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Gavyn Davies

From: zzFabian Monds-PRIVATE
Sent: 29 June 2003 23:49
To: Gavyn Davies
Subject: RE: The Campbell Row

Dear Gavyn,

Your 'no surrender' approach to this very difficult situation is a very familiar Ulster strategy. You are of course absolutely correct, this is indeed a time for the Governors to stand up and be counted. From all the reports, including the BBC itself - and our coverage of the controversy over the past few days has been excellent - there does appear to be some uncertainty over the claim by Andrew Gilligan's source. But this is less important than responding vigorously to the extravagant accusations of lying from Alastair Campbell and others. So I fully support your determination not to buckle to Government pressure, whilst also contemplating the possible consequences for the Corporation of such a principled stand. But the price of giving in would be greater.

I suppose that it may be possible to reach a settlement with No 10 which both sides can live with' at some stage - you and some of our colleagues are much better placed than me to assess this. But that is for another day, and not before the FAC report, I would suggest.

It is good that you are leading us strongly on this.

With best wishes,
Fabian

-----Original Message-----

From: Gavyn Davies
Sent: 29 June 2003 21:21
To: 'ryder@parliament.uk'; zzFabian Monds-PRIVATE; Lisa Kelso, 'irene.adams@weir.co.uk'; 'gj150@calpipe.com', 'ranjits@ukonline.co.uk', 'hoggs@parliament.uk'; 'dgleeson@mjgleeson.com', zzDermot Gleeson; zzDame Pauline Neville-Jones, Ruth Deech-INTERNET, 'angela.sarkis@buntemet.com', Simon Milner-SEC, Catherine East, Helen Tunley, 'r.m.jones@bangor.ac.uk'
Subject: The Campbell Row

Dear Governors

I am sure we have all had a trying weekend, reading the press and listening to broadcasts on the Campbell/BBC row. The press commentary over the weekend has not been uniformly good for the BBC position, but it has certainly been very bad from the government point of view, as was the opinion poll data in the News of the World today. My hunch is that the government would now like the row to go away, and this has been reinforced by the fact that Alastair Campbell has said that he will return to "business as usual", at least until he sees the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee on Monday week. It is clear that some Labour MPs feel that Campbell did himself and the government damage by his performance on Channel 4 news on Friday, and they now want to calm things down.

Having said that, I think it is unknowable whether the FAC will rule in the BBC's favour on the 45 minute claim in the September dossier. They might do so, but it is also possible that they will say that the truth is confused, since early drafts within the intelligence community did not include the 45 minute claim, while later ones did. Or they may conceivably just conclude that the first draft which was seen by Mr Campbell did indeed include the 45 minute claim, as he has always argued. This latter form of judgment would be problematic, especially if Campbell then files a formal complaint which goes for adjudication either to the Governors or the BSC.

Some may therefore argue that there could be advantage for the BBC in reaching a settlement with No 10 which both sides can live with, perhaps in advance of, or shortly after, the publication of the FAC report. However, I remain firmly of the view that, in a big picture sense, it is absolutely crucial for the BBC to emerge from this row without being seen to buckle in the face of government pressure. If the BBC allows itself to be bullied by this sort of behaviour from No 10, I believe that this could fatally damage the trust which the public places in us. Furthermore, I think we should remember that the main historic role of the Governors has been to shield the BBC from this sort of attempt to exert political muscle over our news output. This, it seems to me, really is a moment for the Governors to stand up and be counted. So, I hope you will agree that, whatever emerges about the precise details of the 45 minute claim, we must not give any ground which threatens the fundamental independence of our news output, or suggests that the Governors have buckled to government pressure.

My last thought is this. It may never be definitively proven whether the details of the claim made by Andrew Gilligan's source were 100% accurate or not. And of course I recognise that the Producers' Guidelines must be seen to be upheld. But I do not believe that the BBC has lied to the public, or that it has accused the Prime Minister of lying, or that it has been wrong to place a great deal of scrutiny on the validity of the government's intelligence dossiers. Such have been the proven failings in these dossiers, I wonder whether the Today

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programme could conceivably have suppressed the Gilligan story, coming as it did from a credible and senior source. Would suppression of the views of such an important source have been a valid thing to do in such circumstances?

I put this only as a question, not least because we may have to adjudicate on the matter at a later date. But I feel very comfortable that the BBC did not knowingly mislead the public, and equally comfortable that our news department was pursuing a matter which it was wholly in the public interest to pursue.

Please either ring me or send me a quick e-mail if you would like to register any views. I feel in need of some guidance about your broad feelings, without of course wishing to hold anyone to a definitive position in advance of any subsequent judgments we may need to make.

With best wishes

Gavyn

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