

Analysis by No 10 Press Office of media coverage of, and their response to, allegations relating to the Government's document *Iraq's Weapons of Mass destruction: the Assessment of the British Government*, dated September 2002

On May 29th, the BBC Today Programme carried allegations about the Government's conduct over the Iraq Weapons of Mass Destruction document published last September. The charges were serious and specific. Listeners heard allegations that No 10 had not only ordered the dossier to be "sexed up" but had also inserted intelligence information into it, against the wishes of the intelligence services, and probably knowing it was wrong.

Andrew Gilligan, the reporter, quoted his source as telling him that Downing Street, a week before publication, "ordered the dossier to be sexed up, made more exciting and ordered more facts to be discovered". He said he had been told by one of the senior officials in charge of drawing up that dossier that "actually the Government probably knew that the 45 minutes figure was wrong even before it decided to put it in". He said the 45 minute intelligence went "to the heart of the Government's case that Saddam was an imminent threat."

Later on the same programme, presenter John Humphrys said that Mr Gilligan had found evidence that the WMD dossier "was cobbled together at the last minute with some unconfirmed material that had not been approved by security services". Mr Gilligan, interviewed again, said the dossier was "the most substantial statement of the Government's case against Iraq". He said that the "transformation of the dossier took place at the behest of Downing Street" and, using an actor's voice to convey the words of his source, it was stated that 45 minute intelligence was "included in the dossier against our wishes because it wasn't reliable".

Mr Gilligan went further on Radio 5 that morning when he described the official as "a senior source in the intelligence services". On June 1, writing in the Mail on Sunday as a BBC journalist, he said his source had told him it was Alastair Campbell who was responsible for the transformation of the dossier and, in particular, the inclusion of the 45 minute intelligence. **(transcripts and article referred to attached - 1)**

CAB/1/0137

Why Government considered this story to be serious

In the Government's view, the charges could not have been more serious. They were, in effect, that No 10, and Alastair Campbell in particular, knowingly published false intelligence to mislead the country over the threat that Saddam Hussein posed in order to win support for military action. It was particularly serious as the allegations centered around a document that the Prime Minister had presented to Parliament in a House of Commons statement when Parliament was recalled on Sept 24. So the charge against him was of presenting information to Parliament which he knew to be wrong – in essence misleading or lying to Parliament. As such, the allegations were an attack on the integrity of the Prime Minister, the Government and on the intelligence agencies, who stood accused of succumbing to political pressure.

It was stated that the source was a senior figure in the intelligence services who had been one of those "in charge" of drawing up the WMD dossier. The impression was created that the individual not only was in a position to make these judgements from first hand knowledge but also was expressing the views of the intelligence agencies. The Government and John Scarlett, the Joint Intelligence Committee chairman who wrote the dossier, knew that the charges were totally untrue.

How Government reacted

The first that anyone in Downing Street knew about these allegations was when they were broadcast on the Today programme at 06.07 on May 29th. The BBC has accepted that no effort was made to contact Downing Street, or the chairman of the JIC who authored the report, to check the veracity of these allegations before broadcast and give us the right to reply. This is contrary to BBC guidelines and normal journalistic practice. Indeed, it is the Government's position, contested by the BBC, that these allegations were never put to anyone in Government prior to broadcast. Neither did Mr Gilligan or the Mail on Sunday put the specific allegations leveled personally at Mr Campbell to him before publication.

Once the Number 10 duty press officer had heard the original broadcast, having talked to both the Prime Minister's party travelling in the Middle East and the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, he issued a complete denial of the story at 07.15.

CAB / 1 / 0138

The denial said: "These allegations are untrue, not one word of the dossier was not entirely the work of the intelligence agencies. The suggestion that any pressure was put on the intelligence services by Number Ten or anyone else to change the document is entirely false."

Further phone calls were made by the duty press officer emphasizing the Government's denial of the story, one of which was to complain that the denial had been ignored on the 8 '0' clock news bulletin.

Adam Ingram, Minister for Defence, had already been booked on the Today programme to talk about cluster bombs. He also heard the broadcast just after 6am – the first time he knew anything about these allegations. When interviewed at 0810, he categorically denied the allegations.

We had further discussions with the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee and continued to deny the story strongly throughout the day when approached by journalists both in London and with the Prime Minister's travelling party in Iraq.

Later that day, Downing Street complained formally in a private letter to the BBC about the story and the fact that no effort had been made to contact No 10 before broadcast about these charges. It also questioned whether the story and the way it was handled complied with the BBC's own Producer Guidelines.
(letter and reply attached - 2)

BBC's reaction to Government's denials

Despite our denials, the BBC continued to broadcast the allegations across all BBC outlets in a prominent position.

The story, the BBC's continued confidence in its allegations despite the Government's on-the-record denials and the suggestion of the source's status had a huge impact on other media, not just at home but also abroad, not least because its timing co-incided with the Prime Minister's first visit to Iraq following the end of the conflict. One reason we contested this so vigorously is because of the credibility and trust people have in the BBC reporting and its global reach. We believed this false story had the potential to damage not only the British Government's standing overseas but the integrity and authority of our intelligence agencies.

