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Director of Communications and Strategy

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*Dear Sir*

I am writing to complain about Andrew Gilligan's irresponsible reporting of what he claims to be information from 'intelligence sources'.

As was clear from his report on the Today programme this morning, he continues to display an extraordinary ignorance about intelligence issues. He said, for example, that the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) is a "No. 10 committee" on which the intelligence Agencies are "represented". He should know, because this is public knowledge, that the JIC is a Cabinet Office committee. The current Chairman is a former SIS official. It brings together the Heads of the three Intelligence and Security Agencies (Secret Intelligence Service, Government Communications Headquarters and the Security Service), the Chief of Defence Intelligence and his Deputy with senior officials responsible for policy formulation from the Foreign Office, the MoD, the Home Office, the Treasury, the DTI, the Cabinet Office and representatives of other government departments and agencies. It is part of the Cabinet Office, meets each week in the Cabinet Office, and is under the authority of the Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator. To present it as anything other than the intelligence community is grossly misleading. The role and composition of the JIC would be known to anyone with an ounce of knowledge about their work. Indeed, it was set out in the WMD dossier and has been in the public domain since publication of the Government's "National Intelligence Machinery" booklet in 1993.

Andrew Gilligan also said: "The JIC is the Committee in which disputes between the intelligence services and Downing Street are mediated." This is

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simply untrue. The JIC provides regular intelligence assessments to the Prime Minister, other ministers and senior officials on a wide range of foreign policy and international security issues.

Andrew Gilligan said: "...there's absolutely no doubt that there was rather a major row in that Committee". This is false, whatever his "source" tells him. As the Prime Minister has made clear, all the intelligence in the September dossier was there with the complete authority of the JIC. There was no row.

Do you accept that what Gilligan said this morning about the composition and role of the JIC is inaccurate? What, if anything, do you intend to do about it?

The BBC's reporting on the WMD issue has been driven for days now by the false claim of a single uncorroborated source that Gilligan claims to be reliable. The Prime Minister, after consulting the Chairman of the JIC who was able to speak on behalf of the Agencies represented on it, has emphatically denied the claims made by this single uncorroborated source, yet your reporting continues to be driven by it, not just on the Today programme, but across the BBC. At no point has the reliability of Gilligan's source been questioned or discussed by the BBC.

Strategic intelligence assessments are presented to the government by the JIC who receive intelligence information on a continual basis. The JIC draw on a wide range of experience and expertise to assess the information for its reliability and strength. As the Prime Minister said in a speech on the subject, some of the raw intelligence is reliable; some of it may be misinformation; some of it will be gossip; other material will be based on technical intelligence gathering. Following a rigorous process of assessment and analysis this information is presented to the Prime Minister and other Ministers.

I would like to ask about the rigour of the process which the BBC applies to its reporting. Do you have a process to filter out potential misinformation, gossip, unreliable or uncorroborated information? What is that process?

In particular I would like to know what checks and balances have been applied to some of Mr Gilligan's reporting of information from 'anonymous intelligence sources' or indeed how the BBC's own Guidelines are applied. You cannot have missed the irony that one of the central (albeit false) charges against us (namely that the 45 minutes claim in the dossier was based on a single

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uncorroborated source) was itself broadcast on the word of single uncorroborated source; or that Gilligan chose on 24 September to present the government's assessment as saying little that was new (and claimed that he already knew about the 45 minutes readiness to deploy CB weapons) but subsequently (Mail on Sunday, 1 June) claimed it was "very revelatory indeed".

With regard to the report on the BBC Today programme last Thursday at 0607 (transcript enclosed), can you explain to me how it conforms with the BBC's own producer guidelines, in particular the following three.

1. *"Programmes should be reluctant to rely on only one source."*

At what level was the decision taken to run this story, based on only one uncorroborated source, and to continue to run this story after an official denial, made on the authority of the Prime Minister and the Agencies themselves?

2. *"The authority of programmes can be undermined by the use of anonymous contributors whose status the audience cannot judge."*

What actions did BBC editors and management take to ensure the authority of the Today programme was not put in question by the use of this anonymous contribution? Are you, or the editors of all the outlets which have run reports on Gilligan's claims, aware of the source's professional status, the organisation he works for, his seniority and credibility? Have you, or the editors made any inquiries?

3. *"contributors' credentials may need to be checked and corroborated several times. Documentary evidence may be needed to validate both stories and contributors' identities. It will usually be appropriate to seek corroboration from sources other than those suggested by the contributor."*


Prior to broadcast what actions did BBC editors and management take to ensure the above guideline was complied with? Mr Gilligan's own account of his 'source' in newspaper articles would suggest it was not. Do the BBC have documentary evidence to validate either the story or the source of this item? Did the BBC seek corroboration from other sources prior to broadcasting the story? Did you offer any opportunity for a reply to some very serious allegations being made about the reliability of the dossier produced by the JIC?

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In a rather pathetic attempt to stand up his story, Gilligan claimed subsequently that the story has also been subsequently corroborated by, among others, Clare Short and Robin Cook. Can you spell out which elements of Gilligan's original story they are on the record as having corroborated which have not been addressed by the Prime Minister?

Gilligan also cites Adam Ingram as having corroborated his story that the "45 minutes" claim was based on intelligence from only one source and that it was added into the dossier by me. However Adam Ingram and the Prime Minister, the latter having consulted the Chairman of the JIC, have made it absolutely clear that this piece of information was not inserted into the dossier by No10. It came from an established and reliable line of reporting and was consistent with previous intelligence assessments. Its use was approved by the JIC after going through the usual rigorous process of assessment. The Prime Minister, having again consulted the Chairman of JIC, has confirmed this, and that the allegations made by Gilligan and his "source" are not true.

You will, I imagine, seek to defend your reporting, as you always do. In this case, you would be defending the indefensible. On the word of a single, uncorroborated source, you have allowed one reporter to drive the BBC's coverage. We are left wondering why you have guidelines at all, given that they are so persistently breached without any comeback whatsoever.



ALASTAIR CAMPBELL

Mr. Richard Sambrook  
BBC

Enclosures

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