

Sent to
G-ally
1/7

THIS
WMD PIECE

C04

In Strict Confidence.

WMD.

Thirteen years after Iraq implemented the biggest ever peacetime biological and chemical warfare programme (next to the old Soviet Union) questions are now being asked that suggest that programme ended with the expulsion of the UNSCOM inspectors in 1998, and has remained dormant, or even dead since. The argument is based on the paucity of WMD material that has been uncovered since the coalition swept through Iraq earlier this year. Fuel has been added to the debate by the ferocious row between the BBC and Number 10 based on the allegation that the Corporation's defence reporter Andrew Gilligan publicly claimed that one important 'fact' in the government's dossier warning the nation of the potential perils of Saddam's WMD programme had been effectively dreamed up by Alistair Campbell. This is the famous warning that Iraq's WMD could be deployed within 45 minutes. Campbell, famously and dramatically has wholly denied the allegation. House of Commons Committees, writs, nasty letters and table thumping have followed. Both sides, at the time of writing seem prepared to go the mat on the issue.

What is the probable truth?

I understand that British intelligence have consistently warned not that Saddam could launch or deploy WMD at 45 minutes notice (that is risible to anyone who knows how the weaponry works) but, more accurately, that Saddam's command and control and communications systems (C3) had been sufficiently refined to allow him to authorise the use of WMD to his regional and often far flung outposts.

At first the spooks were uneasy about allowing this fact to be publicised. Its true there was only one source, but he happened to be an Iraqi Army officer of Brigadier rank – an MI6 agent in place, a hen's tooth in the body of coalition

TMG 11/0001