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Empire?

Iraq

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International Justice

UN Financial Crisis

UN Reform

Secretary General

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Tons of Depleted Uranium Polluting Iraq

By Lisa Ashkenaz Croke

[Yellow Times / News From the Front](#)

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U.S. forces unleashed at least 75 tons of toxic depleted uranium on Iraq during the war, reports the Christian Science Monitor. An unnamed U.S. Central Command spokesman disclosed to the Monitor last week that coalition forces fired 300,000 bullets coated with armored-piercing depleted uranium (DU) during the war.

"The normal combat mix for these 30-mm rounds is five DU bullets to 1 -- a mix that would have left about 75 tons of DU in Iraq," wrote correspondent Scott Peterson. Peterson measured four sites around Baghdad struck with depleted uranium munitions and found high levels of radioactive contamination, but few warnings to this effect issued among the populace at large.

While the Pentagon maintains that spent weapons coated with the low-level, radioactive nuclear-waste are relatively harmless, Peterson notes that U.S. soldiers have taken it among themselves to print leaflets or post signs warning of DU contamination. "After we shoot something with DU, we're not supposed to go around it, due to the fact that it could cause cancer," said one sergeant requesting anonymity.

On a group of abandoned burnt-out U.S. munitions supply trucks, Peterson saw signs U.S. troops put up warning in Arabic, "Danger -- Get away from this area." A local vendor said that soldiers in masks warned him and others to keep away from the site. These were the only warnings Peterson found. He wrote that despite the military's attempts to bulldoze the surrounding topsoil, the Geiger counter readings on remaining piles of radioactive DU dust registered at hundreds of times the average, and a DU dart from a 120 mm tank shell emitted radiation over 1,300 times normal.

Two other sites visited were randomly selected Iraqi armored vehicles destroyed with DU bullets. The remains of these tanks sit near a produce vendor on the outskirts of Baghdad, and have become popular playthings for children; the Geiger counter reading from "a DU bullet fragment no bigger than a pencil eraser" near one child registered 1,000 times normal. There were no warnings posted informing the populace of the radioactive emissions coming from the tanks.

"Radioactive? Oh, really?" was the response of a former director general of the ministry, when Peterson presented a Geiger counter registering emissions of 1,900 times normal from spent DU-coated bullets amongst the grounds at the Ministry of Planning. "Yesterday, more than 1,000 employees came here, and they didn't know anything about it," he said. "We have started to not believe what the American government says. What I know is that the occupiers should clean up and take care of the country they invaded."

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