

UN FINDS CLUSTER MUNITION EVIDENCE IN LIBYA, PRESSTV RUNS VIDEO OF US CLUSTER BOMBS IN AFGHANISTAN



B1 bomber dropping cluster bombs. (US Air Force photo from Wikimedia Commons)

In the At War blog on the New York Times website, it was reported yesterday that the UN has found additional evidence of the use of cluster bombs in Libya. The munitions found appear to have been used by pro-government forces:

Civilian de-miners working in Libya have found another type of cluster bomb used last year during the war that overthrew Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, according to the United Nations and Mines Advisory Group, or MAG, a nongovernment organization helping to clean up areas littered with mines and unexploded ordnance.

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About 30 of the submunitions were found, some exploded, others not, near the main road about 20 miles from the southern

gate of Ajdjabiya, according to Ivica Stilin, MAG's technical operations manager in Libya.

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Mr. Stilin said the evidence pointed to the Libyan Arab Republic Air Force's having dropped the bomblets in March 2011. The discovery also aligned with a photo analysis made at that time by David Cencio, an Italian aviation blogger who closely followed the war. In a post on March 14, 2011, Mr. Cencio noted that a photograph made several days before by Marco Longari of Agence France-Presse-Getty appeared to show a Libyan Su-22 flying at low-elevation carrying RBK-250's.

Only after the reader scrolls through eight paragraphs and a second photo below the headline photo do we find the notation that the US has not joined in the world ban on cluster munitions:

The use of cluster munitions has been widely banned under international convention, though several nations – including Libya, China, Russia and the United States – have not signed the convention. NATO has publicly said that neither its forces nor any of the foreign military armies that participated with the alliance in the conflict used cluster munitions.

Just one day after that post at the Times website, Iran's PressTV has put up a new story (warning: the video is set on auto-play) today claiming to have video of US cluster bomb usage in Afghanistan. There is no date on the video and the accompanying story with the video does not explicitly state that the video is recent. Note that the image at the very beginning of the PressTV video, which is also

the image shown when the video loads before being played, is the US Air Force photo found on Wikimedia Commons which I included above. Here is a part of the description from the PressTV story:

New footage has emerged showing US-led warplanes dropping cluster bombs in war-torn Afghanistan, Press TV reports.

The US-led forces have used cluster munitions since their invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. The bombings have caused huge loss of life and property damage.

Apart from the civilians who fall victim to such bombs during the raids, other people continue to be killed by bomblets that do not detonate upon impact.

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The US and Israel are the world's top producers of cluster bombs. Washington and Tel Aviv have refused to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions which has been in force since 2010.

The Afghanistan situation regarding cluster bombs is quite intriguing. On December 3, 2008, Afghanistan surprisingly defied the lame-duck Bush administration and signed the cluster bomb treaty:

In a last-minute change, President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan agreed on Wednesday to join some 90 other nations signing a treaty banning the use of the cluster munitions that have devastated his country in recent years.

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"Until this morning, Afghanistan was not going to be a signatory," said Jawed Ludin, Afghanistan's ambassador to the Scandinavian countries and the leader of its delegation here. He said the

president's change of heart came as a result of pressure by human rights organizations and cluster-bomb victims, including Soraj Ghulam Habib, a 17-year-old from the city of Herat who lost both legs when he accidentally stepped on an explosive cluster remnant seven years ago.

Mr. Ludin's announcement was greeted by raucous cheers in Oslo's City Hall, where the signing ceremony began Wednesday after two years of diplomatic work by Norway. By the end of the day, more than 90 nations – including 18 of 26 NATO members – had signed the treaty, called the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which bars adherents from using, producing, selling or stockpiling cluster munitions.

The Bush State Department feebly attempted a push-back:

The United States defended its decision not to sign the treaty. James F. Lawrence, director of the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement of the State Department, said cluster bombs were sometimes more humane than conventional bombs. As an example, he said that antennas on a roof could be taken out efficiently with a cluster bomb, without bringing the building down.

The Obama administration has been in office now for over three years and yet the US is not among the 111 signatories to the treaty counted by the Cluster Munition Coalition.

Among the many diplomatic cables in the WikiLeaks dump, The Guardian found a cable addressing Afghanistan's signing the cluster bomb ban. The cable is dated December 29, 2008, less than a month after Afghanistan surprised

the US by signing the treaty. Not surprisingly, the US response was that Afghanistan's signature was meaningless:

6. (SBU) CCM signature does not automatically result in restrictions on the plans and operations of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) or other organizations engaged in security operations in Afghanistan. The United States interprets Article 21 of the CCM to enable non-signatories to continue to operate with those that have signed the treaty. Furthermore, the United States reads the phrase "military cooperation and operations" in Article 21 to include all preparations for future military operations, transit of cluster munitions through the territory of a State Party, and storage and use of cluster munitions on the territory of a State Party.

And in the ultimate bit of irony, the US decided that in the case of cluster munitions, a one percent doctrine means that one percent of the bomblets remaining unexploded is tolerable, unlike Cheney's One Percent Doctrine, where any threat with even a one percent of being real must be treated as real:

9. (U) The United States is addressing the humanitarian impact of unexploded cluster munitions through multiple channels. On June 19, Secretary Gates signed the new Department of Defense Policy on Cluster Munitions and Unintended Harm to Civilians. The primary feature of this policy is the commitment that by 2018, U.S. armed forces will employ only those cluster munitions that, after arming, result in no more than 1 percent unexploded ordnance across the range of intended operational environments. Post-2018, the USG will not transfer cluster munitions that do not meet these criteria and, for

any cluster munitions transferred prior to 2018 not meeting this standard, the recipient state must agree not to use them after 2018.

No, that's not a typo. The US is giving itself until 2018 to get to the one percent level, meaning that cluster munitions are still a long way from even being "improved", let alone removed from the US arsenal.