CAB/1/0139

The Prime Minister himself had to deny the allegations throughout his trip – in Poland, St Petersburg and at the G8 Summit in Evian. (**quotes attached - 3**)

The issue continued to dominate the news even after the Prime Minister's return on Tuesday 3rd June. The following day the Foreign Affairs Committee announced its inquiry into *The Decision to go to War in Iraq*. Despite denials by the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the chairman of JIC and the heads of the intelligence agencies, the BBC's continuing coverage of these allegations dominated all media debate at Westminster. The issues that flowed from the BBC's allegations featured in the top four items in 65% of the BBC's Today programme broadcasts since 29th May and were in the top four items in nearly 60% of the BBC's 10 o'clock news broadcasts. Similarly the issues dominated the Number 10 press briefings for weeks, with detailed question and answer sessions concerning Iraq / WMD / dossiers on 26 days out of a possible 34 since May 29th. (**transcripts of No 10 press briefings attached - 4**).

On Wednesday 4th June, the issue dominated Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons (**PMQs exchange attached - 5**). The BBC itself continued to carry the allegations, though they varied in substance and tone from programme to programme. For example the reports carried on Newsnight on the 2nd and 4th of June did not claim that Alastair Campbell or Number Ten had inserted the 45 minute intelligence against the wishes of the intelligence agencies, whilst knowing it probably to be false, though it did say that the report supported the original allegation as it came from a different source. We now know this to be untrue, as Dr Kelly was the source of both reporters' stories, and, it is believed, the source of Gavin Hewitt's report on the Ten O'Clock News on May 29th. (**BBC statement attached – 6**). For transcripts of Newsnight and News at 10 reports see appendix 'comparison between 3 BBC reports')

On June 6th Alastair Campbell wrote privately to the BBC's Director of News, Richard Sambrook, to reiterate the government's denial of the allegations, and repeat that this denial was being made with the full authority of John Scarlett in his role as chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee representing the intelligence agencies. The letter also questioned again in detail how the story complied with the BBC's Producer Guidelines, in particular the use of single and anonymous sources. (**correspondence attached - 7**)

A further private letter followed on June 12th, repeating the denial of the original allegations, and asking whether the BBC would be conducting an

CAB/1/0140

internal inquiry. The BBC refused to change its position. (**correspondence attached - 8**)

At the request of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Alastair Campbell appeared before it on 25th June. He submitted written and oral evidence, and with the authority of the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, he once again denied the central allegations made by Andrew Gilligan, and asked the BBC to recognise that the allegations were wrong. (**written and oral evidence attached - 9**)

The next day Richard Sambrook on the BBC's Today programme said the BBC would continue to stand by its story because it was based on "one senior and credible source in the intelligence services", had nothing to apologise for, and argued that what had been alleged was that "some of those involved in compiling the September dossier were unhappy about how it was finally presented." (**transcript attached - 10**)

The allegations redefined

This was another example of the BBC's recasting of the allegations. Originally the charge was that Number 10 inserted the 45 minutes intelligence into the dossier, against the wishes of the intelligence agencies and probably knowing it was wrong. A week after his initial broadcast, Mr Gilligan said: "nobody has actually ever quite denied the central charge made by my source, just to repeat that charge was that uncorroborated evidence of a forty five minute threat was given undue prominence in the dossier at the behest of the Prime Minister or his staff and to the disquiet of the intelligence community."

Number 10, at the daily press briefing on 26th June, asked the BBC whether it still stood by the original allegations that it had inserted the 45 minute intelligence against the wishes of the agencies knowing it to be wrong. (**press briefing attached - 11**). Number 10 repeated the question in public correspondence with Richard Sambrook, as well as sending a private letter to the BBC Board of Governors before their meeting on July 6th. (**correspondence attached - 12**)

Following that meeting on July 6th the Governors issued a statement saying that while they acknowledged that the BBC should be reluctant to broadcast stories on the basis of a single, anonymous source they supported the BBC's actions in this case due to the "exceptional circumstances" where a story is based on "senior intelligence sources." (**BBC Governors statement attached - 13**)

CAB/1/0141

In the meantime government minister Ben Bradshaw appeared on the Today programme on July 5th, where he was assured that the original allegations had been put to the government via the Ministry of Defence press office prior to broadcast on May 29th, and that all proper procedures had been followed. Mr Bradshaw challenged this assurance, both during his interview and in subsequent correspondence to the BBC, and also questioned whether the handling of the story complied with BBC guidelines. The Defence Secretary also rejected the BBC's assurances that the allegations had been put to his press office. **(interview transcript and subsequent correspondence attached - 14).**

The Foreign Affairs Committee report was published on July 7th **(attached - loose)**. The Foreign Secretary responded for the Government. Alastair Campbell issued a statement, as did the BBC. **(all attached - 15).**

Additional relevant material:

Transcripts of media interviews with family friend Tom Mangold and Robert Jackson, Dr Kelly's constituency MP **(attached transcripts - 16)**

Media coverage across the world **(examples attached - 17)**

Comparison of Gilligan/Watts/Hewitt reports **(attached -18 in separate bundle)**

*10 Downing Street
25 July 2003*

CAB | 1 | 0142