

From: Tim Dowse, NPD
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Heads: News Dept, MED

To: Error! Reference source not found., Special Adviser

SUBJECT: Error! Reference source not found.

1. I am sorry that NPD had no forewarning of the briefing paper which you circulated to PLP members last night. It differs in one important respect from our usual line on Iraqi nuclear weapons.

2. Press reports today have seized on your papers's statement that "If Iraq's weapons programmes *remain unchecked*, Iraq could....develop a crude nuclear device in about five years" (my italics). Our longstanding public line is that would only be possible "if controls [ie UN sanctions] are lifted" – in other words, we believe that at present that the Iraqi nuclear weapons programme is not 'unchecked' (CBW programmes are another matter). This was the line that News Department offered in response to questions from the Guardian to the Secretary of State yesterday.

3. The difference is small, but significant. Our standard line is supported by repeated JIC assessments, and helps to underline the importance of retaining sanctions against Iraq. It is also included in the draft public dossier on 'WMD programmes of concern' which the Cabinet Office are producing at No10's request. We clearly will now have to review that text, to avoid exposing differences with your paper.

4. The underlines the importance of very close co-ordination at a time when so much public briefing material is in preparation on WMD – and Iraqi – issues.

Tim Dowse

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