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Policy Director

NB. PAGES 6, 7
+ 10-13
WERE NOT RELEVANT
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D/Policy Dir/6/2/2 (088/02)

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PS/Secretary of State

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AXIS OF EVIL

Issue

How should UK approach the 'axis of evil'.

Timing

Priority.

Recommendation

The phrase itself was unclear and its international handling before and after unfortunate: but the problem is real and affects UK and European interests too. We should:

- a. Acknowledge that these countries pose (increasing) risks to international stability.
- b. Persuade the US to explain way, releasing intelligence in a road show.

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- c. Encourage a broad-based approach ranging from diplomacy to challenge inspections and levers on suppliers.
- d. Not rule out UK participation in military action against Iraq if that is the only way to stem the tide of WMD proliferation and a worthwhile and legal option exists at the time.

Presentation

We should play our part with the FCO in trying to lift the level of debate, especially in Europe. In particular, we should back up any US roadshow - or other release of intelligence - with a measured interdepartmental discussion of the issues.

Detail

The background to the President's speech was set out in Washington Tel No 188 and has been filled out by some of our direct contacts with the Pentagon. We would also add Libya to the list.

It is important to distinguish two strands here:

- a. The direct risks from proliferation in the three countries; and the potential of other countries to follow.
- b. The potential association with international terrorism.

Direct Risks

Updated detailed intelligence assessments on the three countries are being submitted separately on limited circulation. Summaries at secret level of the kind potentially releasable to European Allies are attached, the JIC are working further on a public version. The key points:

- a.
- b. Iraq came close to developing nuclear weapons before the Gulf War, with medium range missiles. The containment policy since then halted her nuclear progress, eg by UN inspection regimes and bombing in 1998. But Saddam has kept trying: we do not currently assess him as having succeeded but the high level of technical capacity that Iraq has sustained means that they could move forward quickly, especially if Saddam could lay his hands on fissile material.

c.

d.

One can explain some of these programmes in regional terms: Iran and Iraq in particular respond to each other's fears. But once capability exists, it will pose risks not just to each other but to the wider region.

While the JIC has identified some increase in the risk of CBRN terrorism more generally, there are few identified links to the countries above. Any risk is perhaps more general than specific.

UK Interests within NATO and ESDP

Proliferation in Iraq and particularly that in prospect in Iran, poses direct risks to UK interests.

Saddam : have been prepared to use WMD in the region already. So there are specific risks.

The proximity of such weapon states in areas of longstanding and bitter conflicts between religious and other groups would increase the probability that sooner or later a conflict would develop in which they were used. Apart from the risks to deployed forces and bases (eg Cyprus) the UK would be more generally at risk of attack. So we have a more general interest in stemming the tide of proliferation.

Non-military Counter Measures

Traditional controls have concentrated on international diplomatic pressure: CW and IAEA inspections, especially under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention; multilateral arms control; and pressure on suppliers. These have undoubtedly slowed the spread of WMD: but it has crept onwards again, at an accelerating pace in recent years.

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There is a more general argument for stemming the tide by taking action to intercept delivery of WMD supplies or to disrupt or destroy the capacity of a proliferating state as an example to others. While much has been made of the unfinished agenda, Saddam is the strategic centre of gravity of Iraqi WMD programmes. Also unless we tackle some of those cheating on their treaty obligations, the rest of the WMD regime will crumble.

Looked at in security policy terms I assess that - while stated excessively starkly - the US concerns are valid and should apply to the UK too. We may not be the object of as much direct aggression as the US from states such as Iraq and Iran, but we are often in the top five. Also we are closer to the Middle East and are liable to be threatened sooner. North Korea is less of a concern to us, Libya more.

Options for Military Action

Before assessing military options we should need to be clear about the strategic objectives. At one level this could be as straightforward as removing the capability to threaten the West or neighbours. (But there could be a valid general objective to prevent the second use of nuclear weapons - which others might imitate - or to deter further countries from seeking to acquire WMD.)

That said, it is not necessarily easy to find straightforward or effective military options. After the bombing of Iraqi facilities by Israel which was condemned by the UN, rogue states have learned how to conceal their facilities and direct targeting may not be feasible. There are problems over collateral damage risks from the toxic materials used or deliberate location near civilian populations (a Saddam device). Also, finding a UNSCR or other legal base for engagement may be problematic, especially establishing 'imminence' for self-defence. Despite these problems, previous strategic estimates (on which we can brief the Secretary of State orally if required) have shown valid options for military operations in some specific scenarios.

