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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH



8 November 1990

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*Prime Minister*

*A useful paper*

Constraining Iraq's Nuclear, CBW and  
Missile Capability

*CBW  
F/A*

I enclose a paper, prepared in the FCO, about Iraq's nuclear, CBW and missile capability. The paper may need further work but the Foreign Secretary thought the Prime Minister would wish to see it before Mr Baker's visit tomorrow.

I am copying this letter and paper to Simon Webb (MOD) and Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

*[Handwritten signature]*

(J S Wall)  
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq  
10 Downing Street

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## CONSTRAINING IRAQ'S NUCLEAR, CBW AND MISSILE CAPABILITY

## INTRODUCTION

1. It is agreed that any lasting settlement of the Gulf crisis will have to include more effective ways of constraining Iraqi NBC and missile capabilities. Otherwise they will constitute a continuing threat to regional and international security. Much will depend on how the crisis is resolved: the military option may provide the opportunity to destroy Iraq's capabilities but this might in itself have only a temporary effect.

2. The existing constraints on Iraq are:

(a) her membership of the NPT and of the 1925 Geneva CW Protocol (note 1). She has signed but not ratified the 1972 BW Convention;

(b) existing restrictions by suppliers through the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Australia Group, the MTCR, the Zangger Committee and SNET.

3. These constraints have proved inadequate - because of the subterfuges of the Iraqi procurement network, and the failure of some supplier countries to operate stringent controls.

4. Iraq has used CW in war. The main CW production and storage facility is at Samarra, 100 km from Baghdad. There are also three production facilities at Habbaniyah.

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Note 1: The 1925 Protocol prohibits the use of chemical and biological weapons in war; but in common with many other countries, Iraq has reserved the right to retaliate in kind against other parties, and to use these weapons against non-parties



5. Iraq has not used BW in war, but is believed to possess them, though it is not certain that she has a delivery capability. One BW research and production facility has been identified at Salman Pak, but there may be others.

6. In the nuclear field, Iraq may not yet have violated the letter of her NPT obligations, but she has embarked on a clandestine programme aimed at acquiring a weapons capability. Most estimates suggest that she could not have nuclear weapons for at least five years, but it is possible that she would now be able to proceed without further outside help to the production at least of crude nuclear devices. The principal nuclear facility is the Baghdad nuclear research centre at Tuwaitha, which includes the Osirak reactor bombed by the Israelis in 1981. There is a suspect uranium recovery plant at Al Qaim, and a possible enrichment plant at Saad 4-6 South.

7. Iraq has successfully modified Soviet supplied missiles and is well on the way to establishing an indigenous missile production capability.

#### MILITARY ACTION

8. Military action could largely remove the existing production capabilities and main storage sites. It could thus eliminate much of the threat to Allied forces and reduce the regional threat from Iraq in the immediate post-war period. But:

(a) Military action would not necessarily be successful. Iraq has at least 12 manufacturing/assembly facilities around the country: the sites are well protected. In the case of BW, only one site is known but others may exist;

(b) Iraqi CW and missile forces are mobile and many have now been dispersed. A pre-emptive strike might thus provoke retaliation;

(c) Military action might kill large numbers of civilians (especially hostages) near the installations. There might be widespread and/or persistent environmental contamination. The CW plant at Samarra, with a total estimated stockpile of 10,000 tonnes, is only 100 km from Baghdad, and the wind might, following an attack, carry large quantities of CW that far. The BW plant at Salman Pak is near the tomb of the Muslim Saint Salman. An attack could release lethal concentrations of anthrax spore for up to 100 km, and make the area uninhabitable for a long period.

9. Such contamination is not inevitable. In practice CBW agents would probably be largely destroyed by fire following bombing. The nuclear facilities are comparatively small and there seems to be little serious risk of widespread contamination.

10. Even the complete destruction of all facilities would not remove the threat for good (just as Israel's bombing of the Osirak reactor in 1981 did not remove the nuclear threat permanently). The scientists and engineers would remain, and could rebuild an indigenous NBC capability in time.

