade its allies from using them.”

For further information and interviews please contact either the UK Uranium Weapons Network (Dave Cullen) 0161 273 8293 or Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (Ben Soffa) 020 7700 2350

For further details on the weapons and platforms involved, see <http://www.bandepleteduranium.org/en/a/397.html>

The UK Uranium Weapons Network is a grouping of 15 organisations working to achieve a ban on the use of depleted uranium weapons in the UK <http://uwnetwork.wordpress.com> The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) is one of Europe’s biggest single-issue peace campaigns, with over 35,000 members in the UK. CND campaigns for the abolition of all nuclear weapons everywhere. <http://www.cnduk.org>

US Department of Defence News Briefing, 28th March, Vice Admiral Gortney <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4803>

A-10 reference site:
<http://warthognews.blogspot.com/2011/03/10cs-have-attacked-libyan-regime-forces.html>

US Navy press report: <http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=6347>{=0

US Department of Defence News Briefing, 25th March, Vice Admiral Gortney
<http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4799>

Concern also remains that US AV-8B Harrier aircraft have also used DU. In the past the AV-8B has fired PGU-20/U Armour Piercing Incendiary DU rounds from their rotary cannon – see <http://www.bandepleteduranium.org/en/a/396.html>. A US Marines press release on the 20th March stated that AV-8B Harriers from the 26th Marine Expeditionary unit, based on USS Kearsarge attacked ground forces and air defences in Libya. While dropping aerial munitions is more likely to have taken place than the cannon being used in strafing runs, it remains possible that these aircraft have deployed, or will deploy, DU weapons. See [http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=6227\(=0](http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=6227(=0)

David Cameron, House of Commons, 21st March
<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2011-03-21a.700.0#g705.2> It should be noted that the only weapon platform that uses DU weapons in the British arsenal is the Challenger II tank, which is not deployed, or expected to be deployed in this conflict. It is therefore uncertain if the PM was referring to just this conflict, or any future conflict and urgent clarification is being sought. <http://www.bandepleteduranium.org/en/a/398.html>

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