

**BBCi****PRESS RELEASES****BBC** Press Release

06.07.03

**BBC NEWS****Statement from Gavyn Davies, Chairman of the BBC**

"The BBC Board of Governors met this evening [Sunday 6 July 2003] to discuss the allegations made by Alastair Campbell against the BBC's overall coverage of the Iraq war, and its specific coverage of the September intelligence dossier by Andrew Gilligan in the Today programme.

"The Governors questioned Greg Dyke, the Director-General, and Richard Sambrook, the Director of News, about Mr Campbell's allegations. The Board reached the following conclusions.

"First, the Board reiterates that the BBC's overall coverage of the war, and the political issues surrounding it, has been entirely impartial, and it emphatically rejects Mr Campbell's claim that large parts of the BBC had an agenda against the war.

"We call on Mr Campbell to withdraw these allegations of bias against the BBC and its journalists.

"Second, the Board considers that the Today programme properly followed the BBC's Producers' Guidelines in its handling of the Andrew Gilligan report about the September intelligence dossier, which was broadcast on 29 May.

"Although the Guidelines say that the BBC should be reluctant to broadcast stories based on a single source, and warn about the dangers of using anonymous sources, they clearly allow for this to be done in exceptional circumstances. Stories based on senior intelligence sources are a case in point.

"We note that an entirely separate story was broadcast by an unconnected BBC journalist on Newsnight on 2 June. This story reported very similar allegations to those reported by Andrew Gilligan on the Today programme, but the story has not been singled out for similar criticism by government spokesmen.

"Moreover, as these reports fitted in to a general pattern of concern, conveyed to a number of BBC journalists with good contacts in the security services, we consider that it was entirely proper to reflect some unease about the presentation of the Government's arguments in the disputed dossiers.

"The Board is satisfied that it was in the public interest to broadcast Mr Gilligan's story, given the information which was available to BBC News at the time. We believe it would not have

been in the public interest to have suppressed the stories on either the Today programme or Newsnight.

"Third, the Board considers that the Today programme should have kept a clearer account of its dealings with the Ministry of Defence on this story and could have also asked the No 10 Press Office for a response prior to broadcasting the story.

"However, we note that firm government denials of the story were broadcast on the Today Programme within 90 minutes of the original broadcast by Andrew Gilligan, and these were followed soon after on the same programme by equally firm denials by a defence minister.

"Fourth, the Board intends to look again at the rules under which BBC reporters and presenters are permitted to write for newspapers, once it has received recommendations from the Director of News. This examination will be conducted during the summer.

"Finally, the Board wishes to place on record that the BBC has never accused the Prime Minister of lying, or of seeking to take Britain into war under misleading or false pretences.

"The BBC did not have an agenda in its war coverage, nor does it now have any agenda which questions the integrity of the Prime Minister.

"In summary, the Governors are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the BBC upholds the highest standards of impartiality and accuracy. We are wholly satisfied that BBC journalists and their managers sought to maintain impartiality and accuracy during this episode."

### **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 Andrew Gilligan, Today programme Defence and Diplomatic Correspondent, to Phil Woolas, Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (28.06 03)

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

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