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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, April 15, 2011 1:19 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Qaddafi Forces Fire Cluster Bombs Into Civilian Areas (NYT)

From: OpsNewsTicker@state.gov [mailto:OpsNewsTicker@state.gov]
Sent: Friday, April 15, 2011 01:07 PM
To: NEWS-Libya; NEWS-Mahogany
Cc: SES-O_Shift-II; SES-O_OS; SES-O_SWO
Subject: Qaddafi Forces Fire Cluster Bombs Into Civilian Areas (NYT)

MISURATA (NYT) — Military forces loyal to Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, who have surrounded this city and vowed to crush its anti-Qaddafi rebellion, have been firing into residential neighborhoods with heavy weapons, including cluster bombs that have been banned by much of the world and ground-to-ground rockets, according to the accounts of witnesses and survivors and physical evidence on the ground.

Such weapons, which strike large areas with a dense succession of high-explosive munitions, by their nature cannot be fired precisely, and when fired into populated areas place civilians at grave risk.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, speaking at a news conference in Berlin, said she was “not aware” of the specific use of cluster or other heavy weapons in Misurata, but said, “I’m not surprised by anything that Colonel Qaddafi and his forces do.”

She added: “That is worrying information. And it is one of the reasons the fight in Misurata is so difficult, because it’s at close quarters, it’s in amongst urban areas and it poses a lot of challenges to both NATO and to the opposition.”

The cluster munitions were visible in use late Thursday night, in the form of what appeared to be 120-millimeter mortar rounds that burst in the air over the city, scattering high-explosive bomblets below.

Remnants of expended shells, examined and photographed by The New York Times, show the rounds to be MAT-120 cargo mortar projectiles, each of which carries and distributes 21 smaller submunitions designed both to kill people and penetrate light armor.

Components from the 120-millimeter rounds, according to their markings, were manufactured in Spain in 2007 — one year before Spain signed the international Convention on Cluster Munitions and pledged to destroy its stocks. Libya is not a signatory to the convention.

The cluster munitions are not the only indiscriminate heavy weapon system to imperil the city’s neighborhoods. An examination of the area of an intensive rocket barrage on Thursday near the city’s port showed that the Qasr Ahmed residential district was struck by multiple rockets, known as GRADs, which landed in a dense pattern on houses and streets. One rocket shattered the wall beside a mosque.

The GRAD rockets, an area weapons system designed in the Soviet Union to blanket a battlefield with multiple explosions, were readily identified by their twisted fragments and remains, some of which bore markings

indicating they had been manufactured during the cold war. They are fired from truck-mounted launchers that hold 40 rocket tubes, so that each truck is, essentially, a mobile system that can launch its own barrage 12 miles or more.

One of the GRAD rockets alone killed eight civilians, according to survivors and witnesses, who then showed two journalists eight hastily dug graves in a public park nearby, where relatives prayed over the dead. The bodies had been interred beside two children's swing sets. Each grave was dated: April 14, 2011.

Taken together, the attacks of Thursday and the evidence they left behind, point to a campaign by Colonel Qaddafi's forces against Misurata that relies in part on weapons designed to endanger the lives of the civilians trapped within. They also support the rebels' frequent contentions that in the lopsided fight for Libya, Colonel Qaddafi's forces have targeted civilians or at a minimum, taken few measures to avoid endangering them.

"This is a human tragedy," said Ali Salem, 40, a resident of Qasr Ahmed, who described his four children now struggling to sleep. "What else do you call it when they bomb with artillery, rockets and mortars people who are safely sleeping in their homes?"

The toll of the GRAD rocket strikes also framed the ways in which civilians in this war are forced into vulnerability. Misurata has few open markets, almost no electricity and limited supplies of food. To eat, many residents must stand in bread lines.

One of the rockets that landed in Qasr Ahmed exploded beside one of those lines, killing several people waiting for food. "I jumped onto the ground when the explosions started," said Ali Hmouda, 36, an employee of the port. "My friend did not. His head came off."

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