

## Pack of lies

The 'disappearance' of 'Mrs Anthrax' is an utterly unlawful attempt to silence a respected scientist and critic of the US's use of depleted uranium weapons

In increasingly surreal post-war Iraq, a world where those deemed 'most wanted' by the US are pictured on a pack of playing cards and given silly nicknames ('Dr Germ', 'Chemical Sally', etc) in a mindset most people grow out of after kindergarten, the arrest of Dr Huda Ammash ('Mrs Anthrax') is a cause of particular concern.

Dr Ammash, a graduate of the University of Missouri and Texas University, is an internationally respected environmental biologist. Since the 1991 Gulf war, she has devoted much of her expertise to studying the health effects of the toxic and radioactive depleted uranium (DU) weapons used by the US and UK on both the civilian population of the region and on Iraqi and allied soldiers.

She is a fellow of the Islamic Academy of Science, and has served as dean of both the College of Education for Women and the College of Science at the University of Baghdad. She has spoken around the world on the dangers of DU. At a major international conference in Manchester three years ago she and an expert from Hiroshima drew stark comparisons between radiation-linked cancers and birth defects in Iraq and Japan.

She also contributed a chapter to *Iraq Under Siege: the deadly impact of sanctions and war*, which was published in Britain by Pluto Press and by South End Press in the US. Pointing out that DU weapons remain toxic and radioactive for 4.5 billion years, Dr Ammash drew attention to the illegality in international law of weapons whose effects continue to kill and pollute long after wars have finished.

The contributors to *Iraq Under Siege* include Robert Fisk, John Pilger, Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, Ali Abunimah and the former UN humanitarian coordinator in Iraq Denis Halliday. The book is a devastating condemnation of pollution, infant mortality and dodgy dealings at the UN – all the consequence of policies driven by the US and Britain.

South End Press has no doubt about the reason for Dr Ammash's arrest, and is 'outraged at the US extra-legal' action. The

publisher's Alexander Dwinell demands that Dr Ammash 'be released immediately', saying: 'The US government is trying to silence [her] outspoken criticism of the US role in causing cancers and other illnesses in Iraq through its use of biological hazardous weapons such as radioactive DU.'

It is deeply disturbing that those arrested by the US in Iraq are being 'disappeared' with absolutely no transparency and even more totally than those held in Guantanamo Bay. Ironically, that is exactly what happened under Iraq's previous regime.

Sabah al-Mukhtar, the president of the League of Arab Lawyers and whose practice frequently acts for governments (including, on occasion, that of Kuwait) is incandescent: 'From A to Z this is illegal – from the occupation to the detentions; to target, detain, disappear without any charge being made public, with no legal representation, with no magistrate, public prosecutor or proper state representative having made the decision. For the US Army in Doha to issue a list of nationals in another country – it is unlawful, unlawful, unlawful.'

With the ghost of Joe McCarthy walking tall in the White House, Dr Strangelove stalking the Pentagon and Machiavelli's descendents apparently running US foreign policy, the future looks bleak for Iraq, democracy and the disappeared. Ironically, many Iraqis are already saying it was better under Saddam. Regime change anyone? ■

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