#### AN IMPOSED SOLUTION

11. If Iraqi withdrawal is achieved peacefully, we will need to maximise pressure on her to accept the immediate dismantling of her weapons of mass destruction. Short of occupying her territory, we should have to rely on:

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(a) Iraq's need for international help to rebuild her economy. The solidarity of Western creditors would be crucial here;

(b) action in the UN Security Council. Continuation of the general embargo under SCR 661 will not be practicable much beyond Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, assuming that the full requirements of the Security Council have been met. We should have to seek a new Resolution. This would exploit international revulsion against Iraqi behaviour in Kuwait and (if appropriate) her use of CBW in hostilities. It would need to embargo the following:

- (i) all arms and munitions;
- (ii) all components and precursors which could contribute to an NBC facility;
- (iii) technical or other services which might assist development of such facilities; and
- (iv) the granting of credits to these ends.

(c) If such an embargo is unobtainable, the US and UK may need to block Iraqi oil exports unilaterally, until our post-crisis aims are realised. Much would depend on Saudi and Turkish support and on the attitude of other major players, especially Egypt, France and the Soviet Union. This strategy might not be sustainable for long if Iraq had left Kuwait peacefully.

#### A LONGER-TERM SOLUTION

12. Any long term solution should ideally include the following constraints:

- (a) dismantling of existing facilities or diversion to peaceful uses, with adequate verification;

(b) if Iraq wished to continue with a civil nuclear programme of any kind, a reaffirmation of Iraq's commitments under the NPT, combined with a rigorous inspection regime, going well beyond what the IAEA would normally require, including the permanent stationing of inspectors;

(c) renunciation by Iraq of CBW, ratification of the BW Convention, and access for inspectors on an "anytime, anywhere" basis;

(d) complete or partial renunciation of ballistic missiles, again with adequate inspection provisions;

(e) continuing or increased restrictions by supplier states on export to Iraq of items which might be of significance for NBC weapons or a missile programme.

13. Of these, restrictions by supplier states are the easiest to put in place, since they do not depend on Iraqi cooperation. However, it will be difficult over time to maintain support by all potential suppliers unless equally tight constraints are applied to the region as a whole. In any case, seeing what Iraq has already achieved, supplier restrictions alone will not constrain her forever.

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#### A MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK

14. Regardless of whether Iraqi withdrawal is achieved peacefully or not, a comprehensive solution to the problem of constraining Iraq will be necessary, and will need to make full use of possible multilateral agreements. These might include the following, none of which would be quickly realised, and some of which are not to the liking of the UK:

(a) a Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone. Already notionally accepted by all Middle East states. But not



achievable as regards Israel in the foreseeable future, and probably not before a comprehensive solution to the Arab/Israel conflict;

(b) a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, an idea put forward by President Mubarak. (The UK has been unenthusiastic because of the linkage between nuclear and chemical weapons. Again, Israel would be the key);

(c) intensified efforts for a worldwide CW Convention (likely to be a US target for 1991 or 92);

(d) Iraqi ratification of the BW Convention.

#### CONCLUSION

15. In the interests of regional stability we need, following a settlement, to constrain Iraq's NBC capabilities. In the event of hostilities, military action might destroy the existing facilities (though there are problems), but by itself even this would not constrain Iraq indefinitely. In the immediate aftermath of hostilities, or of a peaceful withdrawal, we should seek to impose a regime specific to Iraq, and should maintain stringent supplier restrictions. In the longer term, we should aim at constraining Iraq within a wider Middle East or global framework.

#### IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Intensive studies should continue of the feasibility of eliminating Iraq's NBC and missile capabilities through military action, taking into account the likely extent of collateral damage, contamination and civilian casualties.

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- There should be further discreet discussion with the IAEA regarding the safeguarding of Iraq's nuclear facilities.
- More detailed studies should be undertaken of the likely inspection effort required, under UN auspices or otherwise, to verify a unilateral renunciation or partial renunciation by Iraq of NBC weapons and ballistic missiles.
- Work should be undertaken on the form of a Council Resolution, to be sought in the immediate aftermath of hostilities.
- There should be further discussion of these issues with the United States, in the WEU and with creditor and supplier countries, especially with a view to imposing necessary constraints on Iraq after the crisis.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
8 November 1990