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“Shock and Awe”: The Pentagon’s fiery crucibles of war

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By Leuren Moret

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter”?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

The Pentagon has announced that “shock and awe” will be the strategy for Gulf War II, dropping ten times the amount of bombs and munitions used in Gulf War I. And ten times the amount of depleted uranium?

Today more than 400 tons of depleted uranium dust and fragments are left on the battlefields of Iraq, 40 tons in Kosovo and Serbia, and 1000 tons in Afghanistan. How much came home in the bodies of our veterans like Doug Rokke - slowly killing, mutilating and maiming them?

How much is killing, mutilating and maiming the people of Iraq, the children of Iraq, the unborn future of the Iraqi people? And now we’re going back to make it ten times worse? What about our soldiers this time?

Radiation respects no borders. Carried downwind during bombing in Kosovo, it was detected in air monitors as far away as Hungary and Greece. Levels in the air change with the seasons in Kuwait. Depleted uranium is forever. The half-life is 4.5 billion years.

It decays to isotopes much more radioactive than uranium, like radon. Depleted uranium keeps giving... and it keeps killing. It’s the perfect weapon for the Pentagon to kill people and destroy things. The trouble is, you can’t clean it up... over time it makes survival of life impossible. It transforms into an omniscidal war against the earth – the air, the water, life.

One gram of depleted uranium releases more than 12,000 alpha particles per second. When depleted uranium is inhaled as very fine radioactive dust, it enters the blood stream and is carried throughout the body. Because it is nearly insoluble it stays in the blood or lodges in the tissues, organs and bones of the body. The alpha particles that are released from these “hot particles” tear through the cells and membranes like nuclear bullets and dump huge amounts of energy like nuclear bombs destroying the immune system, nervous system, muscles, and the brain. The radiation slowly kills the cells that make life possible and Gulf War Syndrome, a complex of diseases, slowly kills the soldier.

It mutilates the unborn, causing birth defects, horrible birth defects in babies born after the Gulf War without eyes, brains, organs, arms, legs. In a study by the Veterans Administration¹, of 251 Gulf War veterans families in Mississippi, 67% of the children conceived and born after the war had diseases and defects rated severe. The Iraqi children born with birth defects² are like the children of the Gulf War veterans... “The Tiny Victims of Desert Storm”³.

Dr. Rokke and his Army team of experts were sent to the Nevada Test Site to blow up Abrams tanks with depleted uranium and study the radioactivity around the tanks. The team was given “mop suits” with masks as protection from the depleted uranium dust. What they didn’t know, and the Department of Energy didn’t tell them, is that air filters don’t work for very fine particles – they go right through the mask filters and into the lungs. With the best HEPA filters, 28 million particles 0.1 micron in diameter pass into the lungs in a 24 hour period⁴. One billion particles that size would fill the period at the end of this sentence. Doug Rokke’s cataracts and kidney problems are typical of Gulf War Syndrome. During a weeklong speaking tour we did together in January, I noticed his difficulty breathing and extreme fatigue. He complained of no feeling in his fingers and severe pain in his joints.

Captain Terry Riordan, a Canadian Gulf War veteran who “died officially of Gulf War Syndrome” in 1999, gave his body for research. When he went off to war his eyes were hazel. His wife told me they turned bright blue when he came back, then gray, then nearly opaque before he died. High levels of depleted uranium were measured in his bones, tissues and his brain. He had cancer in his bones. Her house was burglarized while she was testifying before a legislative committee about her husband’s death. His medical records which indicated he had high levels of depleted uranium in his body were stolen.

In the Pentagon’s fiery crucibles of war, they have knowingly failed to protect the Doug Rokke’s, Terry Riordans and hundreds of thousands of soldiers – in Viet Nam, in the Gulf War, and in future conflicts. The use of depleted uranium in the Gulf War, breaking a 46-year-taboo against the use of radiological weapons in combat⁴, has created a military and legal precedent. This is a deliberate strategy to make the use of nuclear weapons more probable in future conflicts⁵.

But there’s more on the drawing board... Donald Rumsfeld is dumping billions of dollars into the “research furnaces of federal laboratories and private universities”⁶ across the US to create ‘super soldiers’. The research to create drugs and electromagnetic brain zaps is directed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) under five-time fellow John Poindexter. This ‘war fighter enhancement program’ will involve “injecting young men and women with hormonal, neurological and genetic concoctions; implanting microchips and electrodes in their bodies to control their internal organs and brain functions; and plying them with drugs that deaden some of their normal human tendencies – the need for sleep, the fear of death, the reluctance to kill their fellow human beings.”⁶

But who are the real terrorists? Those who want to turn US soldiers into mindcontrolled, drugged-up mutants to send off to mindless imperial wars portray themselves as “patriots”, “noble leaders”, and “Christians”. And there are those of us who wish to honor the men and women fighting these wars - like patriots Doug Rokke and Terry Riordan. Because we oppose the greedy, rapacious elite – we are the “traitors”, the “anti-war agitators”, the “enemy of democracy”. What I like the most is that there are more and more of us... this is war⁷ we’ve seen too many times.

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