

What the US Has Done to Iraq and to Its Own

by Bud Deraps

I visited Iraq in 2001 with the Veterans For Peace Iraq Water Project where we were rebuilding four sewer polluted water plants in the Basra area. The entire nation was at peace and we had no restrictions on our travel.

Our comfortable Baghdad and Basra hotels had 24 hour electricity, but the water in each was far from clear. We used bottled water for all our needs. Not so for the people, as the sanctions forbid all metal and chemical items that could possibly be used for military purposes. Sewage flowed in the streets of many small towns where the children played.

We visited universities, schools and a hospital in Baghdad. Another children's hospital in Basra was overflowing into the hallways with children dying from leukemia, other types of cancers and diarrhea caused by having to drink sewer-polluted water. Every child was attended by a relative or a friend.

The head doctor told us that due to the sanctions they were unable to get the many medicines needed to treat the patients and that they would all die there. He gave us dozens of pictures of children being born there with extreme birth defects.

Iraq doctors and medical experts around the world agree that the cancers and birth defects are the direct result of the 320 tons of depleted uranium (DU) that we used during the Gulf War and in bombing during the decade-long no-fly enforcements.

DU, one of the densest metals known, easily penetrates tanks and bunkers, and is used in our tanks and armor for added protection. When each DU weapon explodes, countless millions of toxic microscopic particles fly into the air, soil, and water to remain there until the frequent sand storms carry them aloft. When even small amounts are inhaled, they cause forms of cancer during the next 3 to 5 years. They can infect DNA and travel into the reproductive system, leading to devastating birth defects.

Of the 580,000 US troops that served in the 1991 Gulf War, by the year 2000, 11,000 were dead and 325,000 were on permanent medical disability. This despite the fact that only 269 died in combat and only 457 were wounded in action.

During the years of sanctions and in the present war to now, it is estimated that an additional 2,000 tons of DU have been used, further saturating Iraq with radiation that lasts for billions of years.

A recent test in parts of Baghdad showed radiation levels 1,900 times normal levels. A few days after heavy bombing in Iraq, monitor stations in England recorded sharply higher radiation levels.

In the Basra area, from 1990 to 1999, cancer of all types grew by 242% while leukemia grew over 100% in children under 15. By 2004, 56% of all cancer patients were under age 5. In 1989, the Iraq birth defect rate was 11 per 100,000. By 2001, it was 116 per 100,000.

Recent reports out of Iraq show varying percentages of available power and clean water. We hear of 6 to 8 hours of power available to the public in parts of Baghdad.

Much of the \$19 billion dollars to be used for water and electric projects have been used for the protection of these utilities. Also, much has been spent to provide adequate water and power to US military bases to the neglect of the public.

A March 10, 2006 report from the Congressional Research Service stated that the military cost of our two wars will rise 44% this year to \$9.8 billion dollars a month. This amounts to a massive \$230,000 dollars every minute of every day.

This does nothing but broaden the environmental devastation by our own hands of this precious cradle of humanity.

For peace.

Bud Deraps is a World War II veteran and member of Veterans for Peace. He will speak at the July 5, 2006 "Instead of Oil" forum.