

No 10 orders legal review of Iraq strike

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and Eben Black

DOWNING STREET has ordered fresh reports on the legality of an attack on Iraq amid mounting concern over the idea of toppling Saddam Hussein by force. The move follows resistance from politicians and senior military officers.

Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, chief of the defence staff, is understood to have conveyed doubts to Geoff Hoon, the defence minister, about the legality of an attack and about the possible high numbers of British casualties which could result.

Lord Goldsmith, the attorney-general, has been asked for a legal opinion by next month on whether new approval from the United Nations security council is necessary. Legal advisers to the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office have also been consulted and their views are divided.

The Cabinet Office will submit its own findings next month based on updated evidence from the intelligence services that Saddam may be linked to Al-Qaeda or other terrorist groups and on his development of weapons of mass destruction.

An initial dossier, compiled by the intelligence services on Saddam's terror links earlier this year, was shelved because it failed to make a convincing case. MI6, the intelligence service, has been asked to go back to its sources, including Iraqi informants, and to review the latest findings of the international investigation into the Al-Qaeda network.

Tony Lloyd, a former foreign office minister, yesterday reflected growing unease within the Labour party over the possibility of Britain joining an American-led strike against Saddam. "It is not good enough to say trust the White House because they are Americans. We have got to be a bit more sophisticated than that," he said.

In another development, Haas Bux, the UN's chief weapons inspector, said yesterday that his team were expecting to return to Iraq, a possibility that is likely to forestall any military action. "We think it would be natural for the Iraqis to accept the inspection because they claim in a determined way that there is nothing left, they have done away with weapons of mass destruction."

Tony Blair's position as chief ally to George Bush, the American president, is being undermined by a threatened revolt by Labour backbenchers and some ministers, and the prospect of British major union leaders joining forces against any attempt to

wage war on Iraq without parliamentary approval.

The unions, led by Bill Morris, general secretary of the transport and general workers, plan to push through a motion at next month's Labour party conference calling on the prime minister to win votes in both the Commons and Lords before joining any American attack on Saddam.

Morris is seen as a close ally of Gordon Brown, who is said to have opposed military action in cabinet amid warnings of the potential multi-billion-pound cost. Other unions backing the motion include the two rail unions, Aslef and the RMT, Unison, which represents public-sector workers and Amicus, formed from the merger of the AEEU engineering and



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electrical union and the white-collar MSF.

The unions are also encouraging a concerted campaign for constituency parties to submit identical motions, making it far more difficult for the party hierarchy to refuse a debate and vote.

The TGWU's block representation gives it the largest number of votes — more than 1m — at the conference. With the backing of other unions and constituencies, victory for the motion would be assured.

The motion says Blair must not go to war "without the consent of parliament".

Blair and his colleagues at the top of the party do not consider themselves bound by decisions at Labour's party conference. Following Blairite reforms, policies are now determined at regional and national "policy forums" rather than at conference.

Blair's plight will be worsened by the absence of his staunchest union ally, Sir Ken Jackson, formerly general secretary of the AEEU section of Amicus. Jackson was ousted last month by Derek Simpson, a local union official and former communist.

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