There are of course many potential downsides even from a feasible operation: regional misunderstanding and reactions; follow on if first attacks do not succeed; and possibly just pushing rogue states to try harder. It is not easy to see the satisfactory end-states which should be the objective of military operations.

Deterrence

Overall I conclude that, while continuing to promote non-military control methods the scale and risk of proliferation is such that we should not rule out military options

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absolutely: the fact is that we may otherwise discover within the next four years that the UK is within range of hostile chemical and possibly nuclear weapons. Even if the US came through as a priority with the provision of Missile Defence for 'friends and allies' (which they are following up actively) there is no prospect of effective defences being in place in Europe in that timescale.

We do of course have our Trident force to help deter attack on the UK (and we routinely review these risks in relation to targeting and deployment options). This should have a powerful effect on anyone considering attacking the UK with nuclear weapons: it may have a deterrent effect on those contemplating using chemical or biological weapons against us.

European Partners

I believe it would be wiser for the UK to take a more complex position supporting the underlying concerns but advocating a greater mix of possible approaches. No 10 have started to take this line over the last week but we need to think through the options in more depth. In this way we have better prospects of influencing the US towards a successful outcome. Above all we should encourage the US to explain the issues more effectively, especially to European and Middle Eastern audiences.

I should be grateful to know if the Secretary of State agrees this overall approach to the issue on which we will be working with the Cabinet Office ahead of the PM's next meeting with President Bush. The countries mentioned are being assessed individually. If specific military options start to be considered in the US, we would of course seek his guidance on whether the UK should participate in planning.

Public presentation material based on the intelligence assessment is being developed by the Cabinet Office. It would further excite the debate for MOD to join the presentation actively but this line of thinking could underpin our responding to questions. If the Secretary of State agrees we will provide updated material.

SIMON WEBB

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IRAQ

Missiles Programme

- Iraq may have retained up to twenty 600km range AL HUSSEIN missiles.
- It is also developing two SRBM programmes allowed under UNSCR 687 (maximum range 150km): the liquid-propellant AL SAMOUD and the solid-propellant ABABIL-100.
- The AL SAMOUD has undergone extensive flight testing, and might go into series production soon, while the ABABIL-100 is at an earlier stage of development.
- Prohibited R&D is thought to be underway on extending the range of AL SAMOUD and solid systems much larger than ABABIL-100, though the latter is unlikely to produce a viable system for several years.

Nuclear Weapon Programmes

- Until 1991 Iraq had a massive nuclear weapons project. If the Gulf War had not intervened, it might have produced a crude nuclear device by late 1993.
- It is assessed that Iraq has no capability to manufacture weapons usable fissile material. However, some dual-use material may still be in the inventory.
- With the departure of the IAEA inspection and monitoring team in December 1998, Iraq could have recommenced nuclear weapons activity, as it retains skilled scientists and weapons design information.
- If sanctions were lifted or became ineffective Iraq could possibly develop its first nuclear weapon - a crude weapon for air-delivery - in 5-7 years; and a further 2-3 years to produce a warhead for missile delivery. These timelines could be shortened if it has procured fissile material from abroad.

Chemical Weapon Programmes

- We assess that Iraq probably retains a stockpile, which could easily amount to more than 100 tonnes of agent. They are also likely to retain stocks of undeclared precursors and chemical process equipment. Iraq has the capability to start the production of significant amounts of mustard

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agent immediately, and the production of nerve agent within weeks of a decision to do so.

- Iraq has rebuilt facilities formerly associated with its CW programme and could be re-establishing a CW capability.

Biological Weapon Programme

- In 1995 Iraq finally admitted to a BW programme and to the production and weaponisation of anthrax, botulinum toxin and aflatoxin in missile warheads and bombs. Iraq is probably concealing substantial elements of the programme, including some production equipment, weapons and agents. Iraq could have retained hidden stocks of BW agent, weapons and production equipment, and a significant offensive BW capability could be regenerated within weeks by drawing on residual expertise and legitimate biotech facilities.