



From the Chairman

11 April 2003

Rt Hon Gerald Kaufman MP  
House of Commons  
LONDON  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Gerald

Thank you for your letter of 27 March, previously acknowledged, about BBC coverage of the war in Iraq. I am sorry you feel this demonstrates a pro-Iraqi bias and reinforces your view that the BBC should not operate under a Royal Charter and be funded by the licence fee.

I should say immediately that you may have a different view from me on what the BBC should do at a time of war. You seem to imply that the BBC should not carry any items which question the conduct or objectives of the war, whereas I believe that it is part of its mandate to do so. I certainly agree with you that there should not be a sneering or anti-war tone to BBC coverage, but I do not believe that you have established that such a tone exists. A few specific examples, even if I accepted the interpretation you place on them, would not do this.

Last November Governors approved special editorial guidelines to ensure impartiality in coverage of any possible war in Iraq. Governors agreed that the BBC's coverage should enable viewers and listeners to make sense of events by providing impartial analysis and offering the full range of views and opinions, including those who oppose the war in Britain and elsewhere. At its last meeting the Board received a detailed report about coverage to date, and expressed full and continuing confidence in Management's handling of the international crisis and developments in Iraq. The Board stressed the importance of upholding the independence of BBC coverage and decision-making.

I have considered the examples you quote in your letter. In the case of *Newsnight* on 26 March, far from being a "prolonged sneer" at the Coalition, the first part of the programme raised questions about the determination of the military forces to prevent civilian casualties and included a robust response from Major Brad Bartelt of the US military.

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As far as the *Today* programme is concerned, it always includes two reviews of the papers, one at 0640 and the other at 0740. There is often some variation in the content of each, to broaden the scope of the items and in recognition that there will be many listeners who will hear both. I understand that on 27 March, reports about the casualties in the Baghdad market place were mentioned in both reviews, but only the second included the one from the *Independent* because BBC News took the view that its line was rather different from the one taken by others.

I understand that the interview with Irene Purdy on *Today* was part of an item that covered some fresh ground, which is part of the *Today* programme's remit. It was linked to Tony Blair's reference to rising party membership, which the programme felt was worth analysing, particularly as the difficulties encountered by the Government in the House of Commons before the war began may have led many to believe that membership would decline. The short interview with Irene Purdy explored this background before examining the facts with David Triesman.

As you say, it is true that in times of trouble and peril, people have instinctively turned to the BBC as a trusted source of news. Results from a recently commissioned ICM poll (conducted last week), show this is still true. The poll shows that: 93% of the population have used a BBC television, radio, text or online service to follow the war in Iraq over the past two weeks; that the BBC is the most used and highly rated service for news across all media; that BBC television is the most used television service in the UK; and, when asked which was the main source of television news, 55% of television news viewers mentioned a BBC television channel. This seems to me a clear expression by licence-payers of trust in the BBC's impartiality.

You may also have seen the recent MORI poll (reported in *The Times* T2 on 11 April – page 19) on coverage of the war. Not only was BBC One the most watched channel, it was also by far the most trusted among the adults sampled. *The Times* of 10 April selected "winners and losers" from the media coverage of the war. The first "winner" was BBC One, which the newspaper said was "*the most watched and the most trusted of broadcasters*". Others included BBC journalists Rageh Omaar and Huw Edwards.

As to the forthcoming review of the Royal Charter and licence-fee funding, I look forward to the debate and your contribution to it. I am sure we will disagree about aspects of what the BBC does, but I am hopeful that we will largely agree on what its purpose should be.

Yours sincerely

With best wishes

Gavyn

Gavyn Davies

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# Saddam weapons chief seized

IN THE biggest potential breakthrough so far in the coalition's search for weapons of mass destruction, Saddam Hussein's chief scientific adviser has surrendered to American forces in Baghdad.

General Amer al-Saadi, who reportedly gave himself up in front of German television cameras, is believed to have masterminded Iraq's efforts to conceal weapons projects from United Nations inspectors in the run-up to the war.

Although quoted by the German television station ZDF as claiming Iraq had no chemical or biological weapons, al-Saadi could play a key role in unlocking the secrets of Saddam's military programmes.

