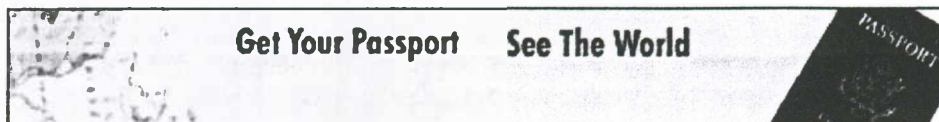


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## Blair: Iraq Can Deploy Quickly

### Report Presents New Details on Banned Arms

By Glenn Frankel

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LONDON, Sept. 24 – Iraq could deploy nerve gas and anthrax weapons within 45 minutes of an order from President Saddam Hussein or his son, and it has been seeking to purchase uranium from Africa on the black market to build a nuclear bomb, according to a British intelligence dossier released today by Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The 50-page report contends that Iraq has produced germ warfare agents in mobile laboratories and restarted its nuclear weapons program after U.N. inspectors left the country in 1998.

It states that U.N. sanctions are hindering Iraq's efforts to obtain enriched uranium needed to build a nuclear weapon. But if U.N. sanctions were broken, the report says, it would take Iraq between one and two years to build a bomb if it obtained fissile material and other essential components from foreign sources, and at least five years to produce enough fissile material of its own.

That assessment is more conservative than some U.S. analyses of Iraq's nuclear program. President Bush, for instance, has said that Iraq could build a bomb within a year if it acquired fissile material.

Britain is the closest U.S. ally in the confrontation with Iraq, and Blair



British Prime Minister Tony Blair addresses the House of Commons after his government published an intelligence dossier on Iraq's weapons programs. (Television image via AFP)

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has frequently acted as the two countries' international voice. He took today's dossier to a contentious special session of Parliament, but the televised speech also served as an appeal to the world at large.

Produced by Britain's top-secret Joint Intelligence Committee, the dossier contains no dramatic revelations, experts said, but gives new intriguing details about the Iraqi weapons programs, such as the 45-minute window. It generally does not disclose sources. But Blair's attribution to the committee is unprecedented, officials said.

Though the report documents Iraq's continuing efforts, analysts said, it suggests that Baghdad would find it difficult to wage sustained, large-scale war with weapons of mass destruction.

The report "doesn't try to make the case that Iraq is on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons or long-range missiles," said Gary Samore, an American weapons expert and the editor of a report issued earlier this month by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. "But when you put the whole together, it does provide convincing information to support the argument that Iraq is pursuing weapons of mass destruction and the long-range missiles to deliver them."

A senior Iraqi official called the dossier "scaremongering, exaggeration and lies." At a news conference in Baghdad, presidential adviser Amir al-Saadi said that U.N. weapons inspectors, whom Iraq has invited to return, would have "unfettered access" to establish the truth.

Blair opened the all-day debate in the House of Commons by declaring that Hussein's program for developing weapons of mass destruction was "active, detailed and growing. It is not shut down. It is up and running now." He said Britain was committed to disarming Iraq "one way or another."

"Read it all, and again I defy anyone to say that this cruel and sadistic dictator should be allowed to get his hands on nuclear, chemical or biological weapons," said Blair, who faces strong opposition at home on his Iraq stance, including from within his ruling Labor Party.

The report says Iraq has retained as many as 20 al-Hussein missiles with a range of up to about 400 miles in violation of U.N. sanctions. It also says the Iraqis have started to deploy the al-Samoud liquid-propellant missile and have used the absence of inspectors to work on improving its range to at least 125 miles, which is beyond the 94-mile limit imposed by the United Nations.

Such missiles could deliver chemical or biological warheads to countries as far away as Israel and Greece.

The dossier also says that although Iraq's main chemical weapons facility was destroyed by U.N. inspectors, Hussein's government has

rebuilt other "dual use" plants that could make both civilian and military products. Iraq could produce significant quantities of mustard gas "within weeks," and nerve agent "within months," according to the report.

Citing intelligence from "reliable sources," the report says that Hussein regards these weapons as the basis of Iraq's regional power and that he is prepared to use them against his own population and not merely as a last resort.

As for nuclear weapons development, which experts say is the most difficult to assess, the report gives new details on Iraq's alleged efforts to acquire dual-use technology and materials with nuclear applications, including pumps, magnets, gases and aluminum tubes needed to build gas centrifuges used to enrich uranium.

In another new accusation, the report states that "there is intelligence that Iraq has sought the supply of significant quantities of uranium from Africa." It does not specify from which country or when. It also says Iraq has begun plans to conceal evidence of its weapons from U.N. inspectors if they return to the country.

In Parliament this afternoon, Blair was challenged by a wide spectrum of opponents, from traditional leftists who oppose military action against Iraq under any circumstances to moderates who expressed concerns about the effect of a war on Iraqi civilians, Middle East stability and hopes for a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many lawmakers also expressed the fear that the United States would attack Iraq without U.N. support.

"Those of us who have never subscribed to British unilateralism are not about to sign up for American unilateralism either," said Charles Kennedy, leader of the small but influential Liberal Democrat party. He added that "it is vital that the British government maintains its moral authority, the authority of this House and the United Nations in the weeks and months ahead."

In making his case, Blair offered two distinctions between his approach and that of the Bush administration. He said that although he would welcome an end to Hussein's rule, Britain's goal was to eliminate Iraq's weapons programs, not "regime change." And he called for a new diplomatic effort to restart the Middle East peace process "based on the twin principles of a secure Israel and a viable Palestinian state."

Blair's government ducked a vote on British policy tonight by refusing to allow opponents to introduce a motion. But opinion polls suggest he faces an uphill battle to convince the British public.

"Do you actually support regime change without U.N. authorization? Yes or no?" demanded Paul Marsden, a Liberal Democrat.

Blair replied that the fate of the current Iraqi government would depend on whether Hussein complied with U.N. demands. He added: "The one thing I find odd are people who can find the notion of regime change in Iraq somehow distasteful. Regime change in Iraq would be a wonderful thing."

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