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Building the case against Iraq

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THE Taliban regime may be the current target in America's war on terrorism but the Bush administration is already building a case against a much bigger foe - Iraq.

James Woolsey, a former director of the CIA, ambassador and Pentagon official who now describes himself as a "private citizen", is the man entrusted with [investigating Iraqi involvement](#) in the September 11 attacks and anthrax outbreaks.

The Iraqi National Congress, the exiled group that opposes Saddam Hussein, said it recently held meetings in London with Mr Woolsey. Administration sources have said his trip was funded and approved by Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy defence secretary.

Such is the sensitivity of the Iraq issue, Mr Woolsey will make no comment about the exact nature of his brief. He told The Telegraph: "I was in London and that's it."

But he made clear that he believed there were "substantial and growing indications" that a state was behind the attacks.

The milled, "weaponised" anthrax that virtually shut down Congress and killed two postal

workers has increased his suspicions. So too have reports of meetings involving Mohammad Atta, a leading hijacker, in Prague.

Atta travelled to the Czech Republic at least twice and was refused entry to Prague airport on another occasion.

According to the Wall Street Journal, on one occasion Atta was observed meeting Ahmed Khalil Samir al-Ani, an Iraqi diplomat subsequently expelled for spying.

Mr Woolsey said: "I doubt very seriously if this was simply a social relationship or that they liked to drink Czech beer together."

It has also emerged this week that intelligence reports have stated that Osama bin Laden sent an al-Qa'eda delegation to Baghdad on April 25, 1998 to attend Saddam's birthday celebration.

Saddam's son Uday, it is claimed, agreed to train al-Qa'eda recruits and establish a joint force of bin Laden's elite fighters and the Iraqi intelligence unit 999.

All this, Mr Woolsey, said, made it imperative that America "should look under that rock" to establish whether Iraq helped al-Qa'eda to carry out the September 11 or anthrax attacks.

He said: "If a state is involved, obviously it seems to me to be important for us to know whom we're at war with."

Focusing solely on proof that would be admissible in a court of law would be a mistake.

He said: "Hearsay is not admissible as evidence and almost all intelligence is hearsay. Evidentiary standards are the wrong standards. I would talk about indications, information."

He added: "The United States has not yet decided it is at war with Saddam Hussein but

Saddam Hussein may have decided he is at war with the United States."

The Clinton administration, he said, had had "a propensity sometimes to reason backwards from public relations to policy, to the facts one was looking at".

This had resulted in the question of Iraqi involvement in the World Trade Centre bombing of 1993 being pushed aside.

In Washington, the debate over global terrorism was continuing to develop as the effects of the anthrax attacks grow more serious.

Having suffered thousands of civilian casualties, most Americans would prefer a pre-emptive strike against a known enemy such as Saddam than risk a biological or chemical attack that could kill tens of thousands.

Mr Woolsey said: "We ought to seriously consider removing Saddam's regime, if he has been involved in any terror in recent years against us."

Saddam had attempted to assassinate President Bush Snr in 1993. He had also defied UN mandates by developing weapons of mass destruction.

He added: "In my judgment that's enough."

President Clinton's response to the assassination attempt was "to shoot some Cruise missiles back into empty buildings in the middle of the night" but this type of limited, ineffective action had been discredited by September 11.

Mr Woolsey said: "Some of the states, such as Iraq, and some of the people, such as bin Laden, saw our behaviour over the last decade or two and may have a false impression that they can bludgeon the United States into submission.

He added: "I think some day - hopefully soon - they will come to the same conclusion that Admiral Yamamoto did after Pearl Harbor, which was to remark that Japan had awakened

a sleeping giant.


" If the government chooses, based on the information that it has, to take military action against any other state outside Afghanistan, I believe that the world will see our reaction in that case will be ruthless, relentless and devastating.

He concluded: "In the American vernacular - you ain't seen nothing yet."

Coming from the man entrusted with gathering that "information", Saddam would perhaps be well advised to mark Mr Woolsey's words.




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