

October 07, 2002

Letter dated Oct. 7 to Senator Bob Graham, Democrat of Florida and chairman of the Intelligence Committee, by George J. Tenet, director of central intelligence, about decisions to declassify material related to the debate about Iraq:

In response to your letter of 4 October 2002, we have made unclassified material available to further the Senate's forthcoming open debate on a Joint Resolution concerning Iraq. As always, our declassification efforts seek a balance between your need for unfettered debate and our need to protect sources and methods. We have also been mindful of a shared interest in not providing to Saddam a blueprint of our intelligence capabilities and shortcomings, or with insight into our expectation of how he will and will not act. The salience of such concerns is only heightened by the possibility of hostilities between the U.S. and Iraq.

These are some of the reasons why we did not include our classified judgments on Saddam's decision-making regarding the use of weapons of mass destruction (W.M.D.) in our recent unclassified paper on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction. Viewing your request with those concerns in mind, however, we can declassify the following from the paragraphs you requested:

Baghdad for now appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks with conventional or C.B.W. chemical and biological weapons against the United States.

Should Saddam conclude that a U.S.-led attack could no longer be deterred, he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions. Such terrorism might involve conventional means, as with Iraq's unsuccessful attempt at a terrorist offensive in 1991, or C.B.W.

Saddam might decide that the extreme step of assisting Islamist terrorists in conducting a W.M.D. attack against the United States would be his last chance to exact vengeance by taking a large number of victims with him.

Regarding the 2 October closed hearing, we can declassify the following dialogue:

Senator Levin Carl Levin, Democrat of Michigan : . . . If (Saddam) didn't feel threatened, did not feel threatened, is it likely that he would initiate an attack using a weapon of mass destruction?

Senior Intelligence Witness: . . . My judgment would be that the probability of him initiating an attack -- let me put a time frame on it -- in the foreseeable future, given the conditions we understand now, the likelihood I think would be low.

Senator Levin: Now if he did initiate an attack you've . . . indicated he would probably attempt clandestine attacks against us . . . But what about his use of weapons of mass destruction? If we initiate an attack and he thought he was in extremis or otherwise, what's the likelihood in response to our attack that he would use chemical or biological weapons?

Senior Intelligence Witness: Pretty high, in my view.

In the above dialogue, the witness's qualifications -- "in the foreseeable future, given the conditions we understand now" -- were intended to underscore that the likelihood of Saddam using W.M.D. for blackmail, deterrence, or otherwise grows as his arsenal builds. Moreover, if Saddam used W.M.D., it would disprove his repeated denials that he has such weapons.

Regarding Senator Bayh's Evan Bayh, Democrat of Indiana question of Iraqi links to al-Qa'ida. Senators could draw from the following points for unclassified discussions:

- Our understanding of the relationship between Iraq and al-Qa'ida is evolving and is based on sources of varying reliability. Some of the information we have received comes from detainees,

including some of high rank.

- We have solid reporting of senior level contacts between Iraq and al-Qa'ida going back a decade.
- Credible information indicates that Iraq and al-Qa'ida have discussed safe haven and reciprocal nonaggression.
- Since Operation Enduring Freedom, we have solid evidence of the presence in Iraq of al-Qa'ida members, including some that have been in Baghdad.
- We have credible reporting that al-Qa'ida leaders sought contacts in Iraq who could help them acquire W.M.D. capabilities. The reporting also stated that Iraq has provided training to al-Qa'ida members in the areas of poisons and gases and making conventional bombs.
- Iraq's increasing support to extremist Palestinians coupled with growing indications of a relationship with al-Qa'ida, suggest that Baghdad's links to terrorists will increase, even absent U.S. military action