

In Ukraine, US Adds to Barbaric Cluster-Bomb Legacy

U.S. cluster munitions have maimed and killed civilians in countries including Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan and Iraq

by Abdul Rahman,* India

(Edit. CH-S) The delivery of cluster munitions from the USA to Ukraine is a humanitarian disaster. These weapons are at the expense of the civilian population. In the following article by Abdul Rahman, the circumstances surrounding the US delivery of cluster munitions to Ukraine are examined in more detail.

Briefly on current Swiss foreign policy: As Swiss Federal Councillor, Micheline Calmy-Rey was very committed to the international ban on cluster munitions. Today, 118 states have ratified the "Oslo Convention of 2008", including Switzerland. Swiss taxpayers pay for the "Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining" (GICHD), thus remaining true to Switzerland's humanitarian tradition.

Although Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis had said before joining the Security Council, "If we are on the Security Council, we will have additional opportunities for action and influence for our concerns",¹ the Swiss representation has so far remained silent. Former Federal Councillor Calmy-Rey commented on this deafening silence: "I expect my country, the cradle of the Red Cross, which has placed respect for human rights and human life at the center of its foreign policy, to take a critical and clear position on the deployment of such weapons to the Ukrainian battlefield."²

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The sad quip about "NATO fighting against Russia to the last Ukrainian" once again proved apt when U.S. President Joe Biden took the "difficult" decision earlier in July to supply cluster muni-



Salam was picking olives with her family near her village in Syria in 2015. She found a strange bit of metal. The explosion of the unexploded piece killed her brother and tore off her left leg. (Picture © S.Khlaifat/Handicap International)

tions to Ukraine to facilitate its fight against the Russians.

The supply of cluster munitions is a part of a fresh \$800 million military aid package to Ukraine,³ which came on the eve of the NATO summit at Vilnius in Lithuania, which was attended by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The dangerous nature of cluster munitions, especially for civilians, is well known. Close to 120 countries⁴ signed a convention in 2008 against their production and use.

In the present case, the decision is more dangerous for Ukrainians for two specific reasons — first, it provides Russians with a perfect justification to retaliate with far superior force, and second, the battlefields where the munitions will be used are primarily inside Ukraine.

Long-Term Impact

A cluster munition⁵ is a bomb containing multiple sub-munitions. They are dropped from air or fired from the ground and explode mid-air to release tens, sometimes hundreds, of sub-munitions which spread across an area equal to several football fields, with no distinction between military and civilian areas.

The sub-munitions explode with impact as they fall on the ground. However, a large number

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of them fail to explode due to the way in which they fall and become hazardous like landmines, exploding sometimes days or years after they were originally released.

Given the large dud rates – anywhere between 2 percent and 40 percent – it is most likely that whoever wins the war will have a herculean task in cleaning up the unexploded munitions to prevent a large number of civilian casualties due to accidental explosions.

This can be understood from the examples of Laos and Cambodia. Almost *20 million tons*⁶ of bombs were dropped by the U.S. in Laos – of which 2 million tons were cluster munitions, of which about 30 percent did not explode.

At least 20,000 people in Laos, half of them children, have either died or been injured since 1975 due to explosions caused by unexploded bombs dropped by the U.S. Clearing unexploded cluster bombs is more difficult as it is relatively harder to locate them.

Yet Another U-Turn

The decision to supply cluster munitions is yet another U-turn in the Biden administration's Ukraine policy, which had expressed doubts just a few months earlier, claiming that they were too dangerous.

This is now a pattern for the Biden administration – first denying a crucial weapon citing possibilities of dangerous escalation with Russia, but later going ahead with the supply or asking allies with the same set of weapons to do so.

U.S. and other NATO members have followed this pattern in the supply of the Patriot missile defense systems, HIMARS rocket launchers, battle tanks and fighter jets to Ukraine.

July 13 the U.S. *House of Representatives* voted down an amendment⁷ to prohibit the transfer of cluster bombs to Ukraine.

When asked by journalists why the decision to send cluster bombs was approved now, Biden made a passing remark that Ukraine had run out of conventional munitions. This took place amid the so-called Ukrainian counteroffensive which was much celebrated by NATO and the Western media.

The U.S. is, by far, the largest user of cluster munitions in the world. It has used these weapons indiscriminately in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Israel, a close U.S. ally, used cluster bombs in Lebanon in 2006.

Helen Caldicott: Cluster bombs are the most hideous weapons



Helen Caldicott.
(Photo wikipedia)

“Cluster bombs are, apart from DU [depleted uranium] weapons which cause cancer, genetic defects and birth deformities for the rest of time in the exposed population”, Dr. Helen Caldicott, founder of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Physicians for Social Responsibility, told Sputnik.

The weapons were expressly designed to cause indiscriminate loss of human life and hideous injuries over a wide area, regardless of who or what was being targeted, Caldicott explained. The bomblets, she added, are colored yellow and shaped like a can of soft drink and are therefore attractive to children, she added.

Source: https://t.me/geopolitics_live/2205, 18 July 2023

Notably, the use of cluster bombs in Iraq and Afghanistan came years after the ill effects of their use in Laos and Cambodia became clear and the world was already discussing a convention to ban them.

Civilian Victims

There are already reports about *Ukraine's widespread use of cluster bombs*⁸ against Russians in the current war and. Cluster bombs were also reportedly used by Ukraine against its own citizens during the initial phases of the *Donbass resistance in 2014*.⁹

However, following an outcry in the media, it declared that it *will not use the bombs*¹⁰ received from the U.S. in Russia, which means that they will be used in Russian-controlled regions in Ukraine.

Ukraine *anyway has limited or no capacity*¹¹ to drop the bombs deep inside Russian territories.

While saying that Russia has deliberately refrained so far from using cluster munitions in Ukraine given the threat to the civilian population, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu recently *claimed*¹² that, “if the U.S. supplies cluster munitions to Ukraine, the Russian armed forces will be forced to use similar means of destruction against the Ukrainian armed forces as a retaliatory measure.” [Human Rights Watch *said*¹³ in May that Russia has already used cluster bombs, as has Ukraine.]

The civilians in Donbass or Crimea are perhaps going to face the impact of the current war for generations thanks to the Biden administration.

Source: <https://peoplesdispatch.org/2023/07/14/us-cluster-munitions-supply-to-ukraine-will-harm-civilians-the-most/>, 18 July 2023

¹ Hubert Mooser in: Weltwoche No. 28 of 13 July 2023

² Calmy-Rey quoted in: Marcel Odermatt. Das Erwachen der Tauben. Weltwoche No. 29 of 20 July 2023

³ <https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-cluster-munitions-biden-russia-war-f364924503dfd14b8851b056852831fb>

⁴ https://treaties.unoda.org/t/cluster_munitions

⁵ <http://www.stopclustermunitions.org/en-gb/cluster-bombs/what-is-a-cluster-bomb.aspx>

⁶ <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Laos-struggles-with-unexploded-bombs-50-years-after-Paris-Accords>

⁷ <https://thegrayzone.com/2023/07/14/amendment-to-block-cluster-bomb-ukraine/>

⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/06/ukraine-civilian-deaths-cluster-munitions>

⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/20/ukraine-widespread-use-cluster-munitions>

¹⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-vows-use-cluster-bombs-de-occupy-only-defence-minister-2023-07-08/>

¹¹ <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-03-07/Russia-says-Ukraine-s-air-force-is-practically-destroyed-18cJCO5p5Ys/index.html>

¹² <https://tass.com/world/1645471>

¹³ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/29/cluster-munition-use-russia-ukraine-war>