

BBC

PRESS RELEASES

**BBC** Press Release28.06.03BBC NEWS**Letter from Andrew Gilligan, Today programme Defence and Diplomatic Correspondent, to Phil Woolas, Deputy Leader of the House of Commons**

Dear Mr Woolas

On Thursday you made the extremely serious allegation that I had "misled" Parliament in my evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee.

You have clearly not read my evidence, or else have disregarded it.

In the words of your letter to me:

"You claimed [to the committee] that the only allegation you had made against the Government was that it gave 'undue prominence' to the point about 45 minutes.

"I am afraid it would appear that you misled the FAC.

"The allegations you actually made were far more varied and far more grave....what you said to the FAC is not consistent with what you said to the BBC, the Mail on Sunday and others.

"It is now clear that you and the BBC are in full retreat from the original allegations because you know them to be untrue."

Your claims against me are wholly false and are based on the blatant misrepresentation and selective quotation of my evidence.

Nowhere in my evidence do I say that "undue prominence" was my source's only charge.

As the transcript, available on the Internet, makes clear, I also repeated to the Committee the charges of my source that the dossier had been sexed up; that the 45-minute claim was uncorroborated and considered unreliable; that it was included in the dossier, in the words of the source, "against our wishes"; that the intelligence services were unhappy with the general tone and tenor of the dossier because, in the words of my source, it "did not reflect the considered view they were putting forward"; and that the dossier had been transformed just before it was published at the behest of Downing Street.

I specifically repeated my source's charge about Alastair Campbell's involvement in that transformation.

As the BBC has made clear on Thursday, in great detail on Friday, and again today, we stand by our story. Do you still stand by your claim that you read my evidence?

In the light of the incontrovertible evidence of what I said to the Committee, I regard the allegation in your letter, which was released to the Press Association long before it reached me, as defamatory, casting grave doubt on my professional integrity and honesty.

Unlike the claims made by Alastair Campbell against me in the Committee on Wednesday, your claim is not protected by parliamentary privilege.

I now require a full apology and retraction of your claims, which were widely reported on Friday morning, are entirely unsupported by evidence and were clearly intended to blacken my character.

In the absence of this I will have no option but to put the matter in the hands of my lawyers.

I should make clear that I write this letter with the full knowledge and support of the BBC.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Gilligan
Defence and Diplomatic Correspondent
The Today Programme

Notes to Editors

Letter from Stephen Whittle, Controller, Editorial Policy, BBC to Ben Bradshaw MP (03 07 03)

Letter from Richard Sambrook, Director BBC News, to Ben Bradshaw MP (29 06 03)

Letter from Richard Sambrook, Director, BBC News to Alastair Campbell (27 06 03)

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