

Dossier foreword by TB

The document published today is based, in large part, on the work of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), which is chaired by the Cabinet Office and 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 and my senior colleagues 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 the Government 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 UNSCRs 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, which have formed the judgements in this document, nor why we cannot publish everything we know. We cannot of course publish the detailed raw intelligence without endangering sources. I and other Ministers have been briefed in detail on the intelligence and are satisfied as to its authority. 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. I also believe that, as stated in the document, Saddam will now do his utmost to try to conceal his weapons from UN inspectors.

The picture presented by JIC papers in recent months has become more not less worrying. It is clear that despite sanctions, the policy of containment has not worked sufficiently well to prevent Saddam from developing these weapons.

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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.

Alone among leaders, Saddam has used chemical weapons, not only against an enemy state, but against his own people. 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. I am quite clear that he will go to extreme lengths, indeed has already done so, to avoid giving them up.

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 brutal and aggressive regime like Saddam'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 and in the longer term, we place at risk the lives and prosperity of our own people.

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, or if he makes it impossible for them to do their job, as he has done in the past, the international community will have to act.

I believe that faced with the information given to me by the JIC over the past three years, the UK Government has been right to support the demands that this issue be confronted and dealt with. We must ensure that he does not get to use the weapons he has, or get hold of the weapons he wants.

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