

British Radioactive Weapons Arrive in Ukraine

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Ignoring all Russian advises, the British government confirmed on April 26th that its depleted uranium weapons are already on Ukrainian soil. Moscow's officials, anti-war activists and experts have repeatedly warned that such an escalation in the conflict should be avoided, but London has not observed the advice and has further violated a red line by sending radioactive weapons to the Kiev regime. It remains to be seen what the consequences of this dangerous measure will be.

The confirmation of the delivery of weapons was made by the Minister of Armed Forces of the United Kingdom, James Heappey, during a speech to the British Parliament. According to Heappey, depleted uranium ammunitions were sent to Ukraine along with other projectiles suitable for use in Challenger 2 tanks. The minister also added that British officials will not try to track where these weapons will be used.

"We have sent thousands of rounds of Challenger 2 ammunition to Ukraine, including depleted uranium armour-piercing rounds (...) [These weapons] re now under the control of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) (...) [UK's Ministry of Defense] does not monitor the locations from where DU rounds are fired by the AFU in Ukraine", the Minsiter said during the statement.

When asked by some parliamentarians about the health dangers posed by these weapons, Heappey claimed that this threat would be "low". Interestingly, he even mentioned that the risk assessment is based on monitoring UK veterans who have already used them on the battlefield. In fact, the minister seems to completely ignore that a series of recent studies point to the opposite, showing serious health problems both in the soldiers who manipulated this equipment and in the victims of the ammunition. The problems include several risks commonly attributed to radioactive substances, such as cancer, fetal deformity, deficiency of fertility, among others.

Commenting on the case with journalists, Doug Weir, an expert linked to the Conflict and Environment Observatory, stated that when DU penetrators strike a target “they fragment and burn, generating chemically toxic and radioactive DU particulate that poses an inhalational risk to people”. Several other scientists have expressed similar views after analyzing the results of these munitions in Iraq and other countries where NATO troops have used them. However, London and Washington continue to deny evidence of these dangers.

It must be remembered that Moscow has repeatedly asked London to reconsider its plan to send these munitions to Kiev. In a recent statement, spokespersons for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia stated that the British measure would be an absolute “imprudence, irresponsibility”. Furthermore, in March, the Russian Ministry of Defense warned that the use of such projectiles could “cause irreparable harm” to the health of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians as well as inflict “tremendous economic damage to the agro-industrial complex” in the region, citing the weapon’s impact during the previous experience in Iraq.

However, despite the warnings, the shipment of these weapons was already expected. In March, US and British troops held a training program with Ukrainian soldiers to teach them how to properly handle depleted uranium munitions. The plan was very well prepared and echoes NATO’s interest in taking the proxy war with Russia to the most dangerous levels of military escalation, ignoring any humanitarian, environmental or social concerns.

Legally, depleted uranium weapons are a complex issue. There is no international convention banning them as there is no consensus among specialists on how to define these weapons. These munitions are really radioactive, which is why some experts believe they should be considered nuclear weapons under the legal principle of analogy. However, its radiation is lower than that of natural uranium, which leads other specialists to reject this classification.

Some other experts believe that a viable solution to the problem of these projectiles would be to consider them chemical weapons, since they contain toxic substances, regardless of the level of radioactivity. But this creates a problem for the western powers that have them, since the US and the UK are signatories to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which would oblige them to destroy their depleted uranium stocks. Not by chance, both countries reject any initiative in this sense and prefer that these weapons remain without specific legislation, so that they can continue using them with impunity.

Indeed, given the absence of specific regulation, Moscow could consider the use of depleted uranium against its troops as a true nuclear attack, which would allow the Russians to react with their arsenal of mass destruction. This is unlikely to happen, as Moscow has repeatedly shown its interest in seeking the most peaceful and humanitarian solutions possible to the conflict, sometimes even ignoring violations against red lines just to avoid escalation.

However, regardless of what the Russian response will be, it is certain that damage to Ukrainian soldiers and the civilian population in the combat zone are inevitable. And the responsibility for that lies with NATO.

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