



JANUARY 30, 2003

Dr. Asaf Durakovic Gives a Rare Interview About Depleted Uranium in Iraq: He Was the First Military Doctor to Test Gulf War Veterans for Radiation Exposure and Was Terminated for His Work

As the Pentagon weighs deploying nuclear weapons in Iraq, we're going to take a look now at another kind of radioactive weapon US troops may use: depleted uranium.

FILED UNDER Iraq

Depleted uranium is the most effective anti-tank weapon ever devised. It is made from nuclear waste left over from making nuclear weapons and fuel. As an unwanted waste product of the atomic energy industry, it is extremely cheap. It is also the densest material available on the market, and can smash through all known armor. US gunners say DU rounds save lives on the front line.

But when DU rounds punch through tanks, they create a firestorm of uranium dioxide dust. Those invisible particles are still "hot." As the Christian Science Monitor's Scott Peterson writes, the particles make Geiger counters sing. They stick to the tanks, contaminate the soil and blow in the desert wind — as they will for the 4.5 billion years it takes for the DU to lose its radioactivity.

The public first became aware the US military was using DU weapons during the 1991 Gulf War. US gunners used 320 tons of DU to destroy 4,000 Iraqi armored vehicles.

The Pentagon deemed those vehicles a "substantial risk" and US forces buried them in Saudi Arabia and low-level radioactive waste dumps in the US. Thousands of US troops became sick after that war, afflicted with a range of mysterious symptoms that have come to be known as Gulf War Syndrome. Many vets believe DU is responsible. According to Reuters, some troops are so concerned about a new Gulf War Syndrome they have begun to bank their sperm before they head to the Middle East. The sperm banks are now offering discounts to troops.

Iraqis say DU is a major cause of the severe health problems such as cancer and birth defects. The director of the cancer ward at Basra's Saddam Teaching Hospital says pre-war cancer rates have increased eleven times.

The Pentagon and the White House deny this. Pentagon officials refer to the latest government report on the subject, which said: "Gulf War exposures to depleted uranium have not to date produced any observable adverse health effects attributable to DU's chemical toxicity or low-level radiation." Just last week, the White House Office of Global Communications rolled out a new propaganda document called: "Apparatus of Lies: Saddam's Disinformation and Propaganda 1990-2003". The document characterized Iraq's claims as a campaign of disinformation.

Despite repeated calls, the Pentagon refused to be interviewed for this program.

In a minute we'll be speaking with Dr. Asaf Durakovic. In 1991, Dr. Durakovic was Chief of Nuclear Medicine at the veterans' hospital in Wilmington Delaware. There he discovered the first Gulf War veterans with symptoms of radiation exposure. The hospital terminated him after he refused to halt his research. He has pursued the research to this day. He was also a former US Army Colonel. He rarely gives interviews in this country.

But first we go to Steve Robinson of the National Gulf War Resource Center.

Guests:

- **Steve Robinson**, Executive Director, National Gulf War Resource Center. They monitor the current status of scientific studies.
- **Dr. Asaf Durakovic**, nuclear scientist and former Chief of the Nuclear Sciences Division at the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute. He is currently the Medical Director of the Uranium Medical Research Center, an independent non-profit institute which studies the effects of Uranium contamination.

The UMRC recently sent a team to the Nargahar province in Afghanistan to test for uranium contamination in residents living near and around US bombing sites during Operation Enduring

Freedom.

- **Dr. Chris Busby**, Scientific Secretary with the European Committee on Radiation Risk, a group of scientists and risk specialists within Europe who assess the risk levels of low-level radiation exposure. The ECRR has just published a report which determines that previous risk-models for depleted uranium exposure are incorrect. The report determines that depleted uranium is 100 to 1000 times more carcinogenic than the present risk model suggests. Dr. Busby is also a member of the International Society for Environment Epidemiology, and was invited to Iraq and Kosovo to investigate the health effects of depleted uranium. He has also given presentations on depleted uranium to the Royal Society and to the European Parliament. He is a member of the UK Ministry of Defense Oversight Committee on Depleted Uranium.
- **Karen Parker**, attorney specializing in humanitarian law. She has been working with the UN Commission on Human Rights since 1996 to expose the illegality of DU munitions under humanitarian law.

Related links:

- [Uranium Medical Research Center](#)
- [National Gulf War Resource Center](#)
- [European Committee on Radiation Risk](#)

Transcript



The original content of this program is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivatives 3.0 United States License](#). Please attribute legal copies of this work to democracynow.org. Some of the work(s) that this program incorporates, however, may be separately licensed. For further information or additional permissions, [contact us](#).