

US munitions cause spike in Iraqi infant birth defects

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Though it has been nearly a decade since the beginning of the US-led invasion of Iraq, a report from the *Bulletin of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology* released in September reveals the devastating impact that the war is continuing to have on the Iraqi people—particularly Iraqi infants.

According to the study, titled “Metal Contamination and the Epidemic of Congenital Birth Defects in Iraqi Cities,” the Iraqi cities of Basra and Fallujah are experiencing an exponential rise in birth defects, allegedly caused by the use of depleted uranium ammunition by the United States and British invasion forces.

The German-based *Bulletin of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology* survey reported that half of the infants it surveyed who were born between 2007 and 2010 were born with a birth defect. This figure was less than 2 percent before 2000. In Basra, the southern Iraqi city and site of a massive bombing campaign undertaken at the start of the invasion in March and April 2003, the birth defect rate was 17 times higher than before the 2003 invasion.

“Some [infants] had only one eye in the forehead. Or two heads. One had a tail like a skinned lamb. Another one looked like a perfectly normal child, but with a monkey’s face. Or the girl whose legs had grown together, half fish, half human,” Basra children’s cemetery owner Askar Bin Said told *Der Spiegel*.

Chemist Chris Busby, the co-author of two studies on the subject, told the *Guardian* that Fallujah is experiencing “the highest rate of genetic damage in any population ever studied.”

Hair sample studies performed in 2010 by *Bulletin* researchers revealed that lead levels were five times higher in Fallujah children than in other children. Mercury levels were six times higher. Diagnosed cases

of hydrocephalus, or “water in the brain,” are six times higher in Basra children than in children from the United States. Basra is also experiencing the highest ever rate of spina bifida, or “open back disease.” In total, over 45 percent of pregnancies ended in miscarriage between 2004 and 2006.

Dr. Mozhgan Savabieasfahani, a lead author of the report and an environmental toxicologist at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, told the *Independent* that “the massive and repeated bombardment of these cities is clearly implicated here. I have no knowledge of any alternative source of metal contamination in these areas.”

According to Dr. Savabieasfahani, there is now a “footprint of metal in the population” and “compelling evidence linking the staggering increases in Iraqi birth defects to neuro-toxic metal contamination following the repeated bombardments of Iraqi cities.”

Moreover, the data reported by the study was most likely an “underestimate,” according to Dr. Savabieasfahani, on account of many parents’ attempts to hide their children’s defects from public view.

The unprecedented health crisis facing the bombed-out targets of American imperialism is apparently the result of the use of “depleted uranium” ammunition used by the United States and British armed forces during the invasion and occupation. “DU” ammunition contains alloys or cores made of depleted uranium. The added density the uranium gives to projectiles allows bullets and shells to pierce bodies and metal with increased facility.

When the ammunition explodes or hits a target, it releases a chemical dust that is inhaled or permeates through the skin of its victim.

In other words, the advanced weaponry utilized by the US with the express goal of facilitating the

destruction of Iraqi towns and cities has achieved its goal: local populations will quite literally be feeling the pain of the invasion for generations to come. Infants born even after the public “withdrawal” of invasion troops are killed as a result of the impact of the invasion on young Iraqi mothers and fathers.

“The war is to blame. The pollution. There were many bombs in our neighborhood,” said Sabra Salman, the mother of a 10 year-old child with cancer, to *Der Spiegel*.

Mohammad Haider, a Basra parent of a deformed child, also told *Der Spiegel* that he and his wife “both grew up in Basra. I hold the United States responsible. They used DU. My child isn’t an isolated case.”

The US Defense Department denied the findings with characteristic callousness. “We are not aware of any official reports indicating an increase in birth defects in Al Basrah or Fallujah that may be related to exposure to the metals contained in munitions used by the US or coalition partners,” a spokesperson said.

“We always take very seriously public health concerns about any population now living in a combat theater. Unexploded ordnance, including improvised explosive devices, are a recognized hazard.”

The British government also denied the report’s findings, proclaiming that there was no “reliable scientific or medical evidence to confirm a link between conventional ammunition and birth defects in Basra... All ammunition used by UK armed forces falls within international humanitarian law and is consistent with the Geneva Convention.”



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