

Dossier foreword by TB

The document published today is the work of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), which is made up of the heads of the UK's three Intelligence and Security Agencies, the Chief of Defence Intelligence, and senior officials from key government departments. The JIC provides regular assessments to me on a wide range of foreign policy and international security issues.

Its work, like the material it analyses, is largely secret. It is unprecedented for them to publish this kind of document. But in light of the debate about Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), I wanted to share with the British public the reasons why I believe this issue to be a current and serious threat to the UK national interest.

In recent months, I have been increasingly alarmed by the evidence from inside Iraq that despite sanctions, despite the damage done to his capability in the past, and despite the UNSCR's expressly outlawing it, Saddam Hussein is continuing to develop WMD, and with it the ability to inflict real damage upon the region, and the stability of the world.

Gathering intelligence inside Iraq is not easy. Saddam's is one of the most secretive and dictatorial regimes in the world. So I believe people will understand why the Agencies cannot be specific about the sources, human and technical, which have formed the judgements in this document. I and other Ministers have been briefed in detail on the sources, and are satisfied as to their authority, and the authority of the information they have disclosed. I also want to pay tribute to our Security and Intelligence Services for the often extraordinary work that they do.

What I believe the JIC reports to me have established beyond doubt is that Saddam has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons, that he continues in his efforts to develop nuclear weapons, and that he has been able to extend the range of his ballistic missile programme.

This picture in recent months has become more not less worrying. Faced with the picture put before me on seeing a succession of JIC papers on the subject, as Prime Minister I have a choice: do I ignore the evidence; or do I act to address the threat?

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I am in no doubt that the threat is serious, and current; that he has made progress on WMD, and that he has to be stopped; that he does not want the UN inspectors in precisely because he has a great deal to hide.

Alone among leaders, Saddam has used chemical weapons. Intelligence reports make clear that he sees the possession of WMD, and the belief overseas that he would use them, as vital to his strategic interests, and in particular his goal of regional domination. And the document discloses that his military planning allows for some of the WMD to be ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them.

In today's inter-dependent world, a major regional conflict does not stay confined to the region in question. Faced with someone who has shown himself capable of using WMD, I believe the international community has to stand up for itself and ensure its authority is upheld.

The threat posed to international peace and security, when WMD are in the hands of a dangerous and unstable regime like Iraq's, is real. Unless we face up to the threat, not only do we risk undermining the authority of the UN, whose resolutions he defies, but more important, we place at risk the lives and prosperity of our own people.

The case I make is not that Saddam could launch a nuclear attack on London or another part of the UK (He could not). The case I make is that the UN resolutions demanding he stops his WMD programme are being flouted; that since the inspectors left four years ago, he has continued with this programme; that the inspectors must be allowed back in to do their job properly; and that if he refuses, the international community will have to act.

It is the minimum necessary to ensure that he does not get to use the weapons he has, or get hold of the weapons he wants.

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