

22 March 2002

IRAQ: POSSIBLE TERRORIST RESPONSE TO A US ATTACK

We have been giving some thought to the possible terrorist consequences should the US, possibly with UK support, seek to topple Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. I thought that you might find it helpful to see our current assessment, together with an outline of our own preparations.

2. Since the end of the Gulf War Iraq has been implicated in a small number of murders of Iraqi oppositionists in the Middle East but only one terrorist plan directed against a Western target - a planned car bomb attack on ex-President Bush in Kuwait in 1993. There is no credible intelligence that demonstrates that Iraq was implicated in planning the 11 September attacks.

3. We judge that the current period of heightened tension between Iraq and the US is unlikely to prompt Saddam to order terrorist strikes against Coalition interests. Even limited military action (for example, cruise missile attacks such as the those in response to the attempted murder of ex-President Bush) would be unlikely to prompt such a response. We assess that Saddam is only likely to order terrorist attacks if he perceives that the survival of his regime is threatened.

In the UK

4. If Saddam were to initiate a terrorist campaign, we assess that Iraqi capability to mount attacks in the UK is currently limited. We are aware of no Iraqi intelligence (DGI) officers based in the UK. There are up to DGI agents here who report on anti-regime activities. But most of these agents lack the inclination or capability to mount terrorist attacks. So if the DGI wished to mount attacks in the UK it would need to import teams

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from overseas. It is possible that some Palestinian groups based outside the UK might be willing to mount attacks in support of Iraq,

5. Nonetheless, in case Iraq should try to co-ordinate action by existing UK-based agents, or to import its own or a surrogate terrorist capability, we will be taking a number of steps over the coming months, including:

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- reviewing our knowledge of past and present DGI visiting case officers to identify and disrupt any increase in DGI activity;
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- putting in place arrangements to deal with (and capitalise on) any increase in defectors, volunteers or callers to the Service's public telephone number who might have relevant information. Experience during the Gulf War leads us to expect an increase in such contact with the public in the event of conflict;
- with the police, maintaining coverage of the Palestinian community, some of whom, as during the Gulf War, may react adversely to any threat to Iraq.

6. You may recall that, at the time of the Gulf War, a number of suspected Iraqi sympathisers were detained pending deportation on grounds of national security. These included members of Iraqi support organisations, as well as individuals believed to be associated with Palestinian terrorist groups, such as the Abu Nidhal Organisation. We currently assess that the number of individuals in the UK who potentially pose sufficient threat to be subject to deportation or detention is small. We are currently reviewing the cases of those who could pose a threat to establish whether there might be grounds for action.

Overseas

7. We believe that Middle Eastern countries would be the most likely location should Saddam order terrorist attacks on Western interests. Other locations, for instance SE Asia

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featured in attempted DGI co-ordinated attacks during the Gulf War and are thus also a possibility. We will, of course, continue to liaise closely with FCO colleagues to ensure they are in a position to brief missions if the situation develops.

3.

Chemical or biological (CB) threat

8. There were media stories during the Gulf War suggesting that Iraq planned to mount CB terrorist attacks in Western countries, and a 1998 scare (arising from a tale put about by Iraqi émigrés) that Saddam planned to send anthrax abroad in scent bottles. Given Iraq's documented CB capabilities, we can anticipate similar stories again.

9. Most Iraqi CB terrorist attacks have been assassination attempts against individuals, often émigrés.

Iraq used chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq war and also against civilian Kurds in 1988, but there is no intelligence that Iraq has hitherto planned or sought mass-casualty CB terrorist attacks. As with conventional terrorism, we assess that Saddam would only use CB against Western targets if he felt the survival of his regime was in doubt. In these circumstances, his preferred option would be to use conventional military delivery systems against targets in the region, rather than terrorism.

10. There have for some years been reports of contact between the Iraqi regime and Al Qa'ida about CB. But we have yet to see convincing intelligence that useful co-operation developed, or that Iraq provided genuine CB materials.

11. I am copying this letter to Stephen Wright, John Scarlett, Julian Miller and Tom McKane.

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Deputy Director General

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