

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

November 3, 2014

Chuck Hagel
Secretary of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington DC, 20301

Dear Secretary Hagel,

During the 1991 and 2003 Gulf Wars, over a million depleted uranium (DU) shells were used by American and Coalition armed forces against targets in Iraq. Multiple weapons systems, including the A-10 Warthog, AVF-8 Harrier, Bradley Fighting Vehicle and M1A1 Abrams tank fired DU rounds. Depleted uranium was designed to degrade armored targets, but was often used in densely populated urban areas against non-armored targets. Prolonged exposure to DU, especially through inhalation or ingestion of DU dust, can cause a myriad of potential long-term health consequences. Armored vehicles contaminated by DU munitions were often sold for scrap or abandoned, exposing Iraqis to unintended risk and many of the fired DU rounds or DU contaminated materials have not been cleaned up.

Iraqi efforts to remove DU contaminated materials have been hampered by a lack of information about DU strike locations. Because American forces were responsible for the vast majority of DU munitions usage, they possess the greatest understanding of target data as well as quantities and types of ammunition used. Providing this data would allow Iraqi government agencies, as well as non-government agencies to accurately and expeditiously clean up contaminated sites.

The Iraqi Ministry of Environment has identified the clean-up of sites contaminated with radioactive material, including DU, as one of their eight environmental priorities in their 2014 environmental strategy. Iraq has also recently highlighted the need for international assistance in achieving this goal in a report submitted to the United Nations Secretary General. The clean-up of contaminated scrap and munitions is also recommended by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the World Health Organization to prevent further exposure of Iraqi civilians.

Transparency on this issue would be beneficial to all parties, and past precedent has shown the strategic risk of revealing strike data to be insignificant. In 1999, following a request by then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, NATO provided detailed information about the locations of strikes and quantities of DU munitions in Kosovo. This information made it possible for

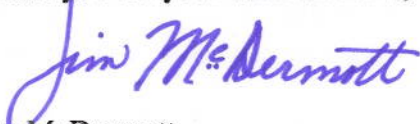
monitors from UNEP to locate and clean up sites containing radioactive materials. In 2003, the British Ministry of Defense provided the coordinates of Iraqi targets where DU munitions were used to UNEP, which were then made available to the Iraqi government. In 2003, at the request of the Dutch Ministry of Defense, whose troops had come into contact with DU in southern Iraq, the Pentagon provided GPS coordinates of strikes by weapons systems that used DU, and were released later on to the public under a Dutch Freedom of Information request.

In 2003, the Pentagon provided GPS coordinates on cluster munitions strikes to demining agencies to support clearance efforts. Some of these organizations have recently indicated that cross-contamination of DU with other explosive remnants of war is hampering their clearance operations. Therefore, the release of DU targeting coordinates will also support their activities and the safety of their staff.

Acting on this issue now will prevent future political and societal costs. In the past our government has had to invest significant resources to mitigate the unintended ramifications of weapons systems such as Agent Orange and cluster munitions. Removing the physical manifestations of our military legacy in Iraq would help foster mutual understanding, vital to our future strategy in the country. It is with this consideration in mind that we respectfully request the following:

1. The GPS location data for strikes in Iraq in which DU munitions were used during the 1991 and 2003 campaigns, as well as the quantities and types of munitions used.
2. That this information be made publicly accessible to the necessary government agencies and non-governmental organizations to facilitate the removal of contaminated materials.

Thank you for your consideration,



Jim McDermott
Member of Congress