Dr David Kelly, the UN's former chief weapons inspec-

Nicholas Rufford  
Qatar

and Iraqi leaders going out," said a senior coalition source.

To the north, meanwhile, US planes bombed Saddam's home town of Tikrit, the only important urban centre holding out.

The exchanges came as America stepped up its hunt for Iraq's ousted leaders by offering a multi-million-dollar reward for information leading to the capture of any other figureheads who feature on its list of the "55 most wanted".

Some of Iraq's top weapons scientists were reported already to have fled to Syria. The Washington Times said intelligence suggested they might include Dr Rihab Taha, the British-trained microbiologist known as "Dr Germ", and Huda Salih Mahdi Amnash, nicknamed "Miss Anthrax" for her role in Iraq's biological weapons programme.

Up to 300 other Iraqis are said to have arrived at hotels in Damascus last week, accompanied by Syrian security officials. "We are hearing that some senior officials have ended up there and that they have been given some assistance through border controls," said a British source.

Mike O'Brien, the junior Foreign Office minister, is expected to raise allegations that Syria has helped Iraqi fugitives when he visits Damascus this week. Syria dismissed the claims yesterday as baseless.

The coalition's determination to prevent other officials from fleeing to Syria was underlined when up to 1,000 troops from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) were sent to block possible escape routes from Baghdad to Damascus.

The unit, equipped with some of the US military's most sophisticated reconnaissance hardware, will strengthen an operation that has seen prolonged fighting around an industrial complex near the Fuphrates River where Iraq extracted uranium for its nuclear weapons programme in the 1980s.

British military officials said the unexpected strength of Iraqi resistance in the area suggested some of the enemy forces might have been defending illicit weapons.

Last night Brigadier-General Vincent Brooks, deputy operations director at the coalition

forces' Central Command in Qatar, said two drones capable of delivering chemical weapons had been found at a phosphate plant near the Syrian border.

Special forces in western Iraq also stopped a bus carrying 50 men of military age away from Baghdad. They were carrying letters offering financial rewards for killing US soldiers and \$630,000 in \$100 bills.

The American initiative to offer incentives for Iraqis to

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Thieves loot Iraq's museum treasures, page 3

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tor, said al-Saadi "knew where all the bodies were buried", adding "He advised Saddam on what he could get away with."

As he surrendered, American and British forces were fighting to seal off escape routes into Syria for the other most wanted men and women of Saddam's elite.

A crack unit of American marines was dispatched to reinforce US green berets and British commandos trying to intercept members of the regime, including scientists who have worked on chemical and biological weapons programmes.

Fierce desert firefights were reported between coalition forces and units of Saddam's Special Republican Guard near the town of Qaim, on the Syrian border. Some of the Iraqi forces engaged were believed to be protecting senior members of the regime.

"We are closing the border to

betray wanted members of the fallen regime came amid continuing confusion about the fate of Saddam. One American report said officials had been heard discussing him as if he were dead. Dr Ahmed Chalabi, an Iraqi opposition leader, claimed the former dictator was moving to the northeast of Baghdad.

US commanders would not name a price for the capture of Saddam or other individuals. However, a \$25m reward has

been offered for Osama Bin Laden, and one source said the figure for Saddam was "in the same ball park".

A Ministry of Defence spokesman in Qatar said search teams known as SSI's — sensitive site exploitation teams — could pay up to \$1m in cash for other intelligence. "They will literally have briefcases that can open up with US dollars on one side and Swiss francs on the other," he said. "If someone said, 'I'll

show you a chemical weapons site, I am the only one who knows where it is but I want a \$1m', [then] yes. Politically, this information is priceless."

Britain's contribution to the search for such weapons is being extended with the transfer of hundreds of troops from 16 Air Assault Brigade towards Iraq's border with Iran, where intelligence suggests evidence may be found.

US forces, who agreed to

"begin joint patrols soon with Iraqi police to curb looting and bring order in Baghdad, became added renewed heavy fire in the city centre last night. US troops said they killed 20 people. Earlier an American marine was shot dead by a gunman dressed in civilian clothes outside a hospital."

In his weekly radio address, President George Bush talked of Iraqis celebrating freedom and pledged the US would be their

"friend. He cautioned, however, that the fight was not over."

Saddam's inner circle cracks open, page